

Rereading Modernity - Charles Taylor on its Genesis and Prospects

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**REREADING MODERNITY -
CHARLES TAYLOR ON ITS GENESIS AND PROSPECTS**

a dissertation

by

TONE SVETELJ

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Abstract: Rereading Modernity – Charles Taylor on its Genesis and Prospects

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Charles Taylor belongs to the group of contemporary philosophers who with their original, diagnostic, challenging, and critical reflection shape our comprehension of modernity in general and, in particular our understanding of the human agent. Taylor's philosophical opus represents a complex comprehension of modernity which integrates various currents of modern political thought (liberalism, utilitarianism, materialism, pragmatism, naturalism, relativism, Marxism), as well as ethical, moral and social issues, historical, theological, religious and spiritual topics, such as the relationship between religion and society, epistemological and ontological components, art and poetry, questions of language, challenges of peaceful coexistence in the globalizing world characterized by the process of unification and universalization on the one side, and on the other side by individualization and differentiation. Taylor does not linger on any one of these specific topics because to do so would present only a fragmented comprehension of modernity; his extensive philosophical interest integrates all of them to create a complex understanding of the whole.

In analyzing his numerous publications, I argue that Taylor's philosophical opus reveals an internal unity and coherency in his philosophical approach that allows us to systematize the variety and diversity in his thought into a unity on the one side, and on the other side to discover the complexity of his comprehension of modernity and human agency. By systematizing and unifying I do not suggest a new partition of Taylor's thought into different philosophical areas, such as ontology, metaphysics, ethics, and

epistemology, which can, once taken together, offer a new structured vision of Taylor's philosophy; nor do I claim that Taylor offers a modern cosmological view, in the view of Plato, Aquinas, or Hegel. As Taylor claims, modernity simply does not like this kind of systematized vision of the whole, as it struggles to find its place in a world of globalization, filled with differences, particularities, and divisions. What I argue is the following: Taylor's philosophical thought includes an internal unity and coherency which need to be exposed. Once we recognize them, they will help us to appreciate the full dimension of Taylor's original and complex reflection about modernity. More specifically, I argue that Taylor's philosophical writings are based on a single unifying inspiration and force binding together the apparent and fragmented divisive particularities of his reflections; this driving force is the search for meaning, fulfilment, and freedom.

In the first chapter I deal with Taylor's interpretation of George W.F. Hegel. Taylor claims that reading Hegel is essential because it provides us the necessary background information for our understanding of modernity. In reading Hegel Taylor does not become a Hegelian; he simply adopts many of his ideas, his way of proceeding and thinking and, in a special way, his concern to unite two ideals – radical freedom and expressive fullness. My thesis is that this concern of Hegel became Taylor's concern as well. From this perspective I argue that Taylor's immense philosophical opus is the result of his desire to find a new answer to Hegel's concern.

There are some themes which often come forth in Taylor's writings, independent of the object of his reflection. These recurring themes all have to do with the moral sources of modern identity, human agency and human language. For the sake of argumentation, I analyse them together in the second chapter, and support my analysis

even with those Taylor's writings that do not refer explicitly to these themes. These themes have to be always kept in mind, even when Taylor is not explicitly referring to modern identity, human agency or human language. In the second chapter I analyze also Taylor's philosophical method, which is descriptive. One of Taylor's theses is that adequate understanding of a specific topic requires insertion into its context; therefore, a description of time, space, and other factors that condition the topic in question is crucial. Hence Taylor applies the descriptive method as the most appropriate way in search for meaning, fulfilment, and freedom.

In the third chapter I follow Taylor's analysis of modernity, showing those aspects that either preclude or impede the modern agent's search for fulfilment and freedom, or open neglected or undiscovered perspectives for investigation that may offer new answers. The scientific interpretation of the world and human agency, and the reduction of the human sciences to the principles of the natural sciences, limit our understanding of the human agent, excluding potential sources of his fulfilment, flourishing, and freedom. Taylor critically reads the scientific approach to modernity, and indicates the primary motive behind this approach, i.e. the agent's desire to be free and fulfilled. At the same time, Taylor emphasizes the challenge of achieving peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society and a world of globalization. This challenge, with its impulse toward unification and universalization, cannot ignore diversity and differentiation among peoples but must rather accord them recognition and respect. Furthermore, we must recognize that every man desires to be free and to follow the deepest convictions in his heart. Taylor talks about the desire to be authentic, an original concept in modernity, as the remedy for the sense of unfulfillment.

The fourth chapter is basically a continuation of the third chapter, with the emphasis on an opening of the horizons of modernity in the field of religion. Following Taylor's descriptive approach, I first reconstruct his historical overview, which helps us to a better understanding of religion, secularization, and the search for meaning in modernity. Taylor indicates how certain narratives exclude some dimensions of human existence. When mainstream secularization theories consider religion and spirituality as irrelevant to daily life, they effectively close off possibilities for fulfilment, flourishing, and freedom. Taylor throughout his critical reading of modernity underlines the importance of belief and faith as a potential road to freedom, fulfilment, wholeness, and discovery of meaning. Not every form of religious belief or practice leads automatically to the goal, however; some may prove to be too narrow and exclusive, and therefore have to be carefully examined in their turn.

Taylor's answer to Hegel's concern about unity of freedom and expressive fullness unfolds only gradually. He does not provide us a clear-cut answer or a final disposition of Hegel's concern; he rather indicates to us the path to be undertaken, namely, a critical analysis of the different ways in which the human agent experiences himself and the world around him, and in the process exposes hitherto undiscovered horizons. This process is what gives Taylor's philosophical opus its unity, and constitutes his remarkable contribution to our understanding of the challenges and opportunities of modernity.

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Introduction

Charles Taylor (born November 5, 1931) belongs to the group of leading philosophers of our time who, with their original, questioning, diagnostic, and critical writings, shape our comprehension of modernity and in a particular way our understanding of who we are. I discovered Taylor about ten years ago by reading the Slovenian translation of his book *The Ethics of Authenticity*. His thoughts about the modern desire to be authentic and find new ways of fulfilment in ordinary life left me with the wish to go deeper into his writings. The opportunity to study philosophy at Boston College made my dreams and desires a reality; the result is this dissertation, focused completely on the work of Charles Taylor, retired Professor from McGill University.

Why do I think that it is worthwhile and necessary to study that Canadian philosopher? His intellectual opus is immense (his bibliography comes to more than 80 pages); his major books, due to their length, sometimes discourage the reader from further reading; and his writing style is not always as clear as it might be. By surmounting these difficulties, I have slowly entered into his way of thinking about modernity and modern identity, and found it to be fascinating. Taylor touches many different areas of our time, from artificial intelligence to analyses of contemporary multicultural society and the globalizing world. His reflections include various currents of political thinking (liberalism, utilitarianism, materialism, pragmatism, naturalism, relativism, Marxism, among others), ethical, moral and social issues, religious and spiritual topics, questions about the relationship between religion and society, as well as

between the natural and the human sciences, epistemological and ontological questions, art and poetry, pressing issues about peaceful coexistence in the world of globalization where the forces of unification do not suppress differences among individuals and nations. Taylor does not linger on any one of these topics, which offer only a fragmented comprehension of the whole; he looks for the unifying forces and those desires in the human agent that can transform our partial comprehension of reality into a new collage, i.e. a deeper and more meaningful picture of who we are and what is most essential for us.

On the occasion of receiving the Kyoto Prize (2008), Taylor autobiographically describes his mission as a philosopher. He himself wants to wonder again as Aristotle did, and to open the question of how to transform ourselves and reach a “higher place.” This wonder should bring us beyond a reductive understanding of human life -- beyond an over-simplified, dry, positivistic, materialistic or dualistic way of thinking, which devalue and dismiss the deepest and most important questions of life, and beyond a one-dimensional understanding of ourselves, such as is many times the case in modernity. This perplexity is not hopeless in Taylor’s mind, but just the opposite; it becomes attractive. He immerses himself fully in it, touches on all the puzzling issues, and proposes new narratives about modernity, secularization, the condition of spiritual life in Western societies. In doing this, he wants as philosopher to unveil the immense human potential for finding deeper and more meaningful answers to life’s questions.

I find Taylor’s positions inspiring and helpful to me personally in understanding myself better and the reality I am part of. Taylor is always moderate in his statements, never claiming absoluteness or imposing unchallengeable conclusions. I see him as

always willing to open himself to what might be better and to learn something new. Honesty and intellectual curiosity radiate from his writings, which makes studying him even more appealing.

Does Taylor systematize human thought into a new whole and create a modern cosmological view, following the example of Plato, Thomas Aquinas, and Hegel? The answer is negative, if by systematization we mean a new partition of human thought into different categories which will, taken together, offer us a new structured vision of the whole. Modernity simply does not have such a vision of the whole, and struggles to find its place in a world of globalization, filled with differences, particularities, and divisions. Nonetheless, I claim that Taylor's reflection can help us to come closer to a new vision of the whole. Specifically, Taylor indicates to us the path to be undertaken toward this new vision. In this dissertation I argue that Taylor often directs our attention to the unifying principles and forces residing underneath divisive particularities and behind our fragmented comprehension. These principles and forces make up the search for meaning, fulfilment, and freedom; they are an essential part of human nature, and as such can unify all humans.

In the first chapter I deal with Taylor's interpretation of George W.F. Hegel. Taylor claims that reading Hegel is essential because it provides us the necessary background information for our understanding of modernity. Taylor does not become a Hegelian; he simply adopts many of his ideas, his way of proceeding and thinking, and in a special way his concern for how to unite two ideals – radical freedom and expressive fullness. My thesis is that Hegel's concern became Taylor's concern as well. Taylor's immense philosophical opus is the result of his desire to find an answer to this concern.

There are some themes which often come forth in Taylor's writings, independent of the object of reflection. These recurring themes are: moral sources of modern identity, human agency and human language. For the sake of argumentation, I analyse them together in one chapter, and support my analyses even with those writings that do not refer explicitly to these themes. In reading Taylor, these themes have to be always kept in mind, even when he does not explicitly talk about modern identity, human agency or human language. One of Taylor's theses is that adequate understanding of a specific topic requires insertion in its context; therefore, the description of time, space, and other factors that condition the topic in question, is crucial. No wonder that Taylor applies the descriptive method as the most appropriate way of proceeding. My second chapter is about these three recurring themes and the descriptive method.

In the third chapter I follow Taylor's analysis of modernity, showing those aspects that either preclude or impede the modern agent's search for fulfillment and freedom, or open neglected or undiscovered perspectives for investigation, and offer new answers. The scientific interpretation of the world and the human agency, and the reduction of the human sciences to the principles of the natural sciences, offer a narrow understanding of the human agency, excluding many possible horizons of fulfilment, flourishing, and freedom. Taylor critically reads the scientific approach to modernity, and indicates the primary motives behind this approach. At the same time, he emphasizes the challenge of achieving peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society and in the world of globalization. This challenge, with its forces of unification, should not ignore diversity among peoples. These differences call for recognition and respect. Furthermore, every man desires to be free and to follow the deepest convictions in his heart. Taylor talks

about the desire to be authentic, an original concept in modernity, and the remedy for the sense of unfulfillment.

The fourth chapter is basically a continuation of the third chapter, with the emphasis on an opening of the horizons of modernity in the field of religion. Following Taylor's descriptive approach, I reconstruct his first historical overview, which helps us to understand better our present situation in the field of religion, secularization, and the search for meaning. Taylor indicates to us how certain narratives exclude some dimensions of our existence. As a result, mainstream secularization theories consider religion and spirituality as unimportant and push them aside from our daily life, effectively closing off some possible answers regarding fulfilment, flourishing, and freedom which remain excluded. Taylor through his critical reading of these theories and of exclusive humanism underlines the importance of belief and faith as the potential road to freedom, fulfilment, wholeness, and discovery of meaning. However, not every form of religious practice and belief brings us automatically to the goal; some might be narrow and exclusive as well, and therefore have to be examined in turn.

The answer to Hegel's concern in Taylor's reflection unfolds only gradually. In Taylor's earliest publications, the search for freedom and meaning are not explicitly at the core of his reflection; however, they are so in his most recent publications. In order to be free, fulfilled, and have a meaningful life, no dimension of human existence can be excluded or remain to be examined. So Taylor critically analyzes them one by one, gradually moving deeper into the human soul and touching on the most essential questions of life.

To reinforce my interpretation of Taylor's philosophy, let us look at the areas of Taylor's philosophical development. His first publications from 50 years ago involve topics such as political science, social issues, the insufficiency of analytical philosophy, and a critique of Marxism, capitalism, behaviorism, and materialism. All these topics somehow crystallize in Taylor's reading of Hegel. So we have his first important book *Hegel* (1975), followed by *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979) as a shorter version of the first book. I understand Taylor's early period as the time of maturation and shaping of his thought, which finds its focus in Hegel's concerns which are unity of freedom and the need for fullness.

In his middle period, Taylor is more interested in the human agency, human language, psychology, questions of meaning and good, ethics, modern identity, modernity, multiculturalism, modern epistemology, the human mind, and a critique of the human sciences following of the patterns of natural sciences. In other words, he focuses more on the human agent who looks for his place in modernity and searches for a deeper meaning in his actions. In this period he publishes *Human Agency and Language, Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (1985), *Sources of the Self* (1989), *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991), *The Politics of Recognition* (1992), *Philosophical Arguments* (1995), and many other articles. I cover this period in my third chapter.

After the middle period we can see Taylor's shift of focus to spiritual and religious issues; his latest publications are mostly about the place of religion in modernity on the social and personal levels. The books from Taylor's latest period are: *A Catholic Modernity* (1999), *Varieties of Religion Today* (2002), *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004), and *A Secular Age* (2007). I cover Taylor's latest period in my fourth chapter.

Not all Taylor scholars would agree with my division of his philosophical opus in the three periods. I am of the same mind with them that it is not possible to delineate clear chronological lines between Taylor's early, middle and recent periods; there are too many articles that do not fit into these divisions. I agree, and for this reason I summarize in my second chapter the themes that recur in all three periods. For example, Taylor never stops reflecting about the human agency, and the importance of language. Nonetheless, this does not contradict my thesis that Taylor twice shifts the focus of his philosophical reflection in the later periods. I hope that by the end of my fourth chapter, the reader will have seen the evidence for my claim. Taylor's initial question -- how might Hegel's concern about the unity of two ideals be resolved -- develops gradually into an outline of an answer.

A limitation of this dissertation is the lack of references to the work of other Taylor's scholars and critics. At the same time, this limitation makes my dissertation original and strong. There are two reasons why I decided not to treat the secondary literature extensively. First, I would like to follow as closely as possible Taylor's thinking and coherently grasp his intuitions and intentions, not always an easy task because of the scope of his work. Second, surveying the secondary literature would extend this dissertation to an unwieldy length. Of course, these considerations do not exclude a critical approach to Taylor. I attempt to address these areas in the conclusion. The aim of this dissertation is to offer us an original reading and organization of Taylor's thought, including his publications from the beginning up to his just-published book *Dilemmas and Connections* (2011). My attempt is to trace out the thread of Taylor's ideas, and to facilitate our comprehension of his, and our comprehension of modernity.

In selecting the books and articles of Taylor to refer to or select from, I choose those most relevant to my interpretation and those passages which best express his position. His latest publications are of course more complex and to the point than some of his earlier publications on the same topics. In my writing, I use only the masculine forms of subjects and pronouns. Without any discrimination, I mean the feminine forms as well.

Chapter One: The Importance of Hegel in Taylor's Writing

In Charles Taylor's view, Hegel's writing presents an important source for our philosophical deliberation because (1) it provides us with the necessary background for understanding our present situation; (2) Hegel's philosophical synthesis gives us a good example for a meaningful organization of our thoughts into a new meaningful synthesis. These two large assumptions require from us an explanation.

In his early period, Taylor devotes much of his efforts to the study of Hegel. As a result, the most relevant writing from this period appeared in 1975, his book *Hegel*, in which he extensively interprets the philosophical opus of the German philosopher. A shorter version of the same book appears in 1979, *Hegel and Modern Society*. Even though the later book seems to be a summary of the first book on Hegel, the two books do not have the same center of gravity. *Hegel* seems to provide a more ample exposition of the distinguished German philosopher and a kind of re-introduction of his philosophy into the English speaking world, which was at that time mainly dominated by the analytical philosophical approach and, as such, skeptical of Hegel's philosophical statements. The second book, *Hegel and Modern Society*, summarizes the first book, but omits its interpretation of *Logic*, *Phenomenology* and the chapters on art, religion and philosophy. Because of this, this book is much more than a summary of the first book. In the introduction to the book, Taylor states:

The aim [of the book] was to produce not just an exposition of Hegel, but a view of the ways in which he is relevant and important to contemporary philosophers (1979, XI).

In view of this last statement, we will focus our analysis primarily on Taylor's second book on Hegel and some of his articles about Hegel.

Hegel as a child of the Romantic period indicated ways of overcoming the narrowness of the Enlightenment period with its prioritizing of reason. When Taylor was studying Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford, made famous by its traditional English empiricism, he dealt with challenges similar to Hegel's. Some of his professors were logical positivists, teaching linguistic and ethical theories based on logic, and emphasizing the rational approach. Taylor found their statements very dry, unsympathetic, and empty. As a contrary reaction, he turned to Hegel and the Romantic period, where he found many sources of inspiration for his own philosophical reflection and, in a special way, for his critique of modern scientism, positivism, behaviourism, atomism, and liberalism, as Taylor explains in an interview for the journal *Idler* (1989, 24). In order to re-introduce Hegel's complex philosophy into the pragmatism of the Anglo-Saxon world, he proposed his book, *Hegel*, which was not only an analysis of Hegel but at the same time a critique of the philosophy based on pragmatic principles.¹

Despite his passion for Hegel, Taylor states very clearly in the same interview for the journal *The Idler* that he has never been a Hegelian; yet he admires Hegel because of all sorts of insightful analyses on certain periods of European history and of a new vision of human development in a unified way.

He [Hegel] was the first great thinker to try to put all Western Modernity together, and understand the religious, economic, political, cultural, and philosophical developments in a unified way. He is indispensable as one of the starting points, because he did it very well, and because everybody

¹ Outside the pragmatism of the Anglo-Saxon world, the presence and relevance of Hegel's philosophy is not disputable at all. Every manual on Continental Philosophy in the 19th and 20th century will show us Hegel's influence on modern philosophy, theology and other human sciences.

has been reacting against him or trying to footnote or amend him every since (1989, 23).

Hence, Taylor interprets Hegel as the bridge from the Enlightenment to the successive periods of the 19th and 20th centuries, and into our time as well. Consequently, he sees Hegel's philosophical writing as a being mind-shaping and inspiring philosophical reflection in our post-modern time as well. In addition:

Hegel has contributed to the formation of concepts and modes of thought which are indispensable if we are to see our way clear through certain modern problems and dilemmas (1979, XI).

In effect, if we want to understand our mind-set and the meaning of some ideas reflected in contemporary philosophy, we have to encounter Hegel as one of the great minds. Hegel's legacy is simply too important to be ignored.

To sum up, Taylor's confrontation with a certain kind of philosophy during his studies in Oxford, and the intellectual unease that he experienced in search of satisfying answers, motivate his turn to Hegel's philosophy. Keeping in mind the link that Taylor conceives between Hegel and contemporary philosophy, it becomes obvious why Taylor's publications on Hegel are much more than a condensed exposition of Hegel's philosophy and problematic. Through Hegel, Taylor is elaborating his description of modernity. In view of our argument, at this point I claim the following: Taylor finds in Hegel's writing the inspiration for his own philosophical reflections. This was the case not only in Taylor's early period; Hegel's philosophical search for the answer to his dilemma has remained the reference point throughout Taylor's entire philosophical engagement up to his recent period.

Before we start our analysis of Taylor's interpretation of Hegel, I raise the question how faithful Taylor is to Hegel's thought, or perhaps how he is misinterpreting Hegel's position? Taking an extreme position, one might say that Taylor is interpreting Hegel in an instrumental way, adapting his master's thought to his own philosophical projects. Such an answer would be unfair to Taylor for two reasons: (1) he never claims to be Hegelian or to be a "simple" interpreter of Hegel's writing, but always keeps in mind a critical distance from Hegel; (2) it is a common consensus that every interpretation is much more than a pure repetition of somebody else's thought. Every interpreter, independently of how close to or far from the original text he stays, always tries to accomplish a certain project in his mind and inserts himself into the original text. In this sense, in both projects, Taylor remains faithful to his sources disclosing Hegel's thought in a very systematic way, and at the same time, is constructive in his effort to discover a meaningful answer to Hegel's dilemma in our time.

Let me illustrate additionally my claim about Taylor's closeness to Hegel by referring to Quentin Lauer's interpretation of Hegel. In his book, *Hegel's Concept of God*, Lauer reads the Hegelian philosophical enterprise as an extraordinarily unified and grandiose attempt to elaborate one concept, which is in Hegel's view the root of all intelligibility – the concept of God (Lauer, 1982, 1). Such a reading of Hegel's entire philosophical endeavor is, in Lauer's mind, an extremely difficult task, and there are at least two reasons for this difficulty: (1) the language that Hegel employs is frequently that of the Christian religious and theological traditions. Those who share the same tradition may feel that Hegel is using the language in such a way as to make its meaning hopelessly obscure; those who do not share the same tradition will only with great

difficulty decipher the meaning of the words, (2) what Hegel says becomes intelligible only in the framework of an elaborate philosophical system, which no one claims to have unraveled adequately. When Hegel employs such terms as *God*, *Spirit*, *creation*, *incarnation*, it is clear that he uses the vocabulary of Christian theology. Yet every one of these terms has a peculiarly philosophical significance in Hegel's system, which one has to re-discover (1982, 2). Keeping in mind these two reasons, it becomes understandable why any interpretation of Hegel's philosophy poses an extraordinary challenge.

Besides, whom can we take as the most genuine interpreter of Hegel's work? Let us refer again to Lauer's writing where the author illustrates how numerous philosophers interpret Hegel's term *God* in different ways (1982, 1-2): (1) there are those who claim that Hegel has no business bringing God, particularly the God of Christianity, into his philosophical discussion at all, either because there is no other way of bringing God into this discussion other than negatively (Feuerbach, Marx); or because God should be defined as the *incomprehensible*, the *transcendental*, the *mysterious*, beyond the capacity of rational thinking (Kierkegaard, Barth). (2) Others claim that Hegel is not talking about God but only about the *absoluteness*, the *infinity* of the human spirit, a sort of overarching *Spirit*, which embraces all its finite instantiations, but bears no resemblance to the God of any religion (Kojève, Kaufmann). (3) Still other interpreters state that Hegel deformed the concept of God and put in his place his own concept of *infinite reason*, the *logic*, i.e. Hegel's own inventions (Maréchal, Küng, Ricoeur). (4) There are those who agree that there is only one reason, finite human reason, and that therefore God is simply beyond reason, either as irrational and therefore nonexistent (Nietzsche, Sartre), or as suprarational and therefore only to be believed in and not known (Kant, Fichte).

Keeping in mind such a variety of possible understandings of Hegel's terminology, and consequently of the different elaborations of Hegel's statements, it becomes easier for us to accept the originality and importance of Taylor's interpretation of Hegel. There are at least two more arguments for Taylor's originality: (1) Taylor goes in his interpretation beyond the pure philosophical text and always wants to insert Hegel's work into the historical background of Hegel's time, which allows him an understanding of Hegel's work as coherently as possible. (2) At the same time, he links Hegel's work to our time, tradition, and modern questions which need to be answered. Thus he looks at the German philosopher's work from a critical distance, which allows him to analyze both the acceptable and unacceptable elements of Hegel's enterprise for our time. For example, Hegel's Western ethnocentrism, his idea that history is heading toward an end, his interpretation of religiosity, are in Taylor's view unacceptable points from the modern perspective. And yet Hegel remains in the same modern perspective the inspiring source for our philosophical investigation. Therefore, Taylor argues that we should learn how to read Hegel, how to integrate him, what to take from Hegel, and how to continue our discussions on Hegel (Taylor, 1982, 596).

In a certain sense, Taylor accomplishes a project very akin to Lauer's project. It is true that Taylor differs from Lauer because he does not look for a certain concept behind Hegel's writing. What he does aim to do is to dig out the sources of Hegel's aspiration and introduce them into our reflection. As a result, he goes beyond the historical framework of Hegel's time and the simple disclosure of Hegel's philosophy. He elaborates an original, appealing and creative analysis of Hegel, linking his reflection

with Hegel's aspiration. His originality and creativeness should be taken as the common denominator of all his published reflections on Hegel.

If this is the case, Taylor always remains close to Hegel's starting point in a very explicit way, as we will see later. This makes him a scholar of Hegel. Hence I will conclude with a preliminary summary statement that Taylor accepts and sympathizes with Hegel's main concern, but he does not agree with Hegel's answer. In this writing I maintain that the search for an adequate answer to Hegel's concern presents the main inspiration of Taylor's entire philosophical career, not only in his early writings, but in his later books as well. Hegel's starting point remains in the back of Taylor's mind even when Hegel ceased to be the main subject of his research.

After these words of introduction, let us move to a more detailed discussion about Taylor's interpretation of Hegel's main concern.

1.1 Hegel's Main Concern as Taylor Understands It

To reduce Hegel's extensive philosophical reflection to one single principle does not make any sense. In four decades of private teaching and professional work at different academic institutions, Hegel modified and extensively elaborated his philosophical statements. Consequently, the writings from his early period do not have the same foci as the writings of his late period. Taylor sees clearly the complexity of Hegel's writing, which eventually appears in his book *Hegel*, where Taylor offers a very dense and intriguing interpretation of Hegel's philosophical development. In the present chapter I argue that Taylor intends both to assess Hegel's major philosophical writings,

and at the same time, to go beyond specific books and to talk about Hegel's aspiration, out of which he created his system of thought.

How to unite two ideals - the radical freedom and the expressive fullness - appears in Taylor's interpretation of Hegel the main concern, challenged by the Enlightenment stream of thought of his time. The union of these two ideals becomes the interpretative key to Taylor's elaboration of Hegel's thought. At numerous points in his writing, Taylor refers to this union from different points of view and elaborates various aspects of Hegel's main concern.

When Taylor describes the historical framework of Hegel's time, he formulates Hegel's project in terms of a hope to unite two ideals (1979, 6). In a slightly different way, when he talks about the dialectic way in Hegel's system, he reformulates the same concern as "how [...] to answer the aspiration of the age in uniting the greatest rational autonomy with the fullest expressive unity with nature" (1979, 53). At the beginning of the chapter *Politics and Alienation*, Taylor summarizes Hegel's philosophy as "the attempt to combine the two aspirations of the Romantic generation, the aspiration to radical autonomy on the one hand, and to expressive unity with nature and within society on the other" (1979, 69). Delineating Hegel's philosophy of history, he formulates Hegel's challenge in terms of the drama of history, based on the question: "How to reconcile the freedom of the individual who knows himself as universally rational with a restored *Sittlichkeit*" (1979, 100). When he writes about the relevance of Hegel's philosophy in our time, he says that Hegel's synthesis appears to us implausible. Nonetheless, he suggests that "[...] we shall be looking at some of the transformations undergone by the central aspiration of Hegel's time, to combine radical autonomy and

expressive fulfillment” (1979, 135). In the third chapter of the same book, Taylor talks about the end of Hegelianism and writes: “Its [Hegel’s synthesis] aim, as I have tried to interpret it, was to combine this vision of nature as the expression of Spirit both with the implied call to man to recover expressive unity with it, and with the aspiration to rational autonomy” (1979, 139). Formulating our modern dilemma, i.e. how to situate subjectivity in relation to our life as embodied and social beings, without reducing it to a function of objectified nature, Taylor refers again to that central aspiration of the Romantic period which Hegel thought to answer definitively – how to unite radical autonomy with the fullness of expressive unity with nature (1979, 167).

All these citations are taken from Taylor’s *Hegel and Modern Society*. If we take his book *Hegel* or other publications on Hegel, we can easily find additional references and formulations of Hegel’s main concern. For the purpose of our writing, the above mentioned references give us sufficient examples to prove the validity of our argument. In the following paragraphs, I illustrate to some extent Hegel’s main concern, this time from the historical point of view.

1.2 The Historical Background of Hegel’s Concern

In general, every question, and in a special way, philosophical questions, always rise up within a particular historical framework and in relation to a specific concern that communicates to us the *why* of the question. In this regard, Taylor wants to reconstruct the historical background which Hegel investigated (1975, 3-11). Doing this, he is not only placing Hegel in his time, but is also proving the accuracy and validity of his interpretation of Hegel’s concern. Yet we should be aware that such a demonstration is

easily arguable and open to various critiques, especially if we want to stress the normative aspect of Taylor's argumentation. Without entering into discussion about the normative aspect of Taylor's approach – this is one of the topics of my second chapter – let us keep in mind these boundaries of Taylor's argumentation.

From the point of view of my interpretation, Taylor's reconstruction of the historical background of Hegel's writing remains very significant. Previously I stated that Taylor conceives the challenges of Hegel's time as resembling the challenges that we deal with in our time. Thus Taylor's placement of Hegel in his time is much more than a historical overview; it is a philosophical attempt to reconstruct historical, philosophical, spiritual, and intellectual parameters necessary for an adequate description of both Hegel's and our time. We can grasp the present time only through an adequate description of the past time from which we come and of which we are part. Therefore, Taylor proposes an extensive but necessary description of Hegel's time, necessary for our adequate comprehension.

Hegel wrote his philosophical synthesis in a time when two trends of thought were dominant: expressivism, which arises with Herder and the movement *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress), on one side, and on the other side, strong opposition against the radical objectification of Enlightenment thought, especially against the attempts objectifying human nature and moral freedom. Taylor describes both of these trends as reactions in late 18th century Germany to the mainstream of Enlightenment thought, in particular to its French variant. These reactions became important sources of what we know as Romanticism. It was the time when many people initially greeted the French revolution with enthusiasm for its freshness and novel ideas; soon the same revolution

became the source of perplexed horror and uncertainty. So Taylor states that Hegel and his time were characterized by a spiritual, moral and intellectual distress, stimulating in Hegel the quest for better solutions:

Much in the writings of Hegel and his contemporaries can be explained by the need to come to terms with the painful, perturbing, conflict-ridden moral experiences of the French Revolution (1975, 3).

This need drove Hegel and other thinkers of that time toward an insistent demanded solution. Taylor formulates it in terms of how to delineate the nature of human subjectivity and its relation to the world, or how to express personal freedom in a world full of limitations.

The need for a new delineation of human subjectivity and its relation to the world originates in the scientific revolution of the 17th century. This revolution was based on a new epistemology, which simultaneously introduced a different anthropology as well, as Taylor explains at the beginning of *Hegel*. Some scientists and philosophers in the 17th and 18th century (Galileo, Newton, Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke) radically changed the understanding of modern science, and consequently, the comprehension of the modern subject. Taylor summarizes the difference between the previous and the new understanding of the modern subject by claiming that “the modern subject is self-defining, where in previous views the subject is defined in relation to a cosmic order” (1975, 6). The cosmic order, which reflects an order of ideas, i.e. rational vision of the order of being, was crucial because it showed the ways in which a human came most fully to himself. In discovering and contemplating the order of things, the subject rose out of his dreams, illusions, and confusions, and came to self-presence and clarity. After the scientific and epistemological revolution, the cosmic order was put aside, ignored,

considered senseless, because it could not contribute clarity to the subject in his process of constructing his identity. The peak of this revolution represents the radical Enlightenment, presupposing a tremendous confidence in human subjectivity and human powers in the face of external nature.

The shift toward the modern notion of the self started in the 17th century. Descartes with his *cogito* wanted to demonstrate with certainty the existence of the self, while everything outside the subject, including God, remained uncertain. Thus the subject should free himself from the search for meaning through projection of meanings onto things. Then he could concentrate purely on the process of his observations and of thinking about things. Such a process created a new self-awareness in the subject, which claimed to be able to define his own nature and to have control over the world, first intellectually and then technologically. The growth of modern science and technology which followed reinforced the subject's self-awareness as the self-defining subject who does not want to be defined in relation to a meaningful order, but wants to treat the world as the object of his control. Parallel to this growing awareness of the self-defining subjectivity, a new notion of freedom grows as well, and consequently, the necessity for finding new and different ways of realizing this freedom. Taylor comprehends the question of freedom as an essential ingredient of the whole change, as we will see later on.

Such a vision of the self-defining subject and of things as devoid of intrinsic meaning Taylor describes as *disenchanted*, using Weber's term, and as *desacralized*, in terms of religious development (1975, 8-11). Disenchanted vision in this case means neutral, subjected to human control and knowledge, without any reference to final causes.

By desacralized vision Taylor refers to the religious reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe. The religious shift of that time significantly influenced the way of thinking of non-philosophical minds. People stopped defining themselves in relation to a larger cosmological order imbedded in their religious consciousness and by their sense of the sacred, dwelling in certain places, times and actions. The whole creation ceased to be the locus of meanings in relation to which man had to define himself. The external world, now desacralized, fostered in its subject feelings of self-dependence.

The third adjective with which Taylor describes the new vision of the world is *objectified*. With this term Taylor explains that the world is not seen any more as having inherent meaning, because categories of meaning and purpose apply exclusively to the thoughts and actions of subjects. The new notion of objectivity rejects recourse to final causes, so important for the previous cosmological interpretation, and relies preferentially on efficient causation. In order to increase the efficiency, each element of the process can be changed to or replaced by one that would work better. Consequently, all elements should be considered as compatible and equal in their value.

The newly formatted notion of objectivity based on the new scientific mind was applying the same scientific principles not only to external material nature but to human nature as well. Man became an object in nature like everything else, even though he is at the same time the subject of knowledge. The new understanding of man resulted in mechanical, atomistic, and uniform understanding based on contingency. A singular individual was like other objects in nature, fully under the jurisdiction of so-called scientific objectivity. So the Enlightenment revolution introduced new criteria of objectivity with anthropological consequences.

Let us formulate together with Taylor the opposing stances culminating in the self-defining subject. The new, cold, purely rational, and objective approach to human nature conflicted inevitably with the subject's deep desire for self-definition. How can man who is an essential part of nature, fully and originally express himself in a world that is scientifically measured, objective, and contingent? How can he who treats the world as an object of his control, at the same time take himself out of this world to which he inevitably belongs? How can he freely express himself as part of the world comprised of the strict causal necessities of the natural laws? Out of this intellectual distress, which includes the spiritual components as well, Taylor conceives the need of a new synthesis, where the self-defining subject will be one with himself, one with other self-defining subjects in society, and at the same time, one with the surrounding nature. This requirement for a new synthesis has not only philosophical, scientific, and religious components, but political, social, and economical ones also. Successive generations of philosophers in the post-Enlightenment period tried to find an adequate answer.

Taylor analyzes three attempts at elaborating a meaningful answer: two short attempts by Herder and Kant, and, then, a more extensive one by Hegel. Let us see now how Taylor interprets, in general, Herder's theory of expression, and in particular, his understanding of language.

1.2.1 Herder's Solution

The movement *Sturm und Drang* represented the first possible answer in the decade of the 1770s. This movement filled with enthusiasm the musicians and literati, first in Germany and then in other countries as well. In opposition to the radical

Enlightenment, they emphasized the importance of a subject who should be able to express freely his emotions. The main theoretician of this movement is Johann Gottfried Herder (1744 – 1803), whose role Taylor describes as follows:

Herder reacts against the anthropology of the Enlightenment, against what I [Taylor] called above the “objectification” of human nature, against the analysis of the human mind into different faculties, of man into body and soul, against a calculative notion of reason, divorced from feeling and will. And he is one of the principal of those responsible for developing an alternative anthropology, one centered on the categories of expression (1975, 13).

This description summarizes the program of the anti-Enlightenment movement. The key notion is to see human activities and human life as expressions. Taylor is aware that the terms *expression* and *expressionism* might be very misleading because they have different meanings for different philosophers. They provide us with the central notions to Herder as well as to Hegel, and we have to understand them properly if we want to grasp correctly the position of both philosophers. Taylor is very explicit at this point, saying that he will assume Isaiah Berlin’s interpretation of the term *expression* by Herder as human activity that expresses the entire personality of the individual or the group.² Why Taylor takes over Isaiah Berlin’s position and his understanding of the term, he explains explicitly at the beginning of his article *The Importance of Herder* (1995a). Isaiah Berlin

² With no reference to the Expressionist painters, writers and composers of the early decades of the twentieth century, Isaiah Berlin defines Expressionism as: “the doctrine that human activity in general, and art in particular, express the entire personality of the individual or of the group, and are intelligible only to the degree to which they do so. Still more specifically, expressionism claims that all the works of men are above all voices speaking, are not objects detached from their makers, are part of a living process of communication between persons and not independently existing entities, beautiful or ugly, interesting or boring, upon which external observers may direct the cool and dispassionate gaze with which scientists – or anyone not given to pantheism or mysticism – look on objects in nature. This is connected with the further notions that all forms of human self-expressions are in some sense artistic, and that self-expression is part of the essence of human beings as such; which in turn entail such distinctions as those between integral and divided or committed and uncommitted (that is, unfulfilled) lives; and thence lead to the concept of various hindrances, human and non-human, to the self-expression which is the richest and most harmonious form of self-expression that all creatures, whether or not they are aware of it, live for.” (Berlin, Isaiah. *Herder and the Enlightenment*. Ed. Earl Wasserman. Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins Press, 1965, 54).

was the one who helped to rescue Herder from his relative neglect by philosophers of that time, through his elaboration of the *expressivist* understanding of the human person. Impressed by Berlin's explanation, Taylor adopts Berlin's interpretation as his own, partially elaborates it and erects on it his philosophical position.

Even though Taylor cites only a few direct references to Herder's work, he dedicates a lot of space to Herder's philosophy. Taylor claims explicitly that for a coherent understanding of Hegel it is crucial to grasp the importance of Herder, i.e. his reaction against Enlightenment in terms of expressionism (1995, 79). Following Herder's interpretation, when he uses the word expressionism, he refers to human life and human activities as expressions, where the act of expression means much more than a verbal act of expressing thoughts and ideals in speech; it refers to a realization in external reality of something that we humans feel or desire. In the act of expression, we express ourselves, our states, or at the minimum, our life-forms which resemble us as the subject. What is expressed is equivalent to the subject who is expressing.

The act of expression becomes the ideal and formative principle of the self-defining subject who through the act of expression finds new ways of self-realization. The same act gives to the subject *meaning* and *purpose* that now reside in his interiority and no longer somewhere in objective reality, or in the world as expressing some ideal order, or in a cosmological order (1975, 14). Hence, Herder is elaborating apparently at this point a new anthropology in which the central notion becomes human action or life as expression.

Taylor conceives Herder's anthropology as a rehabilitation of certain concepts of Aristotelian anthropology, i.e. to see life as an expression means to see it as the

realization of a purpose and of an idea residing in this purpose, which consequently leads to the realization of the subject. However, the realization of the subject by Herder does not mean the fulfillment of an idea or a plan which exists independently of the subject who realizes it, as Aristotle might say. The self-defining subject recognizes the idea or plan as his own, unfolded from within himself, and calling to be realized exclusively by him. This idea of self-relation of the subject illustrates the main difference between the Aristotelian tradition and Herder's position. Human ideas and plans, or life as such in general, originates from and belongs to the subject, and not to any external reality, or an order, or ideas. The individual's creation and realization of his plans becomes the essence of his nature; consequently, the expression of his ideas and realization of his plans have to be solely his own and nobody else's. Nobody can replace the individual subject, and nobody can take away from him his ideas and plans. Following this logic, each individual, every group, and nation, has its own original way of being human and having a human essence calling to be fulfilled. This becomes the origin of nationalism and expressive individualism, so important for our understanding of modernity and Taylor's interpretation of it.

Herder thought that each people had its own peculiar guiding theme or manner of expression, unique and irreplaceable, which should never be suppressed and which could never simply be replaced by any attempt to ape the manner of other. This was perhaps the most remarkably innovative aspect of the expressivist conception (1979, 2).

In order to be able to fulfill such self-expression and self-realization, the subject has to have an inner force, with which he will challenge any possible obstacles on the way to fulfillment, in Taylor's interpretation (1979, 15-18). Aristotle would say that the same growth, development, and realization of humans as tending towards order and

equilibrium, constantly threatened by disorder and disharmony, are embodiments of this inner force. The expressivists, on the contrary, perceive the same growth and development as the manifestations or expressions of an inner power, striving to realize and maintain its own shape against those the surrounding world might impose. So the ideal realization of the inner force does not consist in conformity to an idea (Aristotle), but in the subject's internal generation or creation of an idea first, and second, in his realization of this idea. This is not a two-step process, where the second step chronologically follows the first one. A certain idea or form to be followed is not first wholly determined and then realized; the same realization of an idea or form clarifies and makes determinate what that idea or form is. In other words, if we want to define a form or an idea, we have to express it or put it into action. The ideas and forms are not wholly determinate beforehand, but take shape through their realization. Therefore, the same act of subjective expression becomes extremely relevant because only through expression is man able to realize more completely who he is. Even though Taylor does not say it explicitly, we can add that an act of expression presents the ontological component of the new anthropology. Such an interpretation of expressivism, embracing the idea of the unfolding of the subject, is the added dimension of the new anthropology, missing from the Aristotelian dimension. To avoid possible misunderstandings, let us add the following. It would be wrong to state that act of expression is something new and completely unknown to Aristotle, because Aristotle is very familiar with it. What is new with Herder, i.e. not elaborated sufficiently in Aristotle, is the metaphysical interpretation of expression in terms of the unfolding of the subject through the creation and realization

of his ideas. Aristotle does not talk about the unfolding of the subject, but about the conformation of the subject to ideas or a larger order.

Let us recapitulate with Taylor the main idea of Herder's expressivist theory:

If we think of our life as realizing an essence or form, this means not just the embodying of this form in reality, it also means defining in a determinate way what this form is (1975, 16).

Previously we stated that human life and its fulfillment do not reside in any subjective relation to something outside of the subject. Here, Taylor additionally stresses Herder's position, saying that human fulfillment consists in the same process of expressing and elaborating these ideas and forms. This means that human life is both the search for and the determination of a certain form, as well as its realization and embodiment in reality, which both elements inform. Full determination of an idea consists only in the complete and final realization of the subject.

Such a position gives rise to numerous consequences. Everyone's humanity, his expression, realization and fulfillment is something unique, original, different, equivalent to no one else's, revealing only his particular life. The subject has to be aware of his own expressions because only through them can he come to know himself and discover his identity. Simultaneously he has to be aware of differences among people because they are defining their uniqueness as an individual, group, or nation. The same differences define their identity as individuals. Consequently, each human, group, or nation has its own modality, unrepeatably in history. Each one of them is called to realize its unique quality that which can only be revealed in life itself. Taylor summarizes all these with Herder's words: "Each man has his own measure, as it were an accord peculiar to him of all his feelings to each other" (1975, 16).

Such an expressivist anthropology with its notion of the subject's self-realization presents in Taylor's interpretation a sharp break with Enlightenment thought and a movement toward the objectification of nature, at least as far as human nature is concerned. Now the emphasis lies on the self-awareness of a subject who is opposing any kind of objectification of human nature, or any outside limitations of the subject, or definition of the subject in relation to an outside order. The new conception of self-awareness incorporates the idea of self-defining subjectivity, which is something that unfolds from the subject himself. Taylor claims that this is one of the key ideas underlying the change of thinking in the 18th century, and one of the foundational ideas of our civilization in the twenty-first century (1975, 17-18). From our point of view, the same idea will become the crucial component of Taylor's writing, to which he returns again and again in his philosophical investigation. Let us simply mention two of his articles, in which he additionally elaborates these ideas. In "Action as Expression" Taylor extensively talks about human action as an expression of desire. In this regard, desire and action are in a certain sense inseparable: every action is an expression of human desires, and desires lead humans into action. In his article "Socialism and Weltanschauung," Taylor calls human life the external expression of a man's potential.

After elaborating the general outlines of the expressivist theory, Taylor focuses on Herder's understanding of language and art, which are by their definition the privileged tools of human's expression (1975, 19). Even here, Taylor notices in Herder's writing a tectonic shift in the understanding of meaning of language and art. The Enlightenment predecessors, mostly influenced by Augustine's statements about language, understood

language as the vehicle of ideas, where every word is referring to or picturing something else. Words get their meaning from being used to designate objects. The institution of language as such was supposed to control the flow of associations and to keep human thoughts in order. Herder changed such an understanding of language, saying that language is not something that is referring us to something else, but something that confines an activity in which the human form of consciousness comes to be. Hence, words not only describe the world but express also a particular mode of consciousness as the realization and determination of what that mode of human consciousness is. Therefore, if we want to understand the origin of language and the proper way to use it, we have to analyze the conditions of the subject who is using the language, and the framework in which the language is used.

To understand language as an expression of human consciousness means for Herder that consciousness finds its place through speech, thought, and reflection. They are integral parts of human life and distinctive human activities, and not separate faculties simply added on to our animal nature. To be more precise, *reflection* is that factor which transforms human psychic life into something more than psychic, and brings about the origin of language, i.e. it enables humans to become the users of language. Through reflection humans create a new dwelling space from which they deal with the surrounding world and take stances in it. The most primitive form of expression of reflective stances towards things is language, which takes place in speech, i.e. the presentation of reflection to others in a public space. All these together: thoughts, speech, reflection, language, create in humans a complex process which has to be taken as a whole and as embodied in a concrete place, if we want to grasp properly the meaning of a

single word. In his article “The Importance of Hegel,” Taylor states: “A word has meaning only within a lexicon and a context of language practices, which are ultimately embedded in a form of life” (1995, 93). Herder, as Taylor will after him, proposes a certain holism of meaning, in which the meaning of a linguistic expression has to include its background of understanding. Individual words can be words only within the context of an articulated language. By emphasizing this background of understanding, Herder opposes the designative theory of language, as well as the epistemological approaches of that time, based on atomism and the understanding of language as a collection of independently standing words. Later on we will see how Taylor adopts Herder’s critique as solid ground for his opposition to analytical philosophy.

For Taylor, the holism of meaning is the key idea of Herder’s approach, which will lead us towards a new perspective (1995, 96). Taylor likes emphasizing Herder’s originality by saying that language becomes the way to express human awareness. This is much more than an awareness of things or any ability to describe them; it is awareness of a whole or a web, in which the words we use have sense only through their place in the whole. Language is not a set of instruments ready to be used, but is a form of activity by which we express and realize a certain way of being in the world. This activity includes a new awareness of how to describe things, how to respond to them, and a new awareness of personal feelings. The development of these modes of expression of new feelings leads into a new self-awareness that now becomes much more refined and powerful than before. Hence, language becomes a pattern of activity by which we express and realize a certain way of being in the world. This pattern can be deployed only against a

background that we can never fully dominate. On the other hand, we are never fully dominated by it because we are constantly reshaping it (1995, 97).

Following the same pattern of thinking, Taylor concludes with one paragraph that such a new understanding of language transformed also the comprehension of art in general, including poetry, music, painting, and dance. The normative roles of art and our way of perceiving them were changed. The primary nature of art was not any more imitative, or didactic, or pleasing in function; art became an expression of the profound feelings of the artist. In the process of creating art, the artist extends and completes his own existence. Artistic creation is, consequently, much more than a pure expression of feelings; it transforms feelings to a higher form, i.e., to the realization of the artist. Through artistic creations such as painting, dancing, singing, sculpture, the artist is on the way to realizing himself. Such a transformation is not purely subjective, devoid of any claim to truth. It is true because it presents the highest and fullest expression of the artist's potentialities. It presents the fulfillment of the artist's life. Following such a view, art as realization of human nature can easily replace religion as the new way toward human fulfillment.

Taylor does not hide the fact that his interpretation of Herder goes beyond Herder's basic intuition and the originality of his understanding of language and art. Herder could not be aware of later consequences that his understanding of language would provoke. On the contrary, Taylor has the privilege of seeing the successive development of thought based on Herder's primary intuition, which he integrates into his own interpretation. From our point of view, Taylor's emphasis on Herder's reflection on language is extremely relevant because Taylor recalls in many pages of his writings the

importance of language in human life and the understanding of language as a transforming activity leading to a new human awareness. With a bit of exaggeration, we can say that not only the seeds but a relatively large sapling of Taylor's reflection on language also are taken from Herder's garden. This sapling growing into a tree spreads its branches beyond Herder's garden.

There is a second reason why Taylor accentuates so much the importance of Herder in particular and the *Sturm und Drang* movement in general. Behind all of the ideas of Herder and other writers of the movement (new anthropology of expression, new theory of language, new understanding of art and its transforming power), Taylor perceives a profound spiritual resistance against the Enlightenment conception of nature, especially against the *material* conception of human nature: Enlightenment view of man as the subject of egoistic desires, for which nature and society provide means to fulfilment; life as mechanistic, atomist, analytic, utilitarian experience of an objectified world; the division of human soul from body, reason from feelings, thoughts from senses, desires from calculation. All these distinctions and dichotomies dry out the human soul, tear apart the unity of human life, and profoundly distort the true nature of man.³ In opposition to them, human life should be considered as having unity analogously to the work of art, where every part or aspect of the whole finds its proper meaning in relation to the others. The recognition of such unity and wholeness, and the rejection of any

³ "From this point of view the Enlightenment analytic science of man was not only a travesty of human self-understanding, but one of the most grievous modes of self-distortion. To see a human being as in some way compounded of different elements: faculties of reason and sensibility, or soul and body, or reason and feeling, was to lose sight of the living, expressive unity; and in so far as men tried to live according to these dichotomies, they must suppress, mutilate or severely distort that unified expression which they have it in them to realize" (1979, 2).

disembodied spiritual reality springing from the Enlightenment's view, becomes in Taylor's writing what was the spiritual need and exigency of Herder's time. Later on we will see how the necessity of such a unity became one of the main principles of Hegel's philosophy.

Taylor continues that Expressivism should be taken as a reflection of a spiritual need of Herder's self-defining subject, who is profoundly in search of freedom, now threatened by Enlightenment principles (1975, 25-29). Freedom in this case means much more than to be free from an outside control of state or religious authority. Freedom means the condition of self-realization of the subject, fulfillment of human nature and its flourishing. The same freedom provides a new unity and integration of fragmented pieces of human life; it provides also a new unity on the social level in terms of community or nation. The society cannot be made up of atomistic, morally self-sufficient subjects, who live together only through external relations with each other, seeking advantages or defense of their individual rights. There has to be in society a deeper bond of unity, which amalgamates sympathy between men with their highest self-feeling. The highest concerns of people are shared and woven into their community life. Later on we will see that community life functions as a very important theme in Taylor's reflection.

The expressive activities lead into a greater communion with nature as well. Feelings, and any kind of expressive activities, cannot stop at the boundaries of the subject-self; they have to be open to the great currents of life that flow across nature. To be in touch with these currents means to experience communion with nature, to have sympathy for all life, to feel compassion for nature. This kind of understanding is totally

removed from an objectified universe and its mechanical relation to nature. Taylor understands this as one of the central aspirations of the expressivist view (1975, 25).

These four necessities: freedom, unity, communion with men, and communion with nature, reflect the aspirations behind the expressivist consciousness, which tries to escape from a world where the subject is placed over against an objectified world. Therefore, the expressivist consciousness tries to overcome the gap between subject and object, to see objectivity as an expression of subjectivity or as an interchange with it. The same aspiration looks to overcome the opposition between thought and reason and morality; the separation between human desires and sensibility; the opposition between the fullest self-conscious freedom of the individual and the life in community; the gap between self-consciousness and communion with nature.

At this point Taylor does not want to enter deeply into these topics. He only mentions them as the pre-modern shoots which extensively grow and flourish in the age of modernity. From our point of view, it is important to underline how Taylor elaborates the question of freedom as one of the main concerns of the pre-modern time. Later on we will see how he understands the same concern as coming out from the spiritual, i.e. the deepest dimensions of human existence.

So far I have mentioned how the rise of the Enlightenment and the beginning of the French Revolution with its revolutionary ideas found its opposition in *Sturm and Drang* and Herder as the main representative of the movement. For a better understanding of the historical frameworks, in which both Herder first and later Hegel were writing, I must note that on different occasions Taylor refers to Kant and his

philosophy as well. Herder's and Hegel's writings present a kind of radical reaction to Kant's rational philosophy. Taylor does not deal with Kant and his philosophy in any one particular chapter; neither does he follow a chronological order of Kant's writing, but he refers to Kant's position sporadically. For practical reasons, I will summarize in the following passage his interpretation of Kant's position about how to express human freedom. Hopefully Taylor's interpretation of Kant's view will help us to grasp better Herder's reaction against the Enlightenment. At the same time, it should clarify our understanding of Hegel's writing as well.

1.2.2 Kant's Solution

The Enlightenment's approach based on the radical objectification of reality, including the objectification of human nature, presents a huge dilemma: how to explain moral freedom. If we treat man in the same way as any other part of the objectified world, then it follows that the motivations behind man's actions have to be explained as causally, materially, and systematically as any other event in material nature. Not surprisingly, such a treatment reveals an incompatibility and contradictions between human freedom and moral actions. For example, if a person is morally free, it means that he is capable of making decisions against inclinations arising from the bodily part of his personality, a capacity which undermines the Enlightenment's claim of objectification. Consequently, the Enlightenment's approach remains problematic because it confines human freedom and its moral aspects in a very narrow way.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is doubtless a most remarkable figure who faced this dilemma of that time in a very creative way. His proposal of how to define moral

freedom still influences philosophical thinking. No wonder that Taylor refers to him in numerous pages, and, in a very condensed way, in the first chapter of his book *Hegel*. Even in this case, Taylor does not want to discuss Kant's philosophical statements as such, but to analyze Kant's positions according to the historical boundaries of his time, which present the necessary conditions for an adequate understanding of his statements. From our point of view, this will help us to understand better Hegel's position.

Taylor starts his reflection about Kant by saying that Kant resolved the philosophical dilemma by introducing transcendental argument, and through it, a new definition of the moral subject and a new conception of freedom (1975, 30-36). The subject cannot be taken as a mere bundle of perceptions, similar to what we perceive through observation of material reality. From the perception of external reality, Kant moves back to the subject of these perceptions and raises the question: who are to be able to have the kind of experiences that we do? In other words, external experiences cannot define and limit the subject of these experiences. The subject cannot be exhausted by the phenomena given him through observing both the external world and himself. The real knowledge of the subject can be reached only through inference, by arguing back from experiences to the structure of the subject who makes these experiences possible. Transcending singular experiences and the external world, Kant claimed that the subject of these experiences has to be a unity, that of the *I think* which must potentially accompany all my representations.

Kant argues that our world of experiences takes its shape from the subject, the shape of his mind and his perception of the things (*phenomena*), which are not the same as the things are in themselves (*noumena*). If our world of experiences takes its shape

from the subject, the shape of his mind, as well as his intuition and perception of the external world, it follows that the nature of the noumenal world remains inaccessible to our direct experiences and cannot be disclosed directly.

Such a radical separation from the noumenal world and from the ultimate reality allows Kant to elaborate the central unity and freedom of the moral subject. Man is supposed to draw his moral precepts out of his own will and reason, and not out of any external sources, including religious principles or God. Morality has to be entirely separated from human motivations of happiness or pleasure, which are a kind of external source as well. Since the objects of our happiness are all contingent, none of them can provide sufficient grounds for an unconditional obligation. Our behaviour is directed by *the moral imperative*, i.e. the highest moral obligation which is categorical and binding on us unconditionally. Such a moral imperative can be found only in the will itself, in something that binds us because of what we are (rational wills), and for no other reason. Even more, the moral law must be binding us a priori and in a purely formal way. It cannot depend on the particular nature of the objects we desire. Following this way, the moral subject declares independence from all natural considerations, outside motives and principles, or from the natural causality which rules them. The moral subject is free in a radical sense, self-determining not as a natural being, but as a pure, moral will. Such independence is called freedom in a strict, i.e. transcendental sense. These are the thoughts that Taylor borrows from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*.

“This is the central, exhilarating notion of Kant's ethics. Moral life is equivalent to freedom, in this radical sense of self-determination by the moral will. This is called *autonomy*” (1975, 32). The moral subject should not act out of inclination, even the most

joyful benevolence, or fear of authority or condemnation, but should act out of the right motive. The right motive can only be respect for that moral law which he gives to himself as rational will. Freedom in this case means to act against human inclinations; it means independence from external impingement. The same freedom means division within the human between his reason and sensibility. There is no place for religious sentiments in this freedom. The higher way to come closer to the divine comes from acting in moral freedom and not through religious worship.

Similarly to Herder, even Kant could not foresee the consequences of the statements which he introduced into philosophical deliberation. The generations following Kant enthusiastically received his original ideas and fostered further his conclusions. Soon they came to the conclusion that radical freedom is possible only at the cost of a violent separation from nature, including from the human body. Taylor observes that this new division between reason and sensibility in human nature resulted in a more radical reality than anything the materialistic and utilitarian Enlightenment had previously imagined. The radically free subject was thrown back on himself, and kept in opposition to nature, external authority, and decisions in which any other could have a share. The new ideal of perfection and holiness became radical freedom, i.e. overcoming all drives and inclinations. Kant was aware of the impossibility of reaching such perfection in this world; what remains is the endless task of struggling to approach this perfection. Such awareness somehow disappeared with Kant's followers.

A certain group of the young German intellectuals saw in Kant's understanding of radical freedom a tremendous force, challenge, and drive to define anew human identity. Inspired by Herder's expression-theory, they saw in Kant's interpretation of radical

freedom the way to human fulfilment in freedom, i.e. the freedom of self-determination, which is much more than a simple independence from external impingement. No wonder that they accepted Kant's position as the highest, purest, and most uncompromising vision of freedom as self-determination.

Taylor does not want to end his reflection by summarizing the intellectual solutions of Kant and his followers. In his view, Kant is only one mind, even though very relevant and influential, of the modern time. Consequently, Taylor wants to go beyond Kant's solutions and those of his followers. More important than their intellectual proposals was their hope to unite two ideals: radical freedom and integral expression (1975, 33). Saying this, Taylor shifts the focus of his reflection from the intellectual level to the deeper, more spiritual level of human existence of that time. The expectations of the French Revolution with its revolutionary ideas did destroy the old order, but did not create the desired transformation in the political sphere. The same revolution introduced a kind of spiritual unrest into the sphere of culture and human consciousness, provoking a spiritual revolution. In this sense, people's expectations were permeated with the hope of finding new solutions, where radical freedom and integral expressions would combine together and where a new order would find its place. Something like this did not happen automatically or in an expected way. It seems that the French Revolution did not mediate any solutions but only opened the door to new possibilities.

Taylor does not enter into any extensive analysis of the numerous philosophers of that time who proposed various new solutions (i.e. Fichte, Schelling, Schlegel, Hölderlin, Novalis, Goethe, Schleiermacher, and the young Hegel). He conceives them as variations of the most basic problem, expressed in terms of history: the "problem of uniting the

greatest in ancient and modern life” (1975, 34). All of the above mentioned thinkers felt inspired by the greatness of the ancient Greek world, when the most perfect unity between nature and the highest human expressive form took place. This unity had to die at a certain point of history in order to allow the growth of reason and the ideas of the radical freedom of man. In the time of modernity, radical freedom, separation from the natural and sensible, and a new understanding of human self-determination have reached their peak. They call for a new and different synthesis or union between nature and humans. A return to the Greek synthesis is not a valid option because the Greek vision of union would be insufficient and lacking the comprehension. We need a new comprehensive view based on hope that such a unity is possible in the spiral vision of history. At different occasions Taylor underlines that now we are in possession of the spiritual dimension of human existence, somehow beyond the purely intellectual level. Claiming this, Taylor comes very close to Hegel’s dialectical vision of history, even though he does not agree with Hegel’s basic vision of history as heading to an end.⁴

Having inserted Kant’s philosophy into its historical context and in relation to Herder, Taylor summarizes the new emerging dilemma with a list of opposing terms:

⁴ In the book review *Die Entstehung der Dialektik: Eine Analyse der geistigen Entwicklung von Hölderlin, Schelling und Hegel bis 1802*, Taylor presents the main challenge of that time in terms of spiritual development of Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel. Their spiritual challenge is also the origin of the “dialectic” mode of thinking. The challenge can be summarized as a union of two seemingly incompatible ideas: (1) the ideal of liberation of sensibility, including the religious sentiments, embracing nature as the source of the highest moral feelings. This ideal would do away the division between reason and feeling, as well as between man and nature, and between man and man. (2) Kant’s idea of moral freedom as autonomy of moral man from mere nature.

Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel sought a view of fulfillment which would contain both unity with nature and moral freedom, just as they sought a theology which would both unite God with nature and preserve him as Creator.

...the opposition between thought, reason, morality, on one side, and desire and sensibility on the other; the opposition between the fullest self-conscious freedom, on one side, and life in the community, on the other; the opposition between self-consciousness and communion with nature; and beyond this the separation of finite subjectivity from the infinite life that flowed through nature (1975, 36).

Keeping in mind these oppositions, Taylor immediately formulates the leading question of his research at this point: How was this great re-unification to be accomplished? On what could one's hopes be founded? Hegel seems to be able to hammer out the solution, where all elements from the list of opposites are included: reason, thought, sensibility, desire, feelings, imagination, morality, freedom, self-consciousness, communion with nature, finite subjectivity, and infinite life. The challenge of combining the fullest moral autonomy of the subject with the highest unity within man, between men and with nature should find its way to a solution. In Taylor's words, Hegel shared the hope that this unprecedented and epoch-making synthesis could be made if we win through a vision of a spiritual reality underlying nature, a cosmic subject, to whom man could relate himself and in which he could ultimately find himself (1975, 49).

The cosmic spirit, *Geist*, presents the spiritual reality in which all the elements from the list of oppositions find their place. In this *Geist*, two powerful aspirations – expressive unity and radical autonomy – will join in a new synthesis. Now we have to analyze Taylor's interpretation of how Hegel came to such a solution. This analysis will bring us closer to the leading paradigm of Taylor's philosophical reflection and our interpretation of it. As we will see, Taylor does not introduce his solution in a straightforward way, but studies the question from different perspectives.

1.3 Hegel's Vision of Unity

In my understanding of Taylor's interpretation of Hegel's writing (1979, 7-9), Hegel began his philosophical reflection with a deep desire to construct a new and different vision of society. As we have already mentioned, such a society should unite two connected yet disconnected aspirations: (1) the aspiration to unity with nature, with other humans, and with himself, which requires an individual to be an expressive being; (2) an aspiration to radical moral autonomy, as demanded by Kant. Since many German philosophers of the time considered the ancient Greeks as the representative of expressivist perfection, they referred to ancient Greece as the place of the most perfect unity between nature and the highest human expressive form. Nonetheless, what they longed for was much more than a return to the starting point of the Greeks. The beautiful Greek synthesis had to die in order to allow for the growth of man's self-consciousness and self-determination. After a long period of spiritual development, the time came when man was faced with the task of constructing a new and different union and synthesis of two powerful aspirations.

Hegel could not offer a new solution at once but only after a critical examination of different aspirations of his time. The religious aspiration required restoration of the original Christianity and renewal of the religious life. The political aspiration looked for recovery of a society in which men are free and undivided, as the Greeks were, and where the public life represents an expression of the citizen's role, and not an imposition by an unchallengeable authority. The third aspiration was the moral one: as Kant was

suggesting, the Enlightenment affirmed that man should come to the freedom of self-direction and self-determination through his reason.

Even though these three aspirations seemed to be in conflict, Hegel attempted to reconcile them into a unity and wholeness, where man would achieve the freedom of moral self-determination, and where reason would not be at odds with passion, and spirit with sensibility. Having in mind such a vision, it becomes obvious why Hegel could not accept the solution of his Romantic contemporaries, who based their synthesis on an intuition or immediate grasp of the whole process in which there is no place for reason.

To grasp the meaning of Hegel's vision, Taylor suggests a closer reading of Hegel from his earliest period to his most mature position. In different periods, Hegel elaborated different solutions toward which he was re-formulating what became his final vision of union. Such an overview of the development of Hegel's vision is necessary if we want to grasp the complexity and relevance of Hegel's vision, and at the same time, to understand the importance of our initial question, to which Taylor is in search of an answer.

1.3.1 Tübingen Period (1788 – 1793)

Interpreting Hegel's earliest manuscripts from the Tübingen period, Taylor sees Hegel as being very close to the moral aspiration of the Enlightenment, the ideals of ancient Greece, and the principles of the *Sturm und Drang* movement (1975, 51-55). At the same time, Hegel wanted to be very close to the position of Christianity. In contrast to some radicals of that time who were challenging the Christian faith and rejecting it, the young Hegel took a different way: he conceived the demands of expressive unity and Reason as being compatible with the original teaching of Jesus. Unfortunately, Jesus

failed because the later development of Christianity killed the original spirit of his teaching. Now was the time to regenerate Jesus' spirit, to present what could be done through autonomous reason by recreating what was the best of the Greek spirit. Following the autonomy of his own reason and not any external, sometimes even irrational authority based on the prestige of the past, man should live in freedom. In this sense, the young Hegel was not anti-religious; rather he strove for a renewal of religious life. However, his understanding of religion was very akin to Kant's understanding and, at the same time, unfamiliar with traditional piety, tradition, external practices, allegiances to certain doctrines and claims of supernatural authority. What we ought to do and believe, he thought, should not be determined by religious faith or the commands of God, but by the commands we give ourselves as a rational being. We come closest to the holy when we act as the subject of a pure moral will.

After his initial enthusiasm for Kant's position, Hegel gradually distanced himself from such rational approaches to religion. Beside rational nature, man should be seen as a sensible creature, moved to the good by the heart and its inclinations, interwoven with sensibility, love, friendship, and compassion. The new expressive unity should provide us with a wholeness or integrity where reason is not in conflict with the passions or spirit with sensibility, but where the whole man is moved spontaneously to moral goodness, including his sensible part and inclinations. If we want to unite man within himself and elaborate an expressive unity, then religion must become fully subjectivized, i.e. it must become a living piety in order to unify man within himself, rather than through an external allegiance to certain doctrines and practices. Even more, it must be woven into the life of the people and linked with reformed political institutions, in order to unite men

with each other. In short, the young Hegel looked for an understanding of religion that would be much more than allegiance to an external authority or the object of pure understanding.

Referring to H.S. Harris, the well known Hegelian scholar, Taylor rephrases three requirements for religion which Hegel sets out towards the end of this early period (1975, 55-56). (1) Religion must be grounded on universal reason so that every man can grasp its meaning. It should teach nothing contrary to rational doctrines about the supernatural, the existence of God, immortality, and their relation to a good which one should seek for its own sake. (2) Religion must fulfill the whole human being, not just reason, but also human fancy, the power to discern higher realities in sensible images, the heart or moral sentiment, and sensibility. Such a unification of the whole man with reason should be a common, public realization, woven into business and public actions, and not confined to the private life. (3) Religion must answer to all the needs of life and the public affairs of the state.

In short, Hegel thought in his early period that unity and wholeness can be achieved exclusively by religion, as he redefines it.

1.3.2 Berne and Frankfurt Period (1793 – 1801)

“Where and how can we find such religion?” became the main question in Hegel’s mind in his Berne and Frankfurt period, when he wrote two manuscripts: *The Positivity of the Christian Religion* and *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*. Can the institutional Christian religion, particularly in its Catholic variant, fulfill these requirements? According to Taylor’s interpretation of Hegel, the answer is negative

(1975, 56-75). Religion that is grounded on authority and a system of religious propositions, and not on human autonomy and wholeness, is far from the religion which would penetrate people's heart; this seems to be Hegel's position. What about the original, pure Christianity, as embodied in Jesus' teaching in person? According to Taylor's interpretation, Hegel in his initial period saw Jesus' teaching as being very close to Kant's position. Against the Jewish moral tradition, Jesus did not base his teaching on some fulfillment of law, either external commandments, or abstract formulas. The principle of his Gospel was the will of God, which is not something external but touching "his living feeling of his own heart," as Taylor quotes Hegel's words from *Positivity of the Christian Religion* (1975, 56). Jesus' reason and heart are one, and his moral life is an integral expression of his humanity. What Jesus teaches and does, he feels at the same time in his own heart as God's will. There is no opposition between his reason and sensibility; his moral life is an integral expression of his humanity, and not a fulfillment of abstract and dry formulas or commands.

Taylor concludes that the picture of Jesus that appears in these writings of Hegel is very *Kantian avant la lettre*, in that Jesus manages to put together the demands of Kantian ethics and expressivist ideals (1975, 56). Later on, Hegel will not be able to sustain this position because it is too limited. However, Hegel needs it in order to show the contrast between the original teaching of Jesus and later Christianity, understood as positive religion.

Christianity seems to be in Hegel's view far removed from Jesus' example and teaching because it is grounded on authority rather than being postulated on human reason. Christian religion becomes a system of religious propositions that is supposed to

have the force of truth; believers cannot refuse to subject themselves to this system. Such a situation is due to the fact that people, including Jesus' disciples, are incapable of living the full unity of reason and heart as Jesus did. Instead of recovering God's will in their own hearts as Jesus did, they create a new *positive* religion based on authority. Such a religion does not foster human autonomous integrity and the wholeness of life, but the sense of separation and inadequacy. Whoever grasps the original teaching of Jesus can see that Christianity as such suggests a *failed* religion. Jesus had to die, so little was the world prepared to receive his message. His teaching was supposed to heal the division between man's spiritual vocation and his life in nature, creating a new world of integrated unity. Instead of healing and integrating the differences, Christianity deepened the rift.

Such a descriptive conclusion raises new problems for Hegel, Taylor concludes. If religion cannot fulfill all the needs of man's life and help him to attain autonomy and wholeness, how can it fulfill the public affairs of the state (the third requirement)? In this tension between the personal and social dimension of religion, Hegel sees the origin of the "unhappy Consciousness," what will later become the leading concept of his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. According to Hegel's manuscript *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, this concept has its origin in Abraham, who lost his original unity with nature and with his tribe. Nature became for him a neutral matter that could not unite with the human spirit but had to be dominated by his spirit. Nature was not any longer a sacred spiritual order in relation to which man defines himself, but a raw material shaped by human will. Domination and servitude replace unity and mutuality between man and nature, nature and spirit, man and man. Human consciousness then cannot but be unhappy.

Taylor reads Hegel in his interpretation of Abraham as projecting one of the central concepts of modern consciousness back onto the father of the Jewish faith, the concept of objectification, the disenchantment with nature (1975, 58). The full domination of nature was by Abraham attributed not to man but to God, who is a pure spirit, in which takes place the perfect unity of nature and spirit. Man can have part in this pure unity over against nature only by cleaving to God. But to give oneself to God and to submit oneself to his will means becoming his slave. The subordination to God gives him the possibility of dominating dead nature, of which he himself is inescapably part. Hence, man has to choose between two servitudes: servitude to dead things or to the living God. What God promised Israel was not expressive unity with nature, but rather that nature would be at its disposal, serving its needs. Jesus tried to restore the lost unity and replace the law with the voice of the heart, that affinity of spirit with nature which emerges in love. But people, including Jesus' disciples, were not able to hear his message and recreate the desired unity.

In writing *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, Hegel takes a critical distance from Kant's position, defended in his previous manuscript *The Positivity of the Christian Religion*. As we saw in that manuscript, Hegel took Kant literally, as one who resolved the unity of reason and heart by claiming that human inclinations have nothing to do with morality. He identified the true self with reason which gives laws to man and makes him free from inclinations, sentiments, and misleading desires. In *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, Hegel does not accept any longer this vision of human inclinations, because they stay in relation with the good, which transcends and fulfills the law. As a solution,

Hegel introduces an *ad hominem* twist of argument, where he talks about the expressivist view of man. Human inclinations, especially love, are expressions of life itself, which is called to unify the opposing elements in existence and to restore the unity of man within himself, with other men, and with nature. The self has to express itself in the unfolding of reason and inclinations alike. If this does not happen, human inclinations are cut off from daily situations, human relations, and feelings; what controls them are rigid and abstract rational regulations. This happened with Abraham, who was the first one who wanted to control nature. Kant took the same path. Taylor summarizes Hegel's new position: "The Kantian moral man is the successor of Abraham who has interiorized his jealous law-giving God and called him 'reason'" (1975, 61). No wonder that Hegel sees Kant as the most evident example of the rational approach to nature, which has to be overcome.

The problem of human transgression of laws, either those external to people or those internal to human hearts, remains open. In the case of transgression of external laws punishment follows, which presents a form of division in man and between men. In the case of transgression of internal laws, we talk about bad conscience as the result of transgression. In both cases, the division remains. In order to resolve this problem of division and to restore man's original relation to God, Hegel refers to Greek drama and to its notion of *fate*, which might explain the unpredictable in human life. What befalls us in history, or what happens to us from outside of our power and control, should be seen as the consequence of our own trespasses against life. So Taylor interprets Hegel's notion of fate (1975, 61): any kind of trespass against life and different kinds of divisions of the whole (within man, between men, or between man and nature), are nothing else but destruction of life, which turns into an enemy who punishes us. This was the fate of the

Jewish people, and it is our fate as well. Nevertheless, the injured human life is not an end in itself. Divisions, separations, destructions, punishments should be seen as occasions for reconciliation with people, nature, and ourselves. Reconciliation, therefore, becomes a restorative act of unity, oneness of life, overcoming of divisions. Fate is, yes, a punishment, but unlike the punishment from law, it leads us toward a greater unity. Hence we can be reconciled to it and can come to see it as one with us. This is the point at which Taylor sees Hegel combining the Greeks idea of fate with Jesus' teaching of love and Christian agape (1975, 62). Basically, the Greek notion of fate and Jesus' message tend to the same end: the full reconciliation with the whole. As fate leads us toward a greater unity, so Jesus' teaching about love heals wounds and overcomes divisions. Jesus' life discloses a life of full reconciliation with the whole.

But how can we explain Jesus' tragic end on the cross? Could he not escape his fate? The highest possible way to accept human fate presents the total sacrifice of one's own rights, including one's own life, and Jesus is an example *par excellence* of it. In order not to be divided from others, he sacrificed himself totally, dying on the cross. Such a path of Jesus' surrender fascinates Hegel so much that he calls it the *beauty of soul* (1975, 62). However, Jesus' sacrifice was not an ultimate goal but a strategic one: he accepted his suffering and death on the cross hoping that his life could be flourishing in the community after him. Unfortunately, the apostles were not able to sustain this new life among them. Instead of becoming independent as Jesus was, they remained dependent on the departed Christ. So Taylor synthesized Hegel's statement that Christianity becomes a failed religion.

At this point, Taylor describes some abiding characteristics of the Christian religion as Hegel understood it (1975, 63). First, it is essentially a private religion which renounces public expression. At its very origin, we have a distinction between the things of Caesar and the things of God. Second, this division of private and public is a manifestation of a deeper rift: the fullness of love cannot be lived integrally because Christians are still bound up with *this world*, including their family and property relationships. Therefore, a withdrawal from this world is necessary. However, instead of living in the same spirit and having the same life as Jesus did – he lived the reconciled life independently – Christians preferred to be dependent on the suffering and risen Jesus, whom they saw as an authority and a continuing source of their positive religion. Positivity is the third characteristic of the Christian religion as Hegel understood it.

In short, Christianity seems in Hegel's writing a failure, far from the fullness of life and originality of Jesus' teaching. Jesus had to die, so little was the world prepared to receive his message. After Jesus' death, Christians were still not able to receive his message of freedom, reconciliation, and unity – they put in the center of their worship the Crucified one (1975, 57).

In addition to that, the Christian religion presents in Hegel's view an even more profoundly unhappy consciousness than the Jewish religion does because Christians are called to renounce this world through mortification. Their eventual enjoyment of this world is accompanied with a perpetually bad conscience. It is true that their conceptions of nature and human relations remain as objectified as they are in the Jewish tradition; nonetheless, there is a huge difference between the Jewish and Christian tradition. In the Jewish tradition, there is nothing wrong in enjoying the nature: it is an expression of

obedience to God. For Christians, the enjoyment of this world presents an additional source of their concern.

Although Christianity seems in Hegel's eyes a failure, incompatible with Greek unity and Kantian moral freedom, Hegel does not give up his search for an entirely new kind of synthesis. The apparent lack of success is a necessary state on the way to something better. So Taylor concludes:

The need for an entirely new kind of synthesis grows with the insight that this separation of spirit from life is not a gratuitous falling off from the human norm. There is a certain necessity, or at least inevitability about it (1975, 64).

Here Taylor quietly anticipates Hegel's idea of history. The failure of Christianity, the division between Judaism and Christianity, the decline of pagan religions before Christianity, and the objectification of nature had to happen because these are essential steps on the way to a full realization of man. All separations, conflicts, divisions, and failures are necessary steps toward a new synthesis which man will extend beyond the bounds of the Greek polis and incorporate into the modern spirit of individual freedom. Hegel's goal was a new synthesis of Greek unity with the freedom of autonomous spirit, as the Enlightenment presented it. Taylor is very explicit at this point of his interpretation.

He [Hegel] tried to deepen his vision of a restored society which would combine the expressive unity of the Greeks with the freedom of Enlightenment rationality in the context of a purified Christianity (1975, 65).

Let me stress again that Taylor's primary intention is not the recovery of Hegel's new synthesis. All in all, Taylor wants primarily to expose the aspirations underlying Hegel's writing. Initially, these focused on the idea of restoring Christianity, in which the

individual's expressiveness and moral autonomy would merge together. Later on, Hegel distanced himself from the religion of Jesus because it was too private and incompatible with public life. At the same time, he distanced himself from the restoration of Greek unity because of its incompatibility with the modern spirit of individual freedom. Now it remains for us to see where his aspiration and enthusiasm for a new synthesis led Hegel in his late period.

1.3.3 Hegel's late Period (1801 – 1831)

Reconciliation of the oppositions between Kantian radical autonomy based on reason and the demands of expressive unity or wholeness continues to remain Hegel's concern during his late period. To complete the picture of Hegel's concern, Taylor adds Hegel's enthusiasm for the Greeks, the vogue of Kant, the heady hopes of 1789, the influence of Spinoza and the yearning for a restored Christianity. How Hegel finds his own way through these stages – what makes him still worth studying – is what Taylor reformulates into a primary question of his and my research (1975, 67-75).

As the university teacher of philosophy in Jena and under the influence of Schelling, Hegel reformulates his solution and develops a series of shifts in his philosophical statements. The first one is the annulment of division, where one part does not abolish or raise the opposite part, but where both separation and identity have their own rights, i.e. both sides move toward unity. Every part of physical nature, and every event of human history has its place in the development of the human spirit en route to a higher reconciliation. Following this line, human history is nothing else than a tragic confrontation of different positions, which leads towards a higher union. History is a

necessary unfolding of a purpose from within. In the final synthesis, there will be room for separation as well as for unity. History will become a circle, or rather a spiral, in which unity gives way to division, and where division is transcended on a higher level. This is the way in which Hegel describes, in the manuscript *System Fragment*, life as reconciliation of union and non-union.

In his earlier *Spirit of Christianity*, Hegel claimed that it is love that unifies any kind of division and its oppositions made by *Understanding* (in German: *Verstand*). Understanding had the function of abstracting ideas from experiences, analyzing them and creating the categories of division and opposition. Understanding as such does not have the power to keep these different elements together as a whole; consequently, something else is needed to keep together the opposites, and this must be love, as Hegel claims in his middle period.

Once in Jena, Hegel switches his position from understanding and love to *Reason* (in German: *Vernunft*). It is philosophy, the language of reason, which will have the function of adequately expressing the sought-for unity and synthesis. What understanding separates and opposes, Reason will unify and combine into a new synthesis. The new synthesis is not just a return to the original, undifferentiated unity, but is a unity of opposition of freedom and integral expression. This is the second shift in Hegel's position, the shift from love to Reason and to philosophy as the crucial medium of this union.

The third shift that takes place in Hegel's writing is the shift from man to spirit. During his Tübingen period, Hegel was very close to Kant's position and his postulates of practical reason, including the postulate of God's existence. As we already mentioned

in Kant's philosophy, in the power of his reason, man can restore his unity with nature and within himself. He can create his autonomy out of himself and not in conformity to a larger order outside. Later on under Schelling's influence, Hegel abandoned Kant's position centered on man and the notion of a personal transcendent God, and shifted to the notion of spirit, who is not set on the other side and in opposition to man and the world, as the God of theism must be. This spirit will become an absolute, known as *Geist*. Man as a spiritual being will become the indispensable vehicle of this *Geist*. Nevertheless, *Geist* will not be reduced to man and will not be identified with the human spirit, since *Geist* is also the spiritual reality underlying the universe as a whole. As a spiritual being, *Geist* has its own purposes and ends, which cannot be attributed to finite spirits *qua* finite, but which the finite spirits on the contrary have to serve. Following this vision, human spiritual activity will have to emerge into a larger scheme.

In short, Hegel rejects Kant's notion of man as self-centered and autonomous, a condition in which the law or the inspiration of love is drawn out from him. Man as a spiritual being must be reunited with the whole, and this union will regain contact with the cosmic spirit. Such a union will be the place where man-centered autonomy and expressive unity with nature will come together on a higher level, Taylor says, following Hegel's theory (1975, 72).

The fourth and last shift in Hegel's interpretation refers to transformation and a new meaning of history. The shift from man-centered conception to a higher level of synthesis includes not only the transformation of humans, but also the transformation of institutions – political, social, and religious – where men can realize their desired ends. This transformation goes beyond the individual's understanding and planning, because

his consciousness is too weak to grasp its complexity. Men do not fully understand the part they are playing until the changes occur. The process of transformation finds its explanation only in view of a greater subject than man, i.e. *Geist*. Because *Geist* follows its greater purposes, man can understand history only retrospectively. Hegel describes this in a picturesque way in the famous phrase from the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*: “The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk” (1975, 74).

These four shifts (the acceptance of separation as part of the ultimate unity, the shift to philosophy, the shift from man-centered theory to one centered on Geist, and the notion that man’s realization might be recognized only *post hoc*) are in Taylor’s interpretation internally connected and most probably motivated by the political events of the time in France. Many German intellectuals anxiously waited for the transformation of German society. Hegel and many others hoped that Napoleon would be the one who would bring forth the solution, which was not to be the case. Howsoever, the historical events were apparently deeply influencing, inspiring, and conditioning Hegel’s reflection in his hope to elaborate a new unity with nature, other men, and himself.

Let me recapitulate Taylor’s interpretation of Hegel’s understanding of unity with the following subchapters.

Against Dualism with a New Notion of the Subject

The major task of philosophy for Hegel in his late period is how to overcome a series of oppositions, which Taylor summarizes as (1975, 76-79): the separation between man’s self-consciousness, his knowing mind, on the one side, and the world on the other

side; the gap between man's rational will and freedom against human desires, inclinations, and affinities; the distinction between the individual and his tribe or community, where the growing sense of individuality leads toward a conflict of interests. Man's increasing self-consciousness and perception of freedom mean also separation from a larger framework or a meaningful order, considered as the limitation of human action. This last separation can be seen as separation between man as the finite spirit on the one hand, and on the other hand, the cosmic, infinite spirit underlying all nature. The opposition between the finite and infinite spirit reflects also the opposition between the free man's need to affirm himself and the recognition of the rule of fate. There is also an opposition between the demand for autonomy and self-dependence by the rational agent and the demand for union with the cosmic spirit, without which rational agents remain merely fragmentary beings.

How can these antitheses be reconciled? The solution is not an undoing of opposites, or a return to a primitive unity. Hegel resolves the problem with the introduction of dialectical thinking where behind every opposition lies an intimate relation that is connecting the opposing parts in unity on a higher level. One part is not just related to *an* other, but to *its* other. As Taylor describes it,

That is why Hegel holds that the ordinary viewpoint of identity has to be abandoned in philosophy in favour of a way of thinking which can be called dialectical in that it presents us with something which cannot be grasped in a single proposition or series of propositions, which does not violate the principle of non-contradiction: $-(p \cdot -p)$. The minimum cluster which can really do justice to reality is three propositions, that A is A, that A is also $-A$; and that $-A$ shows itself to be after all A (1979, 15).

Since such a union of oppositions finds its place only in the cosmic spirit, *Geist*, the basic model of understanding properly this notion is the subject. Taylor stresses that

Hegel's notion of subject is a very important one, because with this notion, Hegel breaks with the dualism that had become dominant in philosophy with Descartes and his successors (1975, 80). Hegel builds his notion of subject on Herder's interpretation, which includes the Aristotelian conception of the relation of matter and form, which I already discussed in the section on Herder. It means, therefore, that Hegel accepts Herder's expressivism, and with it objects to Cartesian dualism or other similar explanations that see the subject as an immaterial centre of consciousness, including the functions of thought, perception, and understanding, that are opposed to or controlled by the material world. Taylor asserts that by so doing, Hegel elaborates his theory of subject as the theory of self-realization.

Again, dualism cannot provide us a solution because there is no place in it for the human will and its exigencies, so crucial to modern thought. Human will as modern thought understands it, is an element foreign to the Greek thought and way of reflecting. Human will became important and relevant within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in which everyone is invited to establish a personal relationship with God and, consequently, with other people. In the modern idea of the self-defining subject, the human will becomes strongly tied to the forms in which man expresses himself, his consciousness, and his way of seeing or perceiving things around him. These forms are not just a medium wherein we express our thought; they are expressing our way of being. Therefore, Taylor repeats with Hegel that the expressive theory of man "gives us a view of thinking beings in which thought is inseparable from its medium" (1975, 82). No wonder that our words and human language in general become so important; they express or embody a certain kind of self-consciousness.

In short, Hegel's theory of the self-defining subject is radically anti-dualistic because it is based on the idea that the subject, however spiritual, is inescapably embodied. Behind Hegel's rejection of any kind of dualism and dichotomy (body-soul, spirit-nature, as well as any kind of disembodied spiritual reality), Taylor perceives a powerful thrust of the expressivist theory and one of the basic principles for the right understanding of Hegel's philosophy (1975, 24). In his later reflection and writings, Taylor will abundantly adopt these Hegelian principles.

Embodiment, Hierarchical Structure, and Ethical Life

I mentioned previously that Hegel's notion of the self-defining subject is based on Herder's theory of expression, which includes Aristotelian hylomorphism, i.e. the notion that the matter and form are inseparably united. This means that the human soul is inseparable from the human body. Human life in this case refers to the union of matter and form, i.e. union or embodiment of the human soul and body. We mentioned already that Hegel, following Herder, stresses very much the link between human life and expressions. Human activities are expressions of human life. In the act of expression, we express ourselves, our states and desires, our life itself. The acts of expression are necessary conditions for our self-realization. Therefore, it follows that our thoughts cannot exist without language, art, gesture or other external media of expression. Human thoughts, reflections, and deliberations cannot be reduced to a disembodied mind; they are inseparably linked with the embodied existence of human life.

Hegel combines the notion of embodiment together with the expressivist theory of the subject. When these two notions are put together, they define the mode of life which

expresses what I am as a man, or more properly from the expressivist point of view, what I am as *this* man, a member of *this* community. In this way, Taylor summarizes Hegel's explanation (1979, 23). Saying this, Hegel paves the way to his understanding of human life as unity where every feeling, desire, instinct, bodily structure can remain as it is; every part is important and necessary, and keeps its identity in relation to other parts and to the whole human being. With such a notion of subject, Hegel rejects Kant's moral philosophy with its formal moral criteria for defining right actions. In order to attain freedom and universality, the human mind should not strip itself of all particularities, like certain desires, traditional principles, external authorities, or other determinations of the subject, as Kant suggested. These particularities are in Hegel's view crucial for any right understanding of the embodied subject.

Taylor sees that in Hegel's vision, every singular part of human life and nature is relevant (1979, 79-82). There are different grades of beings in the universe, and all of these levels are linked together in a hierarchy, where the higher grades of beings are what they are only in relation to the lower level of beings, and vice versa. Every specific form, identity, life, beings in general, has to be linked and united together with its negation, i.e. with its antithesis, and inserted into a hierarchy of beings and into the whole of the universe.

The task of the human mind is to discover the links between these parts to the cosmic reason, and discern how different aspects of human lives as particular forms reflect the truly concrete universe. Consequently this means that every state, or society, or family, or individual life, or a particular event in our life, is nothing else than a simple, different and unique expression of a larger life, that of the *Geist*, or Reason. Each of these

expressions is original, and has its place in a larger universe. Therefore, the moral life cannot be reduced to pure and abstract rational principles, or categorical imperatives, without taking into consideration the time, place, circumstances, and historical background of a particular moral action. Thus we can understand better Hegel's resistance to Kantian validation of moral principles through universalization. Hegel prefers insertion, the embodiment of every action into a larger system, where every action remains in relation to the Reason, *Geist* itself. Every individual as a thinking intelligence is called to participate actively in the larger system, where he can find his irreplaceable role. The scope of philosophy is to articulate the connections between singular parts. Being aware of these connections, i.e. being inserted into a larger order, we can find the place where human reason can reach its desired freedom. In Taylor's words:

The demands of reason are thus that men live in a state articulated according to the Concept, and that they relate to it not just as individuals whose interests are served by this collectively established machinery, but more essentially as participants in a larger life. And this larger life deserves their ultimate allegiance because it is the expression of the very foundation of things, the Concept (1979, 80).

In this way, Hegel introduces the notion of a cosmic order, in which every part of the cosmos finds its own place. His cosmic and social order does not resemble those previous to his time, including monarchy, aristocracy, priestly hierarchy, or similar constitutions, where the organization of things reflects the will of God or the order beyond man which he must simply accept as it is. Hegel's order flows from human nature properly understood, i.e. from the modern self-defining subject and from the radical notion of human autonomy (1979, 81). Consequently it means that all men have to be treated alike as rational subjects, whom the modern state must respect by recognizing the rights of the autonomous person to hold property, to follow his conscience, to be free to

choose a career, to worship, and to practice freedom – all these are reflections of the larger universal order. With this vision, Hegel rejects the objectified or material vision of the universe as lifeless, allowing us to understand only a mechanical relationship within itself and with the subject. At the same time, Hegel with his new vision resists the Romantic theorists, who were unable to include human reason in the process of unification and integration, and who preferred to emphasize human feelings, enthusiasm, and heart at the expense of reason.

The subject as Hegel understands him, therefore, is characterized by his embodiment in life. This includes all of his functions, inclinations, desires, his being spontaneous and natural, inserted into a concrete time and place. Simultaneously the subject is characterized teleologically, tending towards the perfection of his consciousness, reason, and freedom. Taylor expands this view to include the subject's growth and development of a higher mode of expression, to work against the stream of inclinations and impulses toward self-realization, to move from an unconscious form of life to higher cultural forms (1975, 85-87).

These two levels of the subject's existence (embodiment and search for a more perfect life) are in conflict and constant confrontation, wherein the embodied subject must struggle in order to realize the perfection of his consciousness and to overcome the natural inclinations of his life. The reconciliation of those two levels results in the recovery of unity, which comes into reality in a higher unity, where the prime matter is made over and becomes a cultivated form. On this higher level, reason ceases to identify itself as a higher self-containing subject in opposition to nature, but sees itself as a part of the rational plan underlying the whole. From here, reason moves to a still higher

cultural form, in which our individual and collective life interact with our surroundings, and where we see ourselves as a part of a larger rational plan, which is much more inclusive than one of singular individuals. In the next step, we move to a still higher mode of consciousness, in which we see a still larger plan of the previous one, and we identify with it. The conscious subjectivity presents the highest level of living beings in the hierarchy. All the lower levels depend on the higher ones and each of these levels is a necessity and requirement of the cosmic spirit, which must be embodied and expressed in space and time (1979, 28).

Similar to this hierarchy, there is also a hierarchy of modes of thought and modes of human expression, wherein the higher level of thoughts and expressions makes possible a more exact, lucid, and coherent thought than the lower one. In the process of education, or in the process of any other alteration of the human mind, man's rational consciousness grows and alters modes of expression of the self-consciousness, i.e. in language, art, religion, and philosophy. The process of alteration takes place in time and only after much struggle and effort, through which the internal divisions and transformations shape specific forms of rational consciousness.

From such a vision Taylor in his interpretation of Hegel derives consequences for both individuals and society: every individual has moral obligations to the community of which he is part. Individual and community are tightly connected. This is the point at which Taylor refers to a very important concept of Hegel's philosophy, which will later on become one of the key concepts in Taylor's philosophical project (1975, 376-378).

To describe the obligations of the individual to society, Hegel uses the term *Sittlichkeit*, which might be translated in English as *ethical life*, *objective ethics*, or as

concrete ethics. Taylor disagrees with these translations because the word as such has in Hegel's philosophy a very specific meaning. So he suggests using it in its original version: *Sittlichkeit* in German means *ethics*. This term refers us to *customs* (in German: *Sitten*), that exist in a certain society and distinguish this particular society from another society. Customs are institutions, norms and practices of society; they act as a kind of language, in which that particular society expresses its fundamental ideas. Therefore, *Sittlichkeit* refers to moral obligations which the individual has to the community to which he belongs. These obligations are based on established norms and customs (*Sitten*) of that society. Every individual is supposed to respect and follow these norms, which are already there in existence. However, these norms, ends, practices and institutions of society are maintained only by continuous human activity in conformity to them; and yet they must in a sense already be active before this activity, for it is only the ongoing practice which defines what the norm or practice is. Taylor concludes that the crucial characteristic of *Sittlichkeit* is that it enjoins us to bring about what already is. It follows that ordinary social life offers the basis for the individual's *sittlich* obligations. Even more, these obligations represent a profound identification of the individual with his society and institutions. In short, the *sittlich* dimensions are the crucial factor in the ethical life of individuals (1975, 382).

From the other side it is also true that only when the individual is fulfilling these obligations that these obligations and norms are kept in being and existence. Without the actualization of customs and norms, they would not exist. However, the process of realizing customs and norms does not occur automatically. It might be that the goals, norms, or ends, which define the common practices or institutions, begin to seem to be

irrelevant, even unnatural, and consequently alienating. Hegel does not see any problem in that because the process of alienation leads toward the change of norms and practices.

In short, there is no disparity for Hegel between what ought to be and what is in reality: because they are one, there is no contrariety between *Sollen* and *Sein*. Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*, therefore, Taylor concludes, presents a strong critique of Kant's *Moralität*, where the individual has a moral obligation to realize something, which does not exist: i.e., an abstract, formal notion of a moral obligation, which obliges me not in virtue of being part of a larger community, but as an individual rational will (1975, 376).

In summary, Hegel's position presents a strong critique of Kant's morality. It does not make sense to talk about the moral life of individuals and their freedom outside of or apart from their society. For Hegel, every man is a part of a larger life in a society characterized by its *Sittlichkeit*. This is the only possible place where the individual can reach his realization and freedom. Thus, the community constitutes an *essence* and *final goal* for the individual, because the individual is what he is only by his belonging to a community.

This is a very important point in Taylor's interpretation of Hegel's philosophy because Hegel runs counter to the moral instinct of the liberalism of both his time and modern time as well (1975, 377). As we will see later, Taylor has been from the beginning of his philosophical investigation arguing against the modern liberal and utilitarian political philosophy, based on Kantian principles. The *final goal* of an individual or society cannot be based on universal moral obligations, as Kant thought. The final goal is not the state, understood as a utilitarian instrument helping the

individuals to reach their particular goals. The state and the individuals should not be taken as two separated units, and the individuals living in the state should not be serving an end separated from them. The identity of individuals is deeply connected to their life in community.

We can think that the individual is what he is in abstraction from his community only if we are thinking of him qua organism. But when we think of a human being, we do not simply mean a living organism, but a being who can think, feel, decide, be moved, respond, enter into relations with others; and all this implies a language, a related set of ways of experiencing the world, of interpreting his feelings, understanding his relation to others, to the past, the future, the absolute, and so on. It is the particular way he situates himself within this cultural world that we call his identity (1975, 380).

Saying this, Taylor claims together with Hegel that our highest and most complete moral existence is one that we can only attain to as members of a community. This is one of the points on which Taylor is building his entire philosophical project, as we will see in the following pages.

Necessity of God or Geist, and Finite Beings

What about God or *Geist*? Is there any place for God in Hegel's hierarchy and cosmic system? Taylor immediately clarifies this notion, which has in Hegel's writing a specific meaning, contrary to any traditional understanding.

Hegel's Spirit, or *Geist*, although he is often called 'God', and although Hegel claimed to be clarifying Christian theology, is not the God of traditional theism; he is not a God who could exist quite independently of men, even if men did not exist, as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob before the creation. On the contrary, he is a spirit who lives as spirit only through men (1979, 11).

Taylor additionally summarizes Hegel's position as follows (1979, 23-31). God and the universe are interconnected because the universe is the only place where God exists. God has to be embodied somewhere, and this occurs in the universe, which reveals the condition of God's existence. Therefore, the universe is the embodiment of the totality of the 'life-functions' of God. At the same time, the universe is something posited by God in order to manifest what God is. The universe is an expression of God. Taylor concludes consequently that we must see the universe as the condition of the existence of God, and also as being posited as such. God can be thought of as positing the conditions of his own existence. There is a perfect coincidence in the God of life and its expression, which is not the case with finite beings.

Continuing, Taylor describes the nature of this *Geist*, which is also the nature of the universe. *Geist* or subjectivity has to be understood teleologically, i.e. as realization of reason, freedom, and self-consciousness, or to put it more accurately, as realization of the rational self-awareness in freedom. This realization of *Geist* follows the same structure of realization that we saw earlier when we spoke about the realization of man. The rational self-awareness reaches its fullness only when the expression of this self-awareness is recognized as adequate to the self, and where no place for further change exists.

Now, if *Geist* as subject, or consciousness, is to come to rational self-awareness in freedom, it must be embodied somewhere in a concrete space and time. Therefore, the universe must contain finite spirits. But if consciousness is somewhere in a concrete place, then it cannot be somewhere else. Thus there must be a limit between itself and what is not itself, there must be a finite. It follows that the universe must contain finite

spirits, extended in space and time, where the *Geist* will take the place of its embodiment. However, *Geist* cannot be confined to the particular place and time of any one of the finite spirits. Therefore, *Geist* has to be living through all finite spirits of all places and times.

The existence of finite spirits is needed from the point of view of consciousness as well. Consciousness can exist only if there is an object of consciousness, which has to be finite and limited by other objects -- consciousness cannot embrace an infinite object. It follows that if the cosmic spirit is to attain a full awareness, it can do so only through the finite spirits who are conscious of the objects. So *Geist* must have in the finite spirits a vehicle of its own existence. Again, *Geist* cannot be confined to one particular place and time but has to be living through many finite spirits existing in different places. This is how we can explain *Geist's* nature of infinity.

Geist comes to self-awareness when it is recognized. The only ones who can recognize it are the finite spirits, i.e. people who are the vehicles of such awareness. To be the vehicle of *Geist* represents the most fundamental characteristic of human beings; this is their vocation.

I as a human being have the vocation of realizing a nature which is given: and even if I am called on to be original, to realize myself in the way uniquely suited to myself, nevertheless this scope for originality is itself given as an integral part of human nature, as are those unique features of me on which my originality builds. Freedom for man thus means the free realization of a vocation which is largely given (1979, 29).

This does not mean that all human beings have the same identical vocation. Neither are the self-awareness and self-expression of *Geist* identical among all men. We persons are supposed to realize our nature in freedom, which is given to us, and which is original in every one of us. Every one of us is called to express his own nature in his

original way. In this sense, freedom means the realization of our human vocation that is largely given to us individually and within our specific nature.

At this point, Taylor indicates the difference between the nature of humans and *Geist*. *Geist* is not like human beings whose nature is given; *Geist's* nature is not given, but is free in the radical sense of the word. Since there is nothing given in it, all is determined by *Geist* itself. *Geist* chooses its own nature and its embodiment in radical freedom from anything merely given. From here Taylor concludes that *Geist* is bound by its own rational necessity, the necessary structure of things, if *Geist* is to be.

For *Geist* as subjectivity is quintessentially reason. And reason is most fully realized when one follows in thought and action the line of rational, that is, conceptual, necessity (1975, 92).

In saying this, Taylor sees Hegel as denying that everything that exists and happens comes out of necessity: what exists and happens is a manifestation of necessity. Such a structure of the world cannot be but posited by *Geist* as the way of its thinking. This is a very important point in the major works of Hegel, where he shows us the relation between the finite and the infinite world. "He [Hegel] claims to know that when we examine the furniture of the world, we must see that it cannot be except as an emanation from *Geist*" (1975, 97). This point Taylor additionally explains through Hegel's dialectical argumentation.

Dialectical Argumentation

Following Taylor's interpretation of Hegel in the previous analysis, we claimed that the world as such cannot be except as an emanation from *Geist*. The things in the world cannot exist on their own, but only as a part of a greater or deeper reality on which

they depend, or of which they are a singular part or aspect. The existence of things on their own would mean contradiction itself. There is a constant tension, movement, a dialectical relationship, which keeps singular parts apart and together at the same time. This dialectic goes through different stages from unsatisfactory notions of what is self-subsistent to the only satisfactory conception, which is *Geist*. Such a movement from a lower stage to a higher stage is not a linear but a circular one, where two kinds of movements are completely interwoven: ascending and descending. Taylor does not devote many pages to this argumentation, but in a very systematic way he summarizes Hegel's dialectic (1979, 36-37), as follows.

The ascending dialectic starts with finite reality and ascends toward *Geist* as the final point. The existence of the finite reality cannot be except as posited by *Geist*, whose nature is to posit its own essential embodiment. Hence the ascending movement shows us that the finite reality is posited by a subject according to a necessary plan. From the other side, if cosmic subjectivity is to be, it lays down the conditions of its own existence and posits the structure of the finite things that we know. In this case we talk about the descending dialectic, which starts from *Geist* and descends toward the finite reality. Both dialectics together construct the perfect fulfillment of a plan, determined by rational necessity.

The ascending and descending dialectic is in Taylor's view one of the crucial points of Hegel's philosophy. The relation between two symmetrically joined dialectics is not a necessity of inference, where the second element necessarily follows from the first one. Hegel talks about ontological necessity, which is something different. We begin with the ascending movement, which presents the movement of discovery of the finite

existence. From the finite reality, we ascend to the *Geist*, which is there and posits its own embodiment back onto the finite reality. Therefore, the original starting point, finite reality, is in reality the secondary point. The real starting point is *Geist*, who posits finite reality. In this way, we can say that the circle is completed.

The outcome of the whole circle is that finite reality is shown to be not just contingently given, but to be there in fulfillment of a plan, whose articulations are determined by rational necessity (1979, 36).

Applying the same structure to *Geist* or God, we have a subject who has to be necessarily embodied, and whose embodiment is both the condition of his existence and the expression of what he is. According to such a view, Hegel's understanding of God cannot be a theistic one, where God is creator of the universe, existing as separated and independent from the universe. Such an explanation would violate his principle of embodiment. Hegel cannot consider God as creator, who freely creates the world, and at the same time, exists independently from his creation. When Hegel claims that the world was created by God, he means that the world necessarily exists so that *Geist* or God can be. God does not exist independently of the world. Both God and the world exist together as necessary and complementary elements of the same reality. However, it does not mean that God in Hegel's vision merges with the world, as the pantheists would say. Taylor explains that what distinguishes Hegel's position from pantheism in his own mind is the rational necessity which cannot exist without the world as the ensemble of finite things. Nonetheless, this rational necessity is superior to the world because it determines its structure according to its own exigencies (1979, 40). So Hegel does not attribute God's divinity to the finite reality, nor consider any part of the world as divine, which is a necessary condition for any pantheistic explanation. The notion of God, as Hegel

understands it, is a God who makes the conditions of his own existence eternal. “God is [] the subject of the rational necessity which manifests itself in the world” (1975, 102).

At this point, Hegel’s position is not sufficiently convincing to Taylor. There is something in Hegel’s philosophy irresistibly reminiscent of Baron Münchhausen, who after falling from his horse in a swamp, extricates himself by seizing his own hair and heaving himself back on his horse (1975, 101). Hegel’s reflection about God imitates the same way of thinking. Hegel’s God not only is, but also has to be. The conditions of his existence are dictated by this necessity. Taylor is skeptical of this conclusion, but rather than analyzing it, or criticizing it, he proposes simply that Hegel is neither a theist, nor an atheist, nor a pantheist. Hegel’s reflection is so complicated that it leads to different interpretation and opens the doors to a variety of heterodox views (1975, 102).

From our point of view, the development of the dialectical way of thinking in Hegel will remain in Taylor’s writing a very important point in his reflection about modern identity and new unity. Here let us simply mention the paper “Dialektik Heute, oder Strukturen der Selbstnegation”, in which Taylor favors dialectical thinking for a free modern society.⁵ In the third chapter, I explore this topic more extensively.

⁵ Eine dialektische Denkweise, die sich selbst als interpretative versteht, kann als unverzichtbar für eine freie Gesellschaft angesehen werden, wenn man darunter eine Gesellschaft versteht, in der Menschen ihre Institutionen kritisieren können und ihre Widersprüche in stetiger Debatte zu überwinden versuchen, einer Debatte, die unter immer weiteren Krisen mehr und mehr gleichberechtigter Teilnehmer stattfinden sollte. Dass unsere Denkweise dialektisch ist, ist für ihre zutiefst kritische Verfassung wesentlich; dass sie ihre interpretativen Grenzen akzeptiert, ist wesentlich für eine wirklich offenen Debatte (Charles Taylor, 1986, 153).

Reality as a Movement

To further clarify Hegel's position, Taylor compares the structure of the human subject with the structure of the absolute subject. Both of them contain some parallel elements. In both cases, subjects must go through a cycle, a drama, in which they suffer division and opposition in order to be able to return to unity. The human subject is in conflict with himself because he is separated from his essential goals. The solution of this conflict takes place in the shift to a higher perspective, from where the subject can see itself as the vehicle of *Geist*. Even the absolute subject is at odds with its goal. As we saw already, the absolute subject must be embodied in external, finite realities, even though its life is infinite and unbounded. The finite spirits become the vehicles which *Geist* as the absolute subject has to overcome in order to be itself.

Reconciliation of the human subject with the absolute subject becomes possible when both of them rise beyond the point of their opposition and see the other as the necessary element of their own completion. Referring to Hegel's *Preface to the Philosophy of the Spirit* (§ 20), Taylor concludes that the life of the absolute subject is essentially a process, a movement, an overcoming of the oppositions, the necessary steps for realizing its goal: self-knowledge (1975, 104). So *Geist* cannot simply exist; it can exist only by overcoming its opposites, by negating its own negations. Man can come to the absolute only through the process of overcoming the opposites. Once at the end of the process, the absolute becomes what it is in truth. In short, the absolute is life, movement, and change, and at the same time, itself and the same subject.⁶

⁶ Describing different stages of development, Hegel, and Taylor with him, uses the German terminology taken from Kant. This does not mean that Hegel adopts Kant's system as well. The reality that is still in germ, Hegel describes with the term "an sich", which means the implicit but yet undeveloped. For the fully developed form, Hegel uses Kant's term "für sich", i.e. the fully deployed form, exteriorized,

Having this kind of structure, the contradictions become the essential part of reality because they are the source of passages from one level to another. *Geist* needs obstacles for its realization as the fully self-conscious rationality. Therefore, conflicts as such should be considered ontologically. Taylor talks in terms of *ontological conflict*, the source of movement and change. Ontological conflict occurs when nothing can exist except in struggle, opposition, and developing itself out of its opposite. Such conflict is not a fatal one because despite the conflict and tension, it maintains the whole as *Geist*. *Identity* and *opposition* together make the whole. It would become fatal only if we had taken anyone of two parts by itself, as an independent existence, and not in relation to the whole (1979, 45). Within everything that exists, there is opposition and negativity, which needs to be resolved. In this view we can easily understand Taylor when he claims that *negativity* occurs as the crucial element of the conflict (1975, 110). This is particularly true for the subject, whose nature is to return to itself through its opposite. So it becomes obvious that conflicts, oppositions, and negativity find their place in the whole structure, without surrendering it. They can stay together because everything is in movement and constant change.

This Hegelian logic of movement can be applied to any kind of historical forms, finite spirits, animals, things, given forms of civilization, historical events, and people, including their perishing mortality. Not only the existence of finite reality, but also its

which therefore lies, as it were “before itself.” Applying this terminology to the plant, when the plant is in germ is “an sich”, and then it becomes fully exteriorized, unfolded, “für sich.” Once at the second stage, the germ loses its self-identity and gets lost in external reality.

When we talk about the full Hegelian theory of reality as manifestation of rational necessity, we have three stages. The Idea, which is in its first stage the self-identity (an sich), must be exteriorized, unfolded, lost in external reality (für sich) (the second state). In returning to adequate self-knowledge, *Geist* realizes a kind of combination of the first two stages, he comes back to self-identity in the opposite of fully developed external reality (the third stage). Hegel calls this stage “anundfürsich” (1975, 111-112).

negation in terms of mortality is also necessary. Again, there is no contradiction in them if we see them in relation to the whole.

Such a notion of reality allows Hegel to use a language in which he talks about things as a chain of necessary connections, in which the whole is necessarily embodied. Consequently, the external material reality becomes extremely important and necessary: it not only exists but has to exist necessarily. At first glance, this is somehow paradoxical if we assume that Hegel is talking in terms of *absolute idealism*. Taylor clarifies this term by saying that Hegel's absolute idealism is far from being a denial of external material reality, as many idealists think to be the case. Hegel claims just the opposite: *idealism* is the strongest affirmation of materialism. In Taylor's words:

Absolute idealism means that nothing exists which is not a manifestation of the Idea, that is, of rational necessity. Everything exists for a purpose, that of the coming to be of rational self-consciousness, and this requires that all that exists be the manifestation of rational necessity. Thus absolute idealism is related to the Platonic notion of the ontological priority of rational order, which underlines external existence, and which external existence strives to realize, rather than to the modern post-Cartesian notion of dependence on knowing mind (1975, 110).

The point is that whatever exists is the manifestation of the Idea. So we should not stop at the material existence as such, but always look behind it toward the non-material reality, the Idea, which enjoys the ontological priority and provides the basis of the whole.

As said previously, Hegel conceives reality not as something static, but in terms of movement, opposition, and negation. In Taylor's view, Hegel's ontological vision remains relevant and interesting for us moderns (1979, 69). It does not mean that Taylor wants to reintroduce Hegel's ontology of *Geist*, which seems incredible to Taylor. What Taylor wants to emphasize is Hegel's ontological vision that includes separation,

negation, movement, process, and both ideal and material reality. Hegel's ontological vision allows him to resolve the problem of unity, i.e. a combination of two aspirations, the aspiration to radical autonomy with the aspiration to expressive unity with nature and within society. This solution of Hegel's will become the source of inspiration for Taylor's reflection.

Before we finish this development, let us add one more point taken from Taylor's analysis: the importance of Hegel's philosophy of history and politics. Both of them are grounded in his ontological vision. Previously, we mentioned that the final goal of everything is the self-comprehension of the Spirit or Reason, and that man is the adequate vehicle of the Spirit. The full realization of an absolute spirit presupposes a certain development of man with all his needs and drives, which are embodied in concrete times and different spaces. Thus, the transformation of man's life in history is something obvious and necessary, because this is the way *Geist* can return to itself. "Spirit can only return to itself through the transformation of man's form of life in history" (1979, 73).

What are these forms of life in history through which man can be an adequate vehicle of Spirit? Taylor, following Hegel's writing, talks about a social form, or a vision of man as part of a larger life (1979, 73). This larger life is first of all the state, i.e. the real expression of that universal life which is the necessary embodiment for the vision of the *Absolute*. Man has to conceive himself as being part of a larger universal life and as being fully integrated into this life. Man as a vehicle of *Geist*, whose goal is to bring to realization the fulfillment of *Geist*, has to see himself within the state and placed in history. Of course, not all forms of the state are equally adequate. The fully adequate

form is the one in which *Geist* can return to itself, and this is the fully rational state. In short, talking about history and politics, we deal again with a movement or a development made out of the process of constant change of social forms through time and in different places. For this reason, Hegel's comprehension of history and politics remains relevant in Taylor's reflection because it offers the coordinates within which Hegel elaborates the union of two aspirations, those which bring us closer to the question of human freedom.

Hegel Overcomes the Oppositions with a New System

Keeping in mind the main lines of Hegel's philosophy, we can return to a major concern of Taylor's interpretation of Hegel's philosophy, i.e. the motivation behind Hegel's reconciliation of the finite with the infinite. As we have already seen in our reading of Taylor, Hegel claims that the true infinite is not simply opposed to the finite but is in reality one with it; true *Geist* is not simply opposed to an external being but is one with it (1975, 114). Thus, the infinite is not separate from or beyond the finite, but includes the finite. This means that the infinite and the universe are not limited from the outside, and yet they are not simply without limit. The whole of reality has a definite structure in which each part has its necessary place, i.e. within boundaries. At the same time, the whole is not bounded from the outside because there is no outside.

As the proper image of such a universe and infinity, Taylor proposes in his interpretation of Hegel not a straight line definitively prolonged but a circle (1975, 115). Reality consists of a circle, which presents itself in its true form as the result of a process of development. This process is itself seen as posited by what results from it. Therefore, it

is written in the same nature of reality that an affirmation and its contradiction, i.e. the negation of the same affirmation, are true as well. If we take reality as a circle, Taylor says, we can present the truth about the absolute in a system, in which both affirmation and negation not only fit together but are also necessary to each other. Therefore, even science must be taken as a circle which embodies and gives an adequate account of different levels of being linked in the whole.

To describe this type of thinking which underlies the new form of science, Hegel refers again to Kant and borrows his terminology, but changes its meaning. With *reason* (Vernunft), Hegel describes the way of thinking which follows reality in its contradictions. So each level of reality turns into the next one. In contrast to it, we have *understanding* (Verstand), which is the habit common to most people and holds fast to the principle of identity (everything is what it is and not another thing). It is obvious why Verstand in itself cannot encompass the philosophy as Hegel understands it; it is rigid and fixed in its manner of discourse (1975, 116).

With this terminology and way of thinking, Taylor finds new hope of overcoming the oppositions and dualism between men and nature, individuals and community, finite and infinite spirit, human freedom and fate, which is Hegel's primary concern (1979, 47). All these oppositions are seen as the necessary expressions of thought, or rational necessity. We as human beings become the necessary elements, the vehicles of this thought, and the point where the thought becomes conscious. Consequently, the price of overcoming the opposition is not in abandoning our free rationality, but in our engaging of rationality into the whole process. Following Taylor's interpretation of Hegel, with such a vision Hegel believed himself to have resolved the dilemma of the Romantic

generations who were not able to do that because they could not solve the problem of human autonomy confronted with a larger order. They held to the vision of an infinite free creative subject, but at the cost of exile in a God-forsaken world; or they sought a unity with the divine beyond reason, where human autonomy has to be abandoned in favor of a larger order.

Taylor summarizes Hegel's solution in two points (1979, 48-50). (1) The unity of man and world, of finite and infinite subject, does not abolish the differences. The ultimate unity retains the differences within it. We remain finite subjects over against the world and God, men with all the particularities of our time, place, and circumstances, even though we see these particularities as part of a larger plan. (2) The Absolute must be understood in concepts and not in feelings and intuition. Man cannot abandon the power of understanding, by which he analyzes his world, sees himself as separate from nature, and names the distinction between things. With the same power man turns against nature within, curbs instinct within, and treats the things around him as instruments to be bent to his purposes. All this is possible in the ontological vision that these oppositions proceed from and return to identity.

Taylor additionally specifies Hegel's vision of reality with two key Hegelian terms: (1) *Aufhebung*, which in German means both *abolition* on a lower level and *preservation* on a higher level; (2) *Versöhnung*, i.e., *reconciliation*, where two terms remain what they are, but their opposition is overcome. With this terminology Hegel overcomes the opposition between the ultimate identity of God's self-knowledge with man's knowledge of the universe, or simply the opposition between a finite and an infinite spirit. The idea of God as necessarily hidden and unknowable is overcome. In this

framework, art, religion, and philosophy occupy a very important place because they refer us to the sought-for union in a very specific way. In addition to that, man does not live anymore in a *sacralized* world. His unity and communion with nature are not sacred as they were before, but something ordinary, which acts as an essential condition towards freedom.

Keeping this in mind, Taylor asserts that Hegel believed he had resolved the deepest concerns of his time, i.e. how to overcome the dualism between finite and infinite, and how to answer the aspiration of uniting the greatest rational autonomy with the fullest unity with nature. In Taylor's view, this represents an immense contribution and change in the philosophical reflection in the 19th century. No wonder that Taylor reads Hegel's argumentation so closely. But in the end, Taylor distances himself from Hegel and rejects his conclusions as unacceptable for our time because we cannot share Hegel's ontological view and his conception of the world. Modern man cannot recognize himself within the structures of a rational state, or the structures which embodied the Ideal. Nonetheless, Hegel's question about how to overcome dualism remains our question in modernity as well.

Hegel's Demonstrations of the Validity of his Synthesis

Following his presentation of Hegel's writings, Taylor came to the point where a presentation of Hegel's synthesis was not sufficient; having a system which claims to reconcile the major oppositions has to be also proved and demonstrated. Demonstration should start by our ordinary understanding of things, show us that this understanding is untenable, and bring us to Hegel's vision of things. Without giving many details and

references to Hegel's books, Taylor claims that there are three different ways by which Hegel demonstrates, supports, and validates his position (1979, 53-55).

Taylor illustrates the first demonstration by showing how Hegel starts with the hierarchy of beings. We already mentioned that this hierarchy of beings has to be embodied in a concrete place and time, where the beings are connected systematically. At the basic level, we talk about matter extended in time and space, and linked to higher levels. Through the various stages of inanimate beings and various levels of life, we move higher in the hierarchy of beings until we come to *Geist*, which in turn shows us a development in human history. The hierarchy of beings manifests the formula of rational necessity in which each level has its place, and where a lower level links necessarily to a higher level, and finally ends with *Geist*. Very generally Taylor states that Hegel follows this pattern of demonstration in his books *Encyclopaedia*, and *Philosophy of Right*, as well as in his writings about history, religion, and aesthetics.

In the demonstration, Hegel – and Taylor with him – takes the entire chain of beings as a manifestation of a chain of rational necessity. Instead of studying various levels of reality (first demonstration), Hegel proposes to study the categories in which we think about the world. So he starts with the poorest, most empty category, with *being*, shows its internal contradiction, passes on to other categories, keeps moving to higher and higher levels, until he come to the Idea, which shows us that all these categories are necessarily embodied in external reality first (Philosophy of Nature) and finally in Spirit. Therefore, it does not make sense to study each one of the categories individually, because we would see them in contradiction. Each one of them always refers us to something beyond itself. The only category that can maintain itself without internal

contradiction is the Idea. This is the second demonstration, found in Hegel's *Logic*, and hence in the first part of the *Encyclopedia*.

Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* contains the third way of demonstration. In this book Hegel does not start from the forms of being (first demonstration) or from the categories of beings (second demonstration), but from the forms of consciousness. Taylor considers this the best demonstration of Hegel's system, because it takes us from where we are and brings us to the vision of the whole. First we start with the weakest and most elementary notion of what consciousness is. This cannot stand up by itself because it is replete with inner contradiction and must give way to another higher notion. But this one proves to be contradictory too as it refers us to a higher level again. From here, we are referred further until we come to the true understanding of consciousness as a self-knowing *Geist*, or absolute knowledge.

Taylor says explicitly that these demonstrations of Hegel's philosophy require deeper analysis and study, which he provides in his book *Hegel*. For our purpose, a detailed analysis of Hegel's demonstrations would lead us beyond the goal of the present work. Nonetheless, together with Taylor we have to say something about the nature of Hegel's demonstrations and the conception of his dialectic.

Taylor characterizes Hegel's dialectic not as a *method* or *approach* but as a *descriptive* demonstration (1979, 55). Hegel's aim is simply to follow the movement in the object of his study and to submerge his freedom as a philosopher into the content of his study, and let it be moved by its own nature. If the argument follows a dialectical movement, then this must inhere in the things themselves. At various occasions we saw that there is a dialectical movement in things, the whole reality is in movement, and

contradictions have ontological status. We saw as well that the whole furniture of the world is there in order to embody *Geist* and to manifest itself as the self-knowing spirit, self-thinking thought, pure rational necessity. The contradictions in finite things do not make sense if they are not seen as part of the embodiment of *Geist*. We have to see the finite things through the process in which things come to be and pass away. The movement as such expresses much more than the finite things in themselves. If this is the case, then all of the three *descriptive* ways of demonstrations as Taylor summarizes them find their explanation.

This argument is not an original contribution to Taylor's reflection. Taylor borrows it from Kenley Dove's interpretation of Hegel.⁷ In any case, it opens the question of validating Hegel's demonstrations. How can we justify Hegel's position? – becomes the next question of Taylor's analysis (1979, 56-58).

Whatever reality we consider, no matter how circumscribed and seemingly independent, will manifest the inner articulation necessary for contradiction, Taylor says of Hegel's claim. With the inner articulation, Hegel refers to what the thing concerned is aiming at or is meant to be, on the one hand, and what it effectively is on the other. If this is so, we have a clash between the effective existence and the goals or standards aimed at, which results in a contradiction. In general, the contradictions might be twofold: (1) if the purpose is unrealized in the thing as it is, then the existing reality has to be transformed in order to reach its fulfillment as in the case of the historical dialectic. (2) If the standard is already met in the thing, then the contradiction forces us to change our conception of the standards, purposes, or reality, in order to give a coherent account of its fulfillment

⁷ Kenley Dove, "Hegel's Phenomenological Method," *Review of Metaphysics*, 33, June 4, 1970.

(ontological dialectic). For example, if we reach a vision free of contradictions, then this vision does not correspond to the reality, and consequently, it challenges us to modify our reflection in such a way that we will see the contradictions in reality reconciled in a larger synthesis.

These two kinds of dialectical contradictions are in Taylor's vision of Hegel very closely related. Hegel's philosophy of history refers us to his ontology, and his ontology requires historical development (1979, 59). Despite this equality, the ontological contradictions and dialectics are more important than the contradictions in our categories and conceptions of reality. The contradiction of our categories can be overcome not with a vision free of contradictions but rather by seeing these contradictions in reality in which these contradictions are reconciled in a larger synthesis. Hegel does not see this as a onetime event, but as a process taking place through time and in different places where men conceive the basic purposes of mankind in various forms. Once they realize that they are dealing with inadequate conceptions and basic purposes, they start looking for better ones. Doing this does not mean that they have to have a complete vision of reality. It is enough that they go beyond their subjective understanding of their own goals and are open to a more adequate conception of reality. To sum up, two kinds of dialectics are closely related in Hegel's work; each one of them figures in the explanation of the other.

These proofs of validity of Hegel's dialectics and contradictions are not convincing in Taylor's eyes (1979, 66-68). The reason Taylor does not give his assent to the dialectical exposition is the fact that there is no reasonably undeniable starting point. If we want to talk about something, first we have to determine its nature. The determination of being is an indispensable concept. At this point Taylor expresses doubts

about Hegel's explanation. When Hegel determines being, he says that its determination includes also its own negation. From here, Hegel develops his dialectical reasoning, based on contradictions. If every determination includes also its own negation, then whatever meets the conditions of existence also meets those of its own demise. This kind of reasoning does not convince Taylor. Most probably, contemporary philosophers would not accept it either. Taylor says simply that it is not an irrefutable demonstration but an expression of what Hegel believes to be the case.

Keeping in mind Hegel's primary concern, i.e. an articulation of the challenging question of his time and a plausible answer to the question, Taylor passes to the next question: why should we study Hegel nowadays? Why is Hegel still relevant in our post-romantic time (1979, XI-XII)? From our point of view, we should ask ourselves a similar question in relation to Taylor: why should we study Taylor and his reflection on Hegel?

The most direct answer can be summarized as follows. It is good for us to study in a profound way our history and the philosophers who influenced our way of thinking. In this way we shape our own way of thinking and become able to reinforce our critical approach. Of course, it does not mean that we have to adopt the visions and solutions of our teachers as our solutions. Rather, we need to become aware of our presuppositions.

Doing this, we can take Taylor as a teacher and guide in our research. Taylor teaches us how to critically read Hegel or other thinkers who have influenced us. Through critical reading, we can elaborate a new and more adequate, i.e. deeper and more meaningful solution to our questions.

1.4 Why Does Taylor Think that Hegel is still Relevant to Us?

In his writing Taylor is not just analyzing Hegel's philosophical opus; he intends to expose and interpret Hegel in such a way that the German philosopher can help us both to understand better the philosophical challenges of our time and to find a satisfactory solution for them. Taylor remains very explicit about this point (1979, XI). As stated previously in the introduction to this chapter, Taylor maintains that Hegel is important because he provides us with the terminology by which we can reflect on our contemporary problems; Hegel's philosophy also shapes the meaning of these terms; Hegel forms concepts and modes of thought that are indispensable if we are to see our way through certain modern problems and dilemmas. In addition to this, Taylor continues:

Hegel is important today because we recurrently feel the need for a critique of the illusions and distortions of perspective which spring from the atomistic, utilitarian, instrumental conceptions of man and nature, while at the same time puncturing the Romantic counter-illusions they continually generate. It is because Hegel is constantly engaged in doing just this, and with an exceptional depth and penetration of insight, that he has something to say to us even though his own ontology of the necessary unfolding of reason may seem as illusory to us as some of the doctrines he attacks (1979, 72).

On various occasions Taylor claims that those of us living in modernity face different challenges than Hegel did in his time. Historical constructs of our time are not those of Hegel's time. Despite different challenges we are facing, Taylor claims that we moderns hold something in common with Hegel: the same inspiration to radical autonomy and to expressive unity with nature and within society, and the hope to combine them. This inspiration led Hegel in his reflection until he elaborated his vision

of reality; this same inspiration leads Taylor in his reflection and elaboration of a new and deeper and more meaningful solution for us in modernity.

From the point of view of my dissertation, the relation between Hegel and modernity as Taylor comprehends it has to remain constantly before us. Here at the end of the first chapter, I will focus on Taylor's description of the modern society, and through this on the challenging questions of modernity. My claim in this subdivision is the following: Taylor describes modern society as being in many aspects alike to Hegel's description of society in his time. By saying this I mean that both philosophers have in their mind identical concerns and inspirations, for which both try to find an answer. So Taylor adopts Hegelian concerns and inspirations, and reads modern society as being in search of an answer to Hegel's concerns and inspirations. In other words, Taylor adopts Hegel's concerns and proposes Hegel as our teacher. Hegel as our teacher does not mean that we should automatically accept all of his teaching as answers; we should rather study his methodology or way of proceeding in search of an answer that has to be our own.

Correspondingly there are some substantial differences in their descriptions. Hegel's primary intention is creation of a system, through which he elaborates an answer to his concern about unity of radical freedom and expressive fullness. Even though Taylor adopts Hegel's concerns and methodology, he does not create a system in which we can find our answer about unity of freedom and expressive fullness. Taylor shifts his focus from Hegel's system to the modern agent and his subjectivity, and examines new fields of possible exploration.

Taylor's intention is a new narrative, through which he suggests a new way how to answer Hegel's concerns from the point of view of modernity. Taylor's description of

modernity is in many aspects original, including even those elements that are in apparent contradiction (individual – society, material – spiritual), and with relatively few references to other philosophers, Hegel included. Taylor's approach is more hermeneutical and less systematically grounded in certain explicit philosophical principles, or in quantitative data, or in sociological comparison of two societies. This indetermination and vagueness of description, occasionally makes Taylor's approach difficult to grasp.

One might ask Taylor why does he not include in his narrative other contemporary philosophers and their alternative descriptions of the same society, exposing some other challenging issues of our time? This might be a valid critique, but it overlooks Taylor's intention. What Taylor wants to do is, first, to compare our time with Hegel's time; second, to expose Hegel's powerful influence on our way of thinking and facing reality; and third and most important, to elaborate an original answer to Hegel's concern from the point of view of modernity. For these reasons I claim that Taylor bases his narrative about modern society on Hegel's inspiration.

Hence, more than singular points or chapters in which Taylor ponders certain aspects of our society – sometimes without evidence or precision – we need to keep in mind Taylor's primary intention, i.e. an elaboration of a new narrative about our society, based on Hegel's philosophy. This narrative should (1) reveal those aspects of modernity that are easily neglected or overlooked; (2) offer us more meaningful answer to our concerns. Let us go now to some specific points of Taylor's description, taken from *Politics and Alienation*, i.e. the second chapter of his book *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979, 69-99).

1.4.1 Hegel Can Teach us how to Create a New Unity Based on the Agent's Inspiration to Radical Freedom

Following Taylor's analysis and reflection about modernity, even though our time differs from Hegel's time in many points, Taylor states that the Enlightenment and Romanticism, so powerful in Hegel's time, continue to shape our society. Nonetheless, Taylor's description of modern society is much more than a copy of Hegel's. By listing and describing the Enlightenment and Romantic elements of modernity, Taylor wants to expose – following Hegel's example – the invisible power lying behind these elements and changes in modernity, i.e. human aspiration to radical freedom. Based on this power, Hegel created a system in which this aspiration found its way to realization. Following Hegel's example, Taylor does something similar: he tries to create a new unity in which human aspiration to radical freedom will find its way to actualization.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Hegel wrote in reaction to those elements of Enlightenment thought and sensibility that were utilitarian in their ethical outlook and atomistic in their social philosophy. Nature and society had during the Enlightenment only an instrumental significance; they were seen as potential means for the satisfaction of human desires and happiness. The hope of Enlightenment thought was that by reorganizing man and society according to the principles of scientific social engineering man would achieve his happiness (1979, 69).

According to Taylor, the utilitarian and atomistic tendencies of the Enlightenment period did not cease to exist with Romanticism, but have extended into our time as well

(1979, 136-138). The advocates of public utilitarianism think of themselves as individuals with certain desires and goals, and their society as a common enterprise of production, exchange, and mutual help, designed to fulfill their respective desires. They consider rational organization as an important virtue of society; society has to be organized toward its maximum efficiency. For example, the technology of an industrial society demands a very strong subjugation of nature and people, and reinforces the need to reorganize society and people's lives toward increased efficiency and higher production. Phenomena like urbanization, factory production, depopulation of the countryside, mass emigration, rigid measurement of life at the expense of seasonal rhythms, first explain and then justify the introduction of principles of greater efficiency and profitability and of reorganization and subjugation of people. Individuals are supposed to find their place within these large economic institutions and political structures, where they can participate in the collective decision-making process by way of voting and negotiation. Modern society claims that these structures are neutral and safeguarding of individual independence. An active participation in these structures is supposed to bring to the participants a kind of fulfillment. In short, the Enlightenment with its utilitarian and atomistic tendencies shapes and modifies our modern society in many ways.

Not only the Enlightenment tendencies, but Romantic forces, like the notions of uniqueness, originality, privacy of individuals, also remain among those principles that deeply affect modern society. For example, the modern agent intensely desires to express himself in an original way. But this desire is stifled by the clichés of conformity and the all-pervasive demands of utility. All objects, acts, and institutions have a use, so there is

no place for expressing the individual's originality. Modern society suffers because of the profound discrepancy between its ideas and the capacity to express them authentically. The result is philistine, producing only mediocrity and conformity. Originality, free expression, and all the heroic virtues, are sacrificed to a "pitiable comfort." If we take the agent's belief in an individual liberty that cannot be prescribed by anybody as one of the crucial elements of modernity, we have a paradox: large social structures and everything else should aim at the fulfilment of the individual's belief and freedom, but fulfilment and freedom struggle to find their places in modernity. In the tension between limits and desires, the agent turns to outlets such as music, art, and Romantic literature that recall now as they did earlier as powerful sources of inspiration for social action and flourishing of the individual. In Romanticism, they were seen as expressions of opposition to the limits of the Enlightenment; in modernity, they inspire resistance in individuals and social structure against the rationale of modernity.

The agent's criticizing, protesting, and rejecting of the present situation are expressions of his struggle to find his place. But these modes of expressions do not provide a place for an adequate philosophical explanation. They are nostalgic for the past, looking for an unfulfilled hope, trying to realize an unprecedented future, and are far from the rationality of the real. They are opposed to a vision where reason triumphs (science); they are opposed to any modern civilization that threatens to distort human nature in its creative, expressive potential.

Viewing the merging of Romantic views of private life and fulfilment with the growing rationalization and bureaucratization of collective structures, Taylor concludes:

“Modern society, we might say, is Romantic in its private and imaginative life and utilitarian or instrumentalist in its public, effective life” (1979, 71).

In this context of modern society as a mixture of utilitarian and romantic principles, the inspiration to radical freedom cannot find expression in the same way as it did in Hegel’s vision. In Taylor’s interpretation, Hegel resolved the problem by subordinating the expressivist forces to the structures which embodied the Idea.

Hegel thought that the forces of dissolution and homogenization of civil society would be contained because men would come to recognize themselves in the structures which embodied the Idea. Men would recover a new *Sittlichkeit* and identify with a larger life (1979, 136).

Taylor is even more specific when he summarizes the aim of Hegel’s synthesis:

[Its aim] was to combine this vision of nature as the expression of Spirit both with the implied call to man to recover expressive unity with it, and with the aspiration to rational autonomy. Spirit, the ontological foundation of the world in rational necessity, is meant to realize this synthesis. It guarantees that man can give himself to unity with the whole without losing his rational freedom (1979, 139).

However, Taylor concludes that Hegel’s solution cannot be applied to modernity. Modern man cannot recognize himself within the structures of a rational state, or the structures which embodied the Idea. These structures have progressively become shallow, until they transform themselves to a bureaucracy. The continuous transformation of the industrial society in view of productive efficiency and the search for higher individual standards of life have been eroding differences, essential for the Hegelian state. Moreover, they have been promulgating homogenization, which has a different meaning now from what it had in Hegel’s philosophy. Modern bureaucratic society is something other than Hegel’s rational state.

In addition, Taylor states that the benefits of technological progress and modernization of society do not lead automatically to the promised fulfillment and desired happiness of individuals or society. In this perspective, for example, Taylor reads certain historical events of the past century (Fascism, Marxism, and student and labor protests against the government in France in May 1968). They attempted to break through the limits of industrial capitalist society to find new and original ways of expressing aspirations of their times: radical freedom as well as integral expression (1979, 71). Even on the personal level, the agent experiences an identical tension with the impersonal structures of the technological and bureaucratic capitalistic civilization, and looks for new ways of fulfilling of his desires.

Despite all these differences between Hegel's society and our modern society, Taylor states that Hegel's philosophy and his reaction against Romanticism and the Enlightenment remain an inspiring attraction for modernity. Hegel's solution is attractive because it provides us a vision of reality in which everything finds its place. The agent's aspiration to radical autonomy and to expressive unity combines with nature and societies. Agent's reason is not neglected or overlooked as it was by Romantics, but integrated into a new synthesis. In Hegel's synthesis we have the Enlightenment based on reason on the one side, and on the other side Romanticism with its ideal of originality, uniqueness and autonomy. In other words, Hegel succeeded in integrating a variety of opposing and contradicting forces and powers into a new whole. In his ontology based on dialectical movement, everything becomes necessary, everything finds its place, and the human agent can actualize his aspirations.

Thus, Taylor re-directs his focus and distances himself from Hegel's solution. If the elements of Enlightenment and Romanticism continue to exist in our modern society, where do they come together in a new synthesis? Where is the place in which modern man can flourish, be inspired by the same radical freedom as he was in Hegel's time? If there is such a synthesis of Enlightenment and Romanticism, what form might it take?

Posing these questions, we are open to a new chapter of Taylor's reflection. Following the main thesis of this dissertation, I claim that Taylor's further philosophical ideas present *grosso modo* an attempt at answering these questions. For example, Taylor himself reformulates this attempt explicitly in terms of a hope of keeping together the rational, technological bent of our society and the inspiration to radical autonomy and expressive unity (1979, 72).

We will see how Taylor analyzes different segments of modernity; each one of them is important because it represents an expression of agent's inspiration to radical freedom. Once critically analyzed, these segments or expressions should find their place in the new synthesis or vision of the whole. In view of this goal, Taylor creates an account through which the modern agent will be able to realize and actualize his search for radical freedom and expressive fullness. This account will also open the door to a new and deeper and more meaningful solution for our struggles in modernity. In any case, Hegel can teach us how to create a new unity and how to find a way to actualize the agent's aspiration.

1.4.2 Hegel Can Teach us how to Describe Society in Terms of Differentiation and Homogenization

Hegel's vision of reality is based on two ontological principles: the principle of homogenization and the principle of differentiation. They have distinctive functions in Hegel's system, because they divide and at the same time connect the whole reality. The same two principles retain their importance in Taylor's description of modern society. Even though Taylor changes their meaning, he adopts them.

Let us first recap from my previous discussion of Hegel's ontology his understanding of *Geist*, its unifying potential, and consequently, the importance of active participation of everyone within the whole system. According to Hegel's view, *Geist* is the one principle which keeps everything together and in relation to which everything finds its place and role. *Geist* presents the principle of homogenization that keeps the whole in one system. Within such a homogenized view of reality, Hegel introduces the principle of differentiation. Every part of the system, or every member of a society, is supposed to be what he or she is, and to participate in the system in a proper way, which depends on the individual's position and role within the system. This is not the only but the best way to keep the whole system running. The individual with his unique position within the whole system is the only one who can transmit *Geist* through his unfolding of reason. There is no other place than human reason where *Geist* can come to its self-consciousness, which is the final goal of the whole system. In this way Hegel describes the whole in which *Geist* keeps everything together, and where every individual keeps his proper place in the system. The principle of homogenization and differentiation join together in a unity.

Taylor is very explicit when he says that the need of homogenization and differentiation in society is not something that started with Hegel. Even societies prior to Hegel followed the principle of differentiations in their structuring process. Unlike Hegel's view, these societies justified this principle in terms of a hierarchical order of things, i.e. the underlying structure of the universe, or the cosmological order. Traditional societies were founded on differentiation in terms of royalty, aristocracy, and common folk; priests and laypeople; free men and slaves. Every one of these parts was necessary to keep the whole running. Taylor describes such a society:

Man could only be himself in relation to a cosmic order; the state claimed to body forth this order and hence to be one of man's principal channels of contact with it. Hence the power of organic and holistic metaphors: men saw themselves as parts of society in something like the way that a hand, for instance, is part of the body (1979, 112).

Taylor takes these two principles and bases on them his understanding of modern society. In the article *Hegel, History and Politics*, Taylor describes contemporary society as being in a dilemma as to how to balance the principles of homogenization and differentiation (1984, 194-195). Generally speaking, contemporary society is moving to a greater homogeneity and interdependence, in which partial communities lose their autonomy and to some extent their identity, even though great differences among communities remain. In light of the ideology of homogeneity, the differential characteristics no longer have meaning and value. The process of homogenization undermined the characteristics by which people previously identified themselves. The same process increases minority and individual alienation and resentment on one side, and provides nothing as a reference point for identification on the other side. This alienation process makes the achievement of basic consensus more difficult, so essential

for the functioning of a democratic society, because the participants do not identify with their society and the democratic system. Consequently, society tends to fragment, unable to satisfy the increasing demands of minority groups. What steps into the breach almost everywhere is ethnic or national identity. No wonder that nationalism becomes the most powerful focus of identity, Taylor argues in his exposition of the modern dilemma.

In other words, the modern ideology of equality and of total participation leads to a homogenization of society. This statement about modern society contains all the essential factors that Taylor includes in his reflection about modernity: homogenization, alienation, dissatisfaction, new self-consciousness, and a search for meaning in private experiences. Let us take a closer look at these factors.

Taylor's search for a new balance of the two principles appears to be primarily a critique of society based on utilitarian and atomistic principles (1979, 111). Advocates of these principles argue in favor of a modern thrust towards equality and radical democracy. The process of homogenization produces the *classlessness* of modern society, based on an abstract idea of equality. What people share in common is their perception of society as the necessary instrument for the fulfillment of their happiness. They accept social structure as long as it furthers their happiness. Utilitarian man remains loyal to his society in proportion to his realization of happiness in that society. In this kind of society, there is no place for traditional myths about the origin of society, or speculative interpretations of the ends of human life in their relation to society, nature, and history. Every kind of cosmic order is seen as a meaningless fiction or invention. Society as such becomes simply an object of social studies, studied almost exclusively from the point of view how it affects human happiness.

There is a paradox originating from the utilitarian perspective, Taylor continues (1979, 113). Some liberal thinkers claim that utilitarian social theories present an “end of ideology,” claiming that there should be nothing else in society than a search for fulfilment of happiness. While claiming this, they paradoxically reintroduce another myth, i.e. a successful society. The same utilitarian approach is in reality anti-utilitarian because it leaves the members of society with great expectations and beliefs about fulfilment, concerns about what is appropriate, just, and conducive to happiness; but this approach fails to provide an answer. People’s expectations constantly grow, while their disappointments too increase. Their loyalty to society is weaker than it was in a cosmologically based society. No wonder that the utilitarian approach that leads to people’s larger expectations becomes the source of their dissatisfaction and tension. Taylor concludes that “some of the richest societies in our day are among the most teeming with dissatisfaction” (1979, 113).

Talking about democratic practices of Western society, Taylor additionally illustrates this problem in terms of alienation and a return to his private experience (1979, 91-93). Common goals, norms or ends, which have previously defined social practices and institutions, are in modern society losing their relevance. Many democratic practices of Western society, e.g. the voting system, seem to be less and less acceptable vehicles of decision-making in the society. Decisions made by elected representatives are sometimes the result of manipulation and consensus, and not the result of people’s democratic decisions. Their decision might be opposed to the democratic principles of the society; in an extreme case, they might be contrary to the will of people, as well. People have problems accepting democracy with all of its governing institutions as the vehicle for

their social decisions. Consequently, they perceive democracy with all its institutions as irrelevant, even as illicit. Instead of anonymous participation in a large society, the individual prefers to be active in smaller societies or groups, or tries to define his identity as an individual in a system in which social bonds and influences are less dominant. Traditional social norms and practices seem to be for him a kind of alienation. He simply prefers to turn back on himself, and perceives himself as an individual with private goals, detached from society and tradition. The most meaningful experiences, which touch the core of his being, are private. Public experiences seem to be too narrow and parochial, and consequently too impersonal to be acceptable. Following this path, we can see how Taylor prepares ground for the shift of his focus to the individual and his subjectivity, seen not from the point of view of utilitarian society, but as a search for absolute freedom.

Confronting a society based on utilitarian and atomistic principles and marked by the homogenization of individuals, their sense of alienation, and struggle against their participation in community, Taylor describes society primarily in Hegelian terms (1979, 84-87). The crucial point of this description is the relation between the individual and society. Taylor claims explicitly that our highest and most complete moral existence is the one we can attain to only as members of a community (1979, 84). The individual cannot put himself higher than the society because the society involves a much more comprehensive notion than the sum of the individuals in it. The individual realizes himself only by his belonging to the community; the larger structure of community defines him for who he is through a particular language, tradition, political system, religion, norms, and ideas. The community becomes the only place where the individual

can find his identification; therefore, he is called to subject himself to the community, to be an active member of his community in the process of modification or alteration of the social structures. Due to the nature of human reason, the individual is confined in his comprehension and cannot properly or completely grasp his situation, i.e. the complexity of the community and the whole system he is part of, or the meaning of history. Nonetheless, he must constantly try to transcend his own subjectivity and remain immersed in the larger structure, system, or history he is part of. He can do this with his reason. Hegel resolved this dilemma saying that the final goal is the self-comprehension of *Geist* or Reason, for which we need community as the embodiment of *Geist*, i.e. a fuller and more substantial embodiment than of the individual. However, the individual remains the crucial factor because he is the only vehicle of this self-comprehension of *Geist*.

We already know that Taylor does not accept Hegel's ontology and his vision of *Geist*, nor does he adopt Hegel's *Geist* as the homogenization principle of modernity. However, he does adopt Hegel's claim that a community or a state does not exist primarily for the individual's needs. Community and state cannot have only an instrumental function as utilitarian, or atomistic or individualistic arguments of modernity claim to be the case. Taylor is very explicit in his acceptance of Hegel's assertion that the individual cannot exist in abstraction from his community, but has to be seen as a part of a larger life. The life of the state or community has the same value as the life of an individual. We exist as human beings only in a community (1979, 87). Thus, Taylor adopts Hegel's critique of the utilitarian society which neglects the principle of differentiation and ignores more satisfactory solutions.

This is a good moment to remind ourselves why Taylor wants to re-introduce Hegel's philosophy into modern philosophical discussions, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, which has resisted and misinterpreted the positions of the German philosopher, overlooking important points about the role of community. Taylor is convinced that Hegel's position can provide us with a more complete understanding of community life and other social structures, which cannot be seen only as being at service to the needs of the individuals. Paradoxically, the same individuals resist the generalization and homogenization of modern society and look for new centers of personal identification. My third chapter analyzes Taylor's interpretation of modernity in terms of disengaged and instrumental reason, in new ways of self-expression and self-realization, and in the modern search for freedom. These elements are expressions of differentiations, or opposition to the generalization and homogenization of modern society, where individuals struggle to find meaning in their society.

1.4.3 Hegel Can Help us by Identification with our Society

The problem of the individual's identification with society is not a completely new phenomenon in modernity; Hegel recognized it as well, even though he saw it from a different vantage point, i.e. in opposition to the traditional cosmological view. In Hegel's homogeneous order or system the individual is allowed to preserve his originality and irreplaceability. This initiates the process of the individual's identification with the particular order or system in which his personal experiences find their meaning. On different occasions Taylor repeats that such a solution, based on Hegel's ontology of

Geist, would be completely unacceptable today. Individualism and self-perception in modern society have different characteristics from what they had in Hegel's time, and therefore the individual's identification with society occurs in a different way.

The main difference between Hegel's time and ours lies in the self-comprehension of the individual and his subjectivity. Taylor describes this shift to the modern understanding of the individual in the second chapter of his book *Hegel and Modern Society*, where he talks about absolute freedom and the modern dilemma (1979, 100-125). Modern man does not choose to identify himself with public life as man did in Hegel's time. In contrast to Hegel's time, modern man relies principally on his own grasp of universal reason, and on his own ideas of meaningful reality, including social reality. This does not mean that he rejects any kind of relation to society; he still chooses to belong to a certain community, group, or institution. However, the importance of his self-definition and his personal understanding of reality has become for him more important than his participation in the public life of a given historical community. Consequently he looks for new political theories which will give him satisfactory answers.

This reaction of modern man to modern society expresses the people's lack of interest in public life, which Taylor sees as a result of Hegel's theory of participation (1984, 195-196). Participation of all is possible only if there is a ground of agreement and an underlying common purpose, which is not the case in modern society. Modern democratic society with its appeal to radical participation of all presupposes this agreement, but in itself it is not able to create or sustain it. What is happening is that through the process of homogenization and the ideology of total participation, the participants are withdrawing from their traditional communities or centers of

identification. This society struggles to replace the focus or create a new focus of identification. Even the ideal of a society of universal and total participation, what some philosophers suggest as the solution, are infutile in Taylor's view. A society of universal and total participation intensifies the process of homogenization, but does not offer a new focus of identification. The only real solution is a recovery of meaningful differentiation, which should bring us closer to the identification of individuals with society.

In Taylor's words, identification occurs when we coalesce with our society, giving it our full allegiance, when a society becomes our own in the strongest sense of the world as our creation, representing what is best in us and most truly ourselves, that is, our moral will or our creative activity (1979, 113). Such identification presupposes a freedom in which we can express ourselves, find our identity, and our place in a larger structure. This might be either a small community, or geographical, cultural, and occupational centers of concern and activity, in which members retain their differences and, at the same time, stay connected to the whole. This idea is not original of Taylor. He borrows it from Tocqueville's reflection about a democratic society, in which the decentralized structures of power on one side, and society's submission to an omnipotent government on the other side, find a balance. In any case, Taylor finds in this idea an appropriate support for his theory (1979, 118).

People's identification with common frames acts as a temporary process in which the realization of public life gradually reinforces people's identification with the society. Such identification starts first in the reasoning of certain individuals and then gradually involves the majority. It is a slow process. Even identification with a constitution occurs only if the constitution has been growing up consciously or unconsciously in people's

mind over a period of time. Sometimes people are simply not aware of the process taking place or do not understand it. Taylor asserts that this is not a problem because the growth has to have taken place before we can understand it (1979, 123). Taylor is basically in agreement with Hegel and his view of history: there is an evolution, in which different forms of social organizations emerge in a certain historical moment as a particular form of unfolding reason. Hegel talks about evolution which is in the domain of *Geist* and goes beyond individual reason that cannot grasp every detail. Humans are simply caught up as actors in a drama they do not understand completely at the present moment, but which they can understand only retrospectively.

So far I have shown that identification is a very complex process, requiring time, presupposing common interests and goals, and involving participation of individuals. Taylor is very clear that something else is needed, if identification is to take place: a certain amount of freedom (1979, 96). Freedom at this point does not mean following one's arbitrary choice of a particular element; Taylor means the freedom that one has in following his own essential reason. If society does not provide this kind of freedom or if hinders it, people will consequently struggle in their identification with society. Taylor is very clear at this point, claiming that identification and freedom are always tied together. People will identify with something only if they are freely allowed to do so. Or let us say it the other way around: people's identification is the expression of their freedom. To illustrate this, Taylor refers us to the French Revolution (1979, 119), where Hegel described it as a radical attempt to organize the whole society entirely according to the prescription of human reason, where there was no place for any differentiation of roles and privileges of citizens. Such a society was supposed to be a place where everyone

would live in freedom. Despite revolutionary changes, the new society was incapable of replacing completely the one it destroyed. Rejecting the old socio-political system, either utilitarian or cosmological, the new system was left in a vacuum, in which the aspiration to absolute freedom transformed into its negative moment of destruction, which is for Hegel the origin of the terror. This went so far that the same aspiration to freedom in its destructive moment did not spare its own children. Those who did not share the ideas of revolution were treated as enemies of freedom and of the people. The consequences were tremendous. Taylor concludes his description of the French Revolution by saying that being under suspicion was equal to being guilty. Taylor comes to a similar conclusion about Marxism and those social theories based on the Enlightenment that argue in favor of imposition of common frames of society and of apparently perfect principles imposed from above. They should lead society toward a perfect social order, but history shows that this is not the case.

To sum up, to identify the individual with society remains one of the crucial questions, for which modernity has to find a sufficient answer in order to escape destructive forces. Identification takes place only if individuals can find a meaningful place in their society. That same society has to become the place of actualization of people's freedom; otherwise it becomes the place of people's failure to achieve their identification and actualization of freedom. Again, Taylor sees Hegel as the one who can teach us much about this subject. Nonetheless, modern self-perception and subjectivity are two points which move us away from Hegel's ontological solution.

1.4.4 Hegel Challenges us to Discover the Positive Energy behind the Modern Struggle to Answer Specific Questions

Summing up different aspects of the identification process in modernity, Taylor claims that there is something positive in people's reaction to modern society, even though this society may limit freedom and the individual's space for self-realization (1979, 91). (1) People are turning elsewhere to define what is centrally important to them. For instance, this might be a smaller community with a more intense religious life, where people can express themselves more directly. This search for new centers of identification is something positive in modernity. (2) People define their identity on their own terms, as individuals with individual goals, and not in relation to a particular community, culture, language, confession. Again, people's desire to be authentic, and their willingness to realize this authenticity, should not be overlooked. This is the point where Taylor disagrees with Hegel who would most probably not accept on the positive aspects of the individual's distancing himself from a community. In Hegel's view, when men cease to identify with the community's life, they turn back on themselves and see as the most important thing themselves as individuals with individual goals. For Hegel, this constitutes dissolution of *Volk* and its life. Despite this disagreement, Hegel might help us in our identification of the positive energy, that fuels the struggle, answers these challenging questions.

Taylor claims that the growing dissatisfaction with the utilitarian model of society provokes in members of the society new aspirations toward what is lacking in life; that is, new grounds for personal identification within society, something that would be fulfilling for human souls and strengthen ties among individuals. Both dissatisfaction and

aspiration toward what is missing express an energy and drives toward a genuine search for absolute freedom. In this case, Taylor understands the opposition to the homogenization process in modern society as a search for new ways of expressing the individual's originality, a rediscovery of subjectivity, and a recovery of meaningful differentiation in the expressions of the human desire for absolute freedom. This energy and genuineness are very appealing, but easily overlooked and neglected by many interpreters of modernity.

In other words, after the critical opposition to the modern process of homogenization resulting from neglecting differentiation, Taylor proposes a new political reflection based on differentiation and on a new identification with society. What Taylor suggests is a kind of new understanding of the whole in which we can recover the sense of significant differentiation, so that partial communities with their geographical, cultural, or occupational characteristics can become again important centers of concern and activity for their members in a way which connects them to the whole (1979, 116).

We saw previously that the principle of equality of members produces a kind of *classless* society, which eliminates differentiating characteristics of individuals and partial communities. Modern man does not want to be identified as just a part of a featureless structure, but as a member of his particular community, culture, language, and confession. Individuals, partial groups, entire nations in the modern world strive for their identity, their original place within a larger system, and for recognition of who they are or want to be. Thus, their subjectivity becomes the new center of gravity. Therefore, modern social theory should pay attention to both, individual (member, particular group, whole nation), and subjective principles. Taylor emphasizes that such a modern social theory

should be antithetical to the idea that the individual and his freedom might be sacrificed on the altar of some higher communal good as was the case in Hegel's interpretation (1979, 85).

Claiming the importance of differentiation in modern society immediately raises the question of how to maintain the unity and vitality of a social system that includes many differentiated individuals and groups. In Taylor's interpretation, Hegel resolved the problem through "absolute freedom," or universal and total participation, where everyone finds his place and a way of self-expression (1979, 111). In Hegel's vision, the free states of ancient Greece present a perfect example, where citizens identify so profoundly with the city that the city's life becomes the center of theirs. This happens through *Sittlichkeit*, i.e. through their meeting ethical obligations to their society. If the ethical obligations are not sustained and kept alive, people's concern shifts somewhere else outside their society. If this happens – in Hegel's view – alienation results.

Taylor goes on to say that Hegel's solution, based as it is on Greek society and *Sittlichkeit*, would not be accepted in modern society. The concept of *Sittlichkeit*, i.e. ethical obligations to society, is in modern society replaced with the concept of *legitimacy*, defined as "the subjective orientations of the members of a polity towards this polity and its institutions" (1979, 125). It means that something becomes legitimate if people in the society see or feel it as legitimate. The institutions as such do not have legitimate or illegitimate characteristics; they are simply there. Modern social science tends to describe them as free from evaluation or as "value-free," because they do not embody a certain conception of man or determine man's relation to society. Taylor suggests, therefore, that we should go beyond these institutions and think about the way

people perceive these social structures. In Taylor words, the institutions in modern society as such do not intrinsically include the community spirit or something similar; they do not embody certain conceptions of quality of life; they do not embody a certain view of the human being as individual or social, contrary to Hegel's view. The community spirit, the quality of life, the individualist or social perception, depend on people's "subjective orientations," their choice, their mindset, and not on the institutions themselves. Thus Taylor stresses and reiterates the importance of subjectivity (1979, 126).

Taylor develops the idea that the relation between individual-centered and social institutions is not a static one. People do change constantly their orientations, principles, values, including the way they perceive themselves; consequently, their relations and perceptions of social institutions change too. As we already know, Hegel was very aware of that. When he reflects about history, he talks about a constant movement: people are changing all the time, including their human practices and social institutions. Human self-perception, changes in the human mind, any alteration of social institutions and practices, new expectations, are in Hegel's view nothing other than expressions of *Geist*, the objective spirit. Again, *Geist* is the principle that includes everything and puts everything in its right place. Changes in society, different forms of tensions, of disunity, which put in doubt the identification of the individual with society, are included in the same principle. Among all these forms of changes, Hegel considers alienation as the crucial one because it is evident that the given social institutions have ceased to be those by which people identify themselves.

Taylor is very clear in claiming that we cannot justify all these changes and the agent's struggle in modern society in the same way as Hegel did (1979, 128). The difference lies in the fact that modern forms of alienation are not rooted in a system in which everything is an expression of *Geist* or an Idea. Changes in modern society find their explanation in people's subjective orientations. When the institutions become disaffected, i.e. when they do not answer any longer to human expectations and consequently lead to frustration, then it is time for change. This might be taken as a reflex of the modern production-orientated mentality, in which constant change pursues higher production. Higher production demands a better control over nature, the resource for production. The same production becomes the principle of identification of the individual with society. An individual's participation in the production and consumption process constantly reinforces his identification with the system. This identification with the system breaks down when the continuous production or growth provokes a crisis in forms of pollution, overcrowding, social dislocation, increasing frustration in the face of the limits of production, and increased social tensions. All these challenges undermine the modern principle of identification.

As a second reason why we cannot accept Hegel's justification of changes, Taylor sees a kind of naïve understanding of historical change behind Hegel's philosophy of history (1979, 130). Hegel believed that a bourgeois economy would accept the limits of rational law and reasonable regulations and resolve the problems of poverty. But the fact is that, despite its richness, the bourgeois economy in Hegel's time, as modern society in our time, is not rich enough to check excessive poverty. Modern society is a clear

example of how private interests threaten to overrun all limits, increase the polarization between rich and poor, and dissolve the boundaries of the state.

Despite their different understanding of changes in society, Taylor claims that Hegel's position remains very important, because Hegel had to face the same threatened breakdown in his time as we do today. It is true that forms that are changing modern society are different from those of Hegel's society. But this is not the point. More important than the changes themselves is in Taylor's view the power that underlies these changes: the positive energy, motives, reason, and inspiration that fuel the modern struggle to find answers to challenging questions. Once we identify all this, we can construct a new synthesis or a new unity of the whole.

Taylor is very explicit that we cannot start with the Hegelian concept of *Sittlichkeit* and his answer to the problem of *Sittlichkeit* (1979, 129-132). What we should do is to face our modern society with the same profundity and penetration as Hegel did in his time, and deal with the destructive potentials within modern society. These potentials are mainly the same as they were in Hegel's society: the force of private interest overrunning all limits, utilitarianism, polarization between rich and poor, the sweeping away of all differentiation in the name of a general will towards homogenization. To these, Taylor adds some new forms of destructive potentials: radical egalitarianism, reinforced processes of homogenization, liberal individualism in the sense that individual choices are untouchable, sweeping aside all the articulations of traditional society.

Again, attacking these changes and the destructive potentials of modern society is not Taylor's primary interest; his primary concern is with what underlines these changes and potentials. This is the point at which Taylor returns again to the central aspiration of

Hegel's time, which in Taylor's mind remains our aspiration as well: how to combine radical autonomy and expressive fulfillment (1979, 135). Saying this, we are back to our initial statement, i.e. the thesis that Hegel's question provides the source of inspiration for Taylor's reflection on modernity. Therefore, if we want to understand Taylor, we should read him through this optic.

Before we move to the next subdivision, let me summarize these four answers to the question of why Taylor thinks that Hegel is still relevant to us. Four answers offer four coherently linked reasons supporting my interpretation.

(1) Hegel is relevant because his analysis of the society of his time is an analysis that is applicable to our modern society. (2) Hegel's solution, i.e. construction of a synthesis, can inspire us to create a new vision of unity for modernity. (3) We can learn from Hegel not only why it is so important to have this unity, but what tools and instruments can be used to construct such a unity. (4) Hegel teaches us to go beyond visible changes toward the energy lying behind these changes. The same power continues to move human agency in modernity, so our challenge is how to discover this power and make use of it. Taylor's point is clear: we can learn much from Hegel, without re-proposing his actual solution.

We will now look at how Taylor, following Hegel's example, proposes a new synthesis, i.e. a new vision of unity. In doing this, Taylor is aware that he is not the first one who undertakes such a project of unification. Many other philosophers, inspired by Hegel, have proposed new syntheses. Taylor takes their attempt seriously into

consideration because they are expressions of the same inspiration to radical freedom that Hegel identified.

1.4.5 Post-Hegelian Attempts of Creation of a Unity

As we saw in the previous subdivisions, modern agency struggles to express properly a new and creative way. To face the discomfort in his society, Taylor lists some ways by which modern man reacts, in his search for fulfillment, to the potential for a new vision of unity (1979, 140). In general, the modern agent opposes modern civilization and looks for new ways of expressing himself; so, the focus in Taylor is on the man who feels oppressed by the “system” and looks for new directions to unity.

One way of creating this unity represents different forms of the agent’s desire to express himself, his deepest desires and his motivations, through the release of the spontaneous, the natural, or the sensuous - - the *Dionysiac* - - in his nature. By expressing himself in such various modes, the agent hopes to reach a wholeness of life, a sense of fulfillment, to heal the divisions between body and soul, will and inclination, Spirit and nature. This is the way of post-romantic nationalism, which tries to restore particular facts about human beings’ life: their heredity, the land they live in, the language group they belong to – centrally relevant motivations in a fulfilled human life – against “abstract,” “cosmopolitan” ideas of man.

Another way of achieving harmony and unity between man and nature is by transforming nature. Creation of this harmony depends on reshaping nature and society,

through a process of constant transformation. Such a process is necessary to the agent's fulfilment. Creation of this unity is combined with a radical notion of freedom as understood in Hegel's philosophy, but in a fundamentally different way, says Taylor. "Hegel's synthesis has been, as it were anthropologized - transferred from *Geist* on to man" (1979, 141).

Taylor suggests combining both ways outlined above, to create a new harmony between man and the natural and social worlds. In the following three chapters, we will move through Taylor's progressive creation of this harmony. As the immediate preparation for Taylor's vision, let us see first how he interprets two insufficient attempts at creation of a new harmony. The first attempt, represented by the young Hegelians and Marx, explicitly harks back to Hegel. The second attempt is based on the modern notion of subjectivity. Even though both attempts offer us insufficient solutions, they are important because they are expressions of the agent's desire to find a meaningful answer in modernity.

(1) First the works of Young Hegelians and then Marx represent a strong effort to create a new harmony. The way in which the Young Hegelians traced out this harmony, and Marx later theoretically grounded it, Taylor calls "expressivist tradition" (1979, 141). Both these groups are in Taylor's eyes examples of how to answer Hegel's question about radical autonomy, this time starting from the point of view of modern man.

Before we continue, Taylor's move to Marxism includes something of a surprise. Why does he dedicate the last part of his reflection to a system with which he does not agree? He rejects both Marxist and socialist solutions as unacceptable for our modern

time, but still constantly refers to Marx and the revolutionary ideas of the 19th and 20th centuries. It might be because Taylor had been introduced to neo-Marxist ideas during his studies in Oxford where he studied these ideas with a certain curiosity. More certain is a second possible explanation. Marxism in all of its ramifications, communism included, has been and remains an important source of philosophical reflection in the 20th century. Even after the fall of socialism and communism in Eastern Europe, different protest and liberation movements in modernity still look to Marxism as their source of inspiration. From the historical perspective, Marxist philosophy is much closer to us than Hegel's philosophy is. Through the analysis of the Marxist movement we moderns might see more easily the role of human aspiration in radical freedom, as the leading force and principle of our life. Thus Taylor takes seriously a consideration of this aspiration, so visibly present in our time. At the same time, Marxism presents another step in our search for an answer to the initial question posed by Hegel, and helps to explain the relevance of Hegelian philosophy in our time. Seeing Marxism in this way, we can understand why Taylor does not ignore it and deals with it carefully.

Taylor defines Marxism as an attempt to reshape nature and society in view of the inhumanity of the present order (1979, 141-145). Marxism, more than any other system based on the Enlightenment, is a sharp critique of the present order and a protest against the injustices of the world. If the Enlightenment had effected a new consciousness of inhumanity, a sensibility about unnecessary suffering, and an urgent determination to combat it, then Marxism as an offspring of the Enlightenment has reinforced the belief that the re-organization of social structures would abolish different forms of alienations, obstacles on the way to happiness, wholeness, and freedom. The transformation of the

social structure and nature would be at the same time a self-transformation, also leading to greater happiness, wholeness and freedom. In this sense, Taylor sees Marxism as a very powerful and attractive “idea of overcoming the injustice and expressive deadness of our world at one stroke by recovering control and radically reshaping it according to a freely chosen design” (1979, 154). If this is the case, it is not surprising that this idea remains so attractive in modernity.

In the Marxist’s view, man is the producer, who suffers because his work and products, i.e. expressions of himself, are alienated from him. Such a system is unjust and needs to be changed, even by revolution if necessary. Workers should own their work, the expression of themselves. In a new system, in which there will be no place for alienation, workers will possess completely what they express through their work. The recovery of self-possession becomes the means to happiness, wholeness, and freedom, the means to the “self-creation” of man. In the new system, man will be one with nature in a sense that he makes it over as an expression of himself. In the same way that man subjugates nature, he can transform society as well. These forms of subjugation and transformation are necessary steps towards man’s self-realization. At this point, Hegel would agree with Marx, saying that we need transformations. In Hegel’s view, this transformation must include recognition of *Geist* also, or the placement of transformation within a larger order. It means that man is supposed to contemplate this larger order, whose subject is the *Geist*. This contemplation includes recognizing differences as a way of proceeding to reconciliation.

Marx does not accept Hegel’s ontology and contemplation of order as the way of proceeding. Instead of contemplating order, man should change it, i.e. transform the

world. Man has to be taken as an individual who exists in a society and who is in constant interchange with nature. This interchange with nature is much more than a natural cycle; it is an expression and transformation of man himself. Only through the interchange can man properly become man. In effect, the subjugation of nature and the transformation of society are two expressions of man's creativity and self-realization. The final goal of the process of transformation is communism, where the transformation will be completed; people will live in freedom, beyond any kind of self-alienation, divisions, and oppositions, in resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man, according to Taylor's interpretation of Marx (1979, 144).

Taylor does not propose a close reading of Marxism but from a certain perspective. Marx's *Kapital*, or Darwin's evolutionary theory, or Freud's psychoanalysis should not be taken as science in a strict sense of the word. Taylor sees these theories as different forms of the same basic conviction that man (generic man) can dominate the natural and social world through science and technology. Through this domination, man impresses his free design on the nature of society, and simultaneously expresses himself in his longing for radical freedom. In this desire for domination, there are many romantic elements and inspirations (man's desire for expression and for freedom) combined with the Enlightenment determination to dominate the natural and social worlds with science and technology, leading to scientific objectification of romantic inspiration.

Taylor does not want to delve deeply into an analysis of Marx' writings, but emphasizes one point: Hegel's notion of a self-positing *Geist* profoundly impressed Marx's reflection up to the point where Marx transferred the nature of *Geist* to man (1979, 150). Hegel's *Geist* can create the conditions of its own embodiment; in the same

way, Marx's man enjoys his freedom as self-creation. To this move from *Geist* to man on the theoretical level follows another change, something that Marx does not describe with the same accuracy: changes on the practical level. Surprisingly, Marx, Lenin and the whole communist movement had an incredibly simple view about social reality, and its transformation and administration in overcoming the class-society. Taylor sees that the Bolshevik Party was thrown into the reality of state power with a simple image of human freedom as the unproblematic administration. Despite their weakness on the practical level, their conception of freedom as self-creation became and remains the inspiration for new movements and actions on the social level, with the transformation of external reality as a form of self-realization.

Taylor supplements his picture of Marxism and Leninism by saying that they are the union of an extreme voluntarism and scientism combined with the most thoroughgoing determinism (1979, 152). The first two elements – voluntarism and scientism – belong to the elite, which imposes a new direction on a refractory mass. So we have a kind of social engineering, imposing imaginary laws of history on society that should lead the whole society into a desirable freedom. This way of realization and fulfilment of freedom leads through the socialist system to communism, where humans will be fully developed. On the nature of this freedom, Marx surprisingly remains very unclear and unreal. For him, freedom means the overcoming of opacity, division, indirectness, and the cross-purposes of social life. Even the representatives of the Marxist tradition will define the free society only in negative terms: a society without divisions between men or between levels of people's existence, without coercion, as endlessly

creative. In agreement with Hegel, Taylor describes this kind of “free” society as unacceptable.

Now this freedom without situation is what Hegel called ‘absolute freedom.’ It was a conception of freedom, which was sterile and empty in his eyes in that it left us with no reason to act in one way rather another; and it was destructive, since in its emptiness it drives us to tear down any other positive work as a hindrance to freedom (1979, 153).

Taylor’s critique of Marx is basically the same critique which Hegel made of the French Revolution, which destroyed the old system and then left people in a void with the new system. Freedom as such can never be situationless. It has to be always situated within certain historical coordinates, or it does not exist at all. Following the same line, Marxist’s philosophy is not only unbelievable, but unlivable also, in many points full of enigmatic solutions, and is far from being a solution to our modern dilemma. However, Marx’s basic aspiration for freedom remains very strong and influential in our time. This is the reason why Taylor wants to deal with it from the point of view of subjectivity and the modern notion of freedom.

(2) Talking about the second attempt at a new synthesis in modernity, Taylor becomes less explicit or concrete, and more descriptive about a certain way of thinking. In this attempt he refers primarily to the modern notion of subjectivity and freedom, and to the aspiration behind these concepts, which is the same as what we saw in Marxism.

Taylor assumes that the modern notion of subjectivity and modern conceptions of freedom equate freedom with removing obstacles and external impediments to action. To be free in this case means to be dependent only on oneself and independent from external interferences. Next to this negative description of freedom, there is a positive conception

of freedom, where freedom means realization in action to become what one believes to be his true self. Freedom in this case refers to the control of the lower self of human nature by the higher (true) self. Thus Taylor deduces that behind these two definitions of freedom lies the basic idea that freedom is not something given but something to be created again (1979, 156).

In the following pages, Taylor notices a contradiction in modern conceptions of freedom as self-dependence and self-creation. From one side, the negative conception proposes liberation from external oppressions, natural limits and conditions of the given situation, including inauthentic aspirations imposed by society. The fulfilment of freedom should be somehow situationless, a kind of void in which nothing appears to be worth doing. From the other side, a positive definition of freedom stresses self-fulfillment and self-dependence, and refers us to our strongest, most persistent, most all-embracing desire to be free. The contradiction states in fact that we cannot define our freedom in opposition to our nature and situation, and, at the same time, follow our strongest desires. These might be distorted by our compulsions, fears, obsessions, i.e. expressions of our distorted and inauthentic nature and limited aspirations. Therefore, Taylor concludes, persistence in a conception of freedom as self-dependence can only mislead because it identifies human aspirations with what is chosen by us, and neglects the option that the same aspiration can be simply given to us. In short, the radical notion of freedom reopens the dilemma of vacuity.

In this perspective, Taylor briefly mentions various attempts to, first, resolve this dilemma of vacuity, and second, to save the conception of freedom as self-dependence (1979, 158-159). We have already discussed Hegel's vision in which man is supposed to

see himself free as the vehicle of the cosmic reason. Marx claimed that transformation of material reality will open the door to freedom. As a kind of reaction against Marxism, Schopenhauer proposed a kind of Buddhist dis-attachment to earthly things, including to the same human will. This should lead us out of human despair and pessimism to freedom understood as self-dependence. Following in the steps of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard went a step farther suggesting that the best exit out of human despair is accepting oneself with all the burdens of life. This is possible only by connecting oneself to the external power, i.e. God. Nietzsche goes farthest of all, rejecting all values and principles, including the same idea of freedom as self-dependence. For Nietzsche, freedom is an empty idea. Consequently he reduces everything to the will to power, which has to reconcile itself with the idea of eternal recurrence.

Based on these short examples, we can see that Taylor concludes that (1) such modern ideas of freedom lead to despair about realization, and doubts about whether the aspiration to freedom makes sense; (2) self-dependent freedom is ultimately empty and ends in nihilism. No wonder that the philosophical thought of the 20th century has been very much engaged with the following problem:

How to go beyond a notion of the self as the subject of a self-dependent will and bring to light its insertion in nature, our own and that which surrounds us; or in other terms, how to situate freedom? (1979, 159)

The answer, Taylor claims, lies in recovering a conception of free activity, which is grounded in the acceptance of a defining situation. Acceptance of our situation does not mean elimination of our human limitations, oppressions, distortions of inner and outer origin; they are not limits to be overcome. They are affirmations of our defining situation as ours and an affirmation of us. The notion of freedom has to be bent in our situation,

which we either endorse or reject, reinterpret or distort. There is no other place in which we can situate our freedom. The way in which we relate to our situation indicates the place in which we can realize our freedom.

From the point of view of my writing, this surprisingly short description of freedom indicates the path to be undertaken in our analysis of Taylor's writing. I suggest a reading of Taylor's further philosophical reflections up to the time of his recent book on secularism as an attempt to situate human freedom in a very concrete situation and time, i.e. modernity. Making the same point from a different perspective, Taylor's intention is to open human minds and hearts, limited by the frameworks of modernity to larger horizons of freedom.

At the end of *Hegel and Modern Society*, Taylor enumerates three different attempts in the 20th century that are situating human freedom (1979, 162-164). Let us say that with these examples Taylor wants to confirm the coherence of his previous statement about freedom. The first one occurs in the phenomenological movement with Husserl, who talks about subjectivity in terms of natural, embodied beings. The second attempt happens with Anglo-Saxon philosophy, where there is a growing interest in tracing the conceptual connections between thoughts, feelings, and intentions and their bodily expressions.

The most important attempt in Taylor's eyes takes place with the philosophy of language, which came to the fore in the 20th century. The function of words is much more than simply pointing us to the world or to our thoughts, where the word-object relationship seems to be unproblematic. Every word is an expression of the sensibility of the human subject. Words and language are reflections of our subjectivity in a concrete

situation. As human sensibility and awareness change, so the meanings of words or language in general change as well. Language is the vehicle for expressing human awareness and consciousness. In this perspective, meaning is not only a property pertaining to each word, but also the activity of discourse as a whole, which is prior to the meaning of individual terms. Such activity can be grasped if we understand it in the context of human concerns, practices, visions, and other “forms of life,” such as culture, art, conversation, rituals, self-revelation, scientific study (1979, 162-163).

These three attempts to situate freedom in modernity have something in common: all are based on Hegel’s principle of embodiment (1979, 164). Subjectivity has to be situated in life, in nature, and in a setting of social practices and institutions. Contemporary understanding of languages reflects Hegel’s principle of embodiment in a very precise way. As we know from the previous discussion, this way of thinking originated with Herder, who introduced the idea that a sign is much more than a description of a certain object; signs, words, language are the vehicles of human consciousness. No wonder that contemporary philosophy of language sees:

...speech as the activity by which we gain a kind of explicit, self-aware consciousness of things which as such is always related to an unreflective experience which precedes it and which it illuminates and hence transforms (1979, 165).

At this point we do not want to go deeper into Taylor’s reflection on language, because we will be discussing it further in my second chapter. Let us simply keep in mind with Taylor that modern reflection on language refers us to the extra-linguistic experience. Description of these experiences is much more than a simple portraying of something; it is the realization of something as well. Modern reflections about language

bring to light the horizons of implicit and unreflected life and experiences, which consequently leads into a transformation of our understanding.

Keeping in mind this conclusion, Taylor's reflection offers new horizons about the new harmony between man, the natural and social worlds, the question of freedom, the importance of being situated, subjectivity, the historical relevance of Hegel and Herder, modern concerns based on self-dependence and self-sufficiency. As we continue, we will see how all of these issues constantly come to the fore of Taylor's reflection in his middle and recent periods.

Chapter Two: Recurring Themes in Taylor's Answering Hegel's Concern

In his initial studies Taylor analyzes Hegel's concern first and then adopts it as his own. In the middle period, Taylor formulates his answer to Hegel's concern in terms of the "making of modern identity" (*Sources of the Self*). His formulation of the answer follows two coordinates of Hegel's question and concern: (1) the human desire to be free, and (2) a search for new ways of expressing the fullness of life (self-realization, self-fulfillment, having meaning). The character of the question about modern identity leads Taylor to examine the subject of this identity, i.e. the human agent, and its main characteristics: the agent's sense of inwardness, inner depth, freedom, individuality, and his sense of being embedded in nature. Since the question refers us to the *modern* identity, Taylor confines his examination to Western cultures, where modernity finds its home.

The constitution of modern identity has remained in the back of Taylor's mind since his initial confrontation with Hegel. In the continuation of this dissertation, I track Taylor's reflection about various constitutive elements of the agent's identity in modernity, as well as of the agent's aspiration for freedom and his search for the fullness of life.

Here in the second chapter, I focus on three recurring themes, which in different ways characterize the entirety of Taylor's writings. I talk about recurring themes because they exceed specific topics of Taylor's reflection and present the coordinates within which Taylor unfolds his reflections. These themes are: (1) moral sources of modern identity, (2) understanding of human agency, (3) importance of human language. These

three themes are so important that Taylor continuously refers to them or makes use of them even though they are not explicitly the main topic of his reflections. If the answer to Hegel's concern is indicated by the goal of Taylor's philosophical structure, these themes represent the foundation of that structure.

While reflecting about these themes and other philosophical questions, Taylor continuously applies the descriptive method as the most appropriate way towards the answer to Hegel's concern. Therefore, let us also talk about his method, which includes historical understanding, polemical proceeding, interpretive study and hermeneutics.

Why these three themes and not others, as for example: the spiritual and religious dimensions of human agency, or multiculturalism as the unavoidable space of the human agency in modernity? The objection is legitimate and requires an explanation. I assume that these three themes represent a kind of common denominator of Taylor's vast philosophical reflection. My assumption is based on the fact that Taylor continuously returns in his writings to the human agency as the subject who is either creating social sciences, or describing the universe with the help of the natural sciences, or looking for new spiritual dimensions, or reestablishing relations with other subjects, or something similar. More than about what is happening, Taylor wants to talk about the subject of this happening; hence the first theme refers us to the human agency.

Independently of what domain of human agency we talk about, the nature of human agency inseparably and always bound us with the question of *good*; therefore, our second theme discusses the moral sources of human agency. There is no other way to describe the moral sources or to talk about humans but by using language. Language is much more than an instrument for communicating an expression which is a disposition to

the human agent; in Taylor's reflection, language presents one of the constitutive factors for identification of both the human agency and of the moral *good*; therefore, our third theme concerns language.

Finally, Taylor is cautious in his reflection, using only now and then strong statements or something like absolute principles. Familiar with Hegel's ontological vision, Taylor prefers a dynamic description of reality, which includes movement, change, inner dynamicity, dialectic, continuous articulation and search for something different. The way in which Taylor comprehends human agency, his moral sources and language, is based on his dynamic comprehension of reality. As a result, the most appropriate way for Taylor's delineation of reality, especially for description of human agency, seems to be a descriptive approach.

Even though only briefly, I have hopefully justified for now my claim about the recurring themes and their qualification. Once familiar with these themes, we will hold in our minds an accurate roadmap of Taylor's philosophical opus. Familiar with the mainland marks of the roadmap, we can move more easily through and grasp more quickly the specific topics of Taylor's investigation, which I will consider more specifically in the third and fourth chapters of this dissertation.

The reconstruction of these themes is based on a descriptive approach as well. My intention at this point is not to critically analyze and argue for or against Taylor's position. The primary goal of the second chapter is to become familiar with certain tools, with which Taylor erects his philosophical building. The reconstruction of these arguments remains to a certain degree a challenging task because Taylor does not always use his terminology consistently. Many times his articles about the same topic represent

shades of or slight variations from or different emphases about the topic. This makes our understanding of his writings additionally different. Even so, I believe to set forth *grosso modo* Taylor's position and expose the major recurring themes of his search for an answer to Hegel's concern.

Among the many articles and various books in which Taylor reflects upon the four cited themes are: *Human Agency and Language* (1985), *Philosophy and the Human Sciences I, II* (1985), *Sources of the Self* (1989), and *Philosophical Arguments* (1995).

2.1 Moral Sources of Modern Identity

When Taylor talks about modern identity, he distinguishes two facets of the question: (1) the subject of modern identity or what does it mean to be a human agent, a person, a self; (2) the good, and morality and the sources of morality. Since we will analyze Taylor's reflection about the human agent in the next subdivision ("Human Agency"), let us focus now for convenience on the second facet of the question, calling attention to the good and moral sources of modern identity.

Our first concern relates to the status of the question in Taylor's writing. With regard to the prevalent normative ethics, Taylor redefines the question of morality in modernity. In continuation, we will check Taylor's description and definition of the good. Taylor derives the meaning of the good from the context or framework in which this good is placed, and from its relation to the human agent. Having defined the good, we will discuss its nature and qualitative distinctions. For the last topic, we will study Taylor's proposal regarding the possible unity of the goods. This seems to be an

unresolved question of modernity, how to integrate the diversity and the incommensurability of goods.

2.1.1 Normative Ethics Lacks Sufficient Foundations for Morality

From the early beginning of his masterpiece, *Source of the Self*, Taylor broadens the notion of morality in what modernity normally describes as the *moral*. Next to the issues such as justice, respect for other people's life, well-being, and dignity, we have to look "at our sense of what underlines our own dignity, or questions about what makes our lives meaningful or fulfilling" (1989, 4). With such an extended definition of *morality*, Taylor clearly indicates the insufficiency of the prevailing mainstream of moral philosophy in the English-speaking world over the last two centuries. This moral philosophy reduces *morality* to moral obligations or theories and principles of right conduct, telling us what we ought to do, but excluding what is good to do or what may be good (1995b, 134-135). For Taylor, this kind of understanding of morality contradicts itself because it does include a certain good. At the same time, such a discourse based on a limited notion of morality lacks precision, which is necessary for an adequate explanation of morality, human nature, and the moral sources of modern identity.⁸

Introducing an extended notion of morality, Taylor not only resists the mainstream of modern moral philosophy, but also criticizes all those theories which favor "a conception of the world freed from anthropocentric conceptions" (1989, 56). By this,

⁸ In his paper "Les Sources de l'identité modern" (1996d), Taylor distinguishes three axes or contexts in which we use the term *identity*: (1) psychological context, in which everybody goes through different stages of his development and moral growth; (2) identity which is something that defines us as individuals; identity is a personal, original, and to some extent invented expression of ourselves; (3) as every individual expresses himself in an original way, so every group contains certain characteristics through which it identifies itself.

Taylor means first of all a naturalistic conception of human being and any moral teaching that is based on naturalism. These theories maintain that we ought to understand human beings in terms contiguous with the modern natural sciences. Therefore, we should include the methods and ontology of the natural sciences as the most appropriate model for our self-understanding, and turn away from the descriptions of things in terms of significance, value, and meaning. Naturalism, and moral thinking based on naturalism, perceives morality simply as a guide to human *action*. This guidance explains to us what is right to do and what the contents of moral obligations are, but leaves aside the explanations about what good means, what the nature of the good life is, what is valuable in itself, or what we should admire or love.⁹ For example, everyone agrees that we have to follow some social obligations like those forbidding killing, violence, lying, and the like, as the functional requirements of any human society. From the naturalist point of view, these rules taken in themselves are enough. In Taylor's perspective, these rules are weak if we do not take them as a part of the background through which we understand these terms, i.e. "murder", "assault," "honesty." We can justify and explain these terms only through perceiving the good behind them, i.e. the sanctity or dignity of human life, of bodily integrity, and of the human aspiration to the truth. Taylor's point is very clear: we should not consider right and good as two properties of the universe which are without any relation to human beings and their lives (1989, 56).

⁹ Taylor interprets Anglo-Saxon moral philosophy as primarily concerned with questions of what we ought to do and to occlude or exclude questions about what it is good to be or what it is good to love. From within this narrow perspective, moral philosophy has two main intellectual tasks: to try to work out exactly what the considerations are which tell us which action is right, and to try to show that these are the right considerations, against other rival candidates (Charles Taylor, "Irish Murdoch and Moral Philosophy" 1996e, 3-4).

Thus a naturalistic approach and any moral code based on naturalism are unacceptable because they produce a vision of the moral life which is insufficient; it neither helps us on our way to “make the best sense” of our lives nor establishes what it means to “make sense” of our lives. If this is the greatest challenge we are looking to achieve, naturalism does not orient us on our way to it. Naturalistic descriptions of the good life in terms of right action do not articulate sufficiently the significance that certain actions or feelings have within our life. They reduce human nature to his rationality and ignore the specificity of the moral subject, as well as the relevance of human embodiment in space and time. Such a reductive approach to morality is, in Taylor’s reflection, typical not only for the naturalist explanation of morality, but also for modern utilitarianism and various derivations of Kant’s moral philosophy, when they assert to have found and based the whole morality on one specific principle, like human pleasure, or the greatest amount of human happiness, or human reason, and from there derive other moral principles.

In Taylor’s perspective, these moral theories have something in common: they share a *procedural conception* of ethics, which he describes as the opposite of *substantive* ethics (1989, 85). By procedural conception, Taylor means the ethics which considers the way of thinking of the human agent, i.e. the procedure of his reasoning, as more important than the outcome of his reasoning. At least apparently, this kind of ethics does not refer us to any external good and does not construct morality in relation to the good. Instead of any substantive good, procedural ethics perceives in *substantive* terms an agent’s rationality, thoughts and feelings. Taylor calls this ontologizing a rational procedure, meaning the reading of the ideal method into the very constitution of the mind

(1993, 202). Consequently, good and correct thinking is not defined by the substantive truth or by a correct vision or by any reference to the good, but by a certain style, method, or process of thought that has to be correct and coherent in itself. Following the same path, moral action should not be defined by what is good, but by the principles of action. Taylor summarizes this position in a few words by saying that the procedural ethics “demands that one proceed on the assumption that metaphysical questions can be decided independently of assumptions about the good” (1993, 338).

This is the point at which Taylor sees the procedural conception of ethics and the theories of right action in contradiction with themselves. At least apparently they claim that they do not refer to any kind of overarching good, but *de facto* they are motivated by the strongest moral ideals, like freedom, altruism, and universalism. These ideals are in modernity so crucial that Taylor calls them “the central moral aspirations of modern culture, the overarching goods which are distinctive to it” (1995b, 151). Let us simply assume with Taylor that there is a general agreement on the importance of these moral aspirations in modernity. Taylor’s assertion is that the advocates of procedural ethics simply deny any relevance for these supreme goods, ideals, and prefer to ignore them, rather than struggling with explanations about the deeper sources of their own thinking. For Taylor, procedural ethics, despite its oversight does hold to a kind of hierarchy of goods in its way of thinking and does refer us to the substantive forms, but struggles to bring this hierarchy and way of thinking into coherence with its own statements. Taylor’s position is very clear at this point: any theory that claims to be right has to base the primary position in reality on a notion of the good. And if this is the case, then the

question about the good is an unavoidable question; otherwise, the discussion collapses into incoherence (1993, 349).

This is Taylor's straight forward critique of modern moral philosophy favoring the procedural ethics. In the third chapter of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor describes this kind of moral philosophy as *ethics of inarticulacy*. This ethics includes inarticulateness about the good, and avoids a deeper analysis. It promulgates as the most important good of our civilization the disengaged, free, rational agency. Taylor's critique of the procedural ethics becomes even sharper in his paper "The Motivations behind a Procedural Ethics": "procedural ethics in the strong sense of the word is a delusion because it itself rests upon a substantive vision of the good" (1993, 358).

From the point of view of my analysis, it is revealing to observe how Taylor interprets the central moral aspirations of modernity. Among these motivations is freedom as well, i.e. one of the two main components of our Hegelian question (the second one is the expressive fullness). In other words, Taylor asks us to grasp the procedural conception of ethics with all its aspirations as an expression of the human desire for freedom and the human search for meaning. Freedom in this case, and in connection to it morality and human dignity, refers us neither to the ordering of our lives according to a certain vision, nor to following some external authority. Freedom simply means to be governed by one's own reasoning procedures. Taylor illustrates this claim by saying that through the achievement of rational control one achieves his own dignity and meaning to his life (1993, 341).

In Taylor's interpretation, such a concept of freedom lacks a direct connection with ethical matters. It is more like a belief or ideal or source of power, which stimulates

our ethical reflection. Freedom in this case belongs to an area that Taylor calls independent metaethics. It presupposes to be independent, but is not absolute. It is true that freedom in this case claims its autonomy and goes beyond ethics, yet it makes sense only within a certain ethical outlook (1993, 342).

In short, normative ethics and other similar reductive foundations of morality provide us insufficient explanations. So our next question becomes the definition of the good, in relation to which Taylor explains his understanding of morality.

2.1.2 Morality is a Part of Larger Horizons or Framework

Previously we talked about Taylor's claim that we should not consider right and good as two properties of the universe without any relation to human beings and their lives (1989, 56). In the next subchapter (2.2) we will address to some extent one of the main characteristics of human agency as embodiment, i.e. living in a concrete time and place. Following Taylor's argumentation, we can arrive at a conclusion that the good can be defined only in relation to human embodiment in a time and space. This relation refers us to a framework or background of information, within which our lives take place and where we can find meaning. Let us elaborate this conclusion and explain its parts.

In order to define the meaning of human life, identity and good, Taylor examines human lives and the good as being inserted in a horizon or context which provides the sources with which humans can connect to their spiritual lives. In the first chapter of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor talks extensively about this horizon in terms of "inescapable frameworks." Initially, he describes these frameworks as the background language in which we set the basis of the moral obligations that we acknowledge. Frameworks in this

case are like the background information about our spiritual nature and predicament which lays behind moral and spiritual intuitions of our time, and in virtue of which we make our moral judgments, intuitions, and reactions (1989, 3-4). Later on Taylor becomes more specific in his definition: “framework” incorporates a crucial set of qualitative distinctions, which makes some action, or mode of life, or mode of feelings incomparably higher, deeper, fuller, purer, more admirable, than others. In each of these cases, there are some ends and goods that are worthy or desirable in a way that cannot be measured in the same way as our ordinary ends, and goods. These goods and ends stand independent of our own desires, inclinations, or choices. They represent standards by which these desires and choices can be judged (1989, 19-20).

When Taylor talks about the human agent at this point, he takes a strong position and uses firm language (1989, 27-28). We as human agents always live in a framework. It is possible that the framework is not articulated sufficiently or is neglected; nonetheless, it is there. Not to have a framework is utterly impossible for us; we have to live within frameworks or horizons because this makes sense to us and provides us with qualitative distinctions, i.e. which goods condition our moral reactions and make sense of our moral acting. Living in a framework is crucial because it makes possible our identity as a human agent. To define who we are and describe our identity, we have to include what is important, good, and valuable to us. We cannot describe human agency without reference to the good. The goods give a sense of wholeness and fullness to the person. What I am as the self, my identity, is essentially defined by what things have significance for me. Therefore, living in a framework is not simply an option but a necessity because the framework is the constitutive factor of human agency, the good and our sense of the self

being so closely interwoven. Taylor insists on this point in order to refute naturalistic descriptions and analyses, based on neutral observations of human agency as an object of the scientific study, with no reference to values and to goods.

As for the second reason why we need a framework, Taylor claims the following: it helps us in the orientating of our lives and in our relation to the good (1989, 33). By orientation Taylor means having a sense of where we stand in relation to what is qualitatively higher, i.e. the good. We cannot take an indifferent position or treat the question of the good as essentially a neutral question. We always have to take a stand in our present lives in relation to the good. This question is inevitably connected with the question about the direction of our lives, i.e. where we are headed from the present situation. And this last question inescapably includes the question of where we are coming from. All three together make the understanding of our lives intriguing. As the best way how to understand our lives, Taylor suggests reading them as an unfolding story, or as a narrative, in which there is a space for questions and a quest for answers (1989, 47). In any case, this narrative has to be inescapably placed in a moral space.

2.1.3 Nature of the Moral Good Revealed through Articulation

In the previous subchapter we talked about the framework as the inescapable place of the goods, and about our relation to the goods. Now we have to answer with Taylor the question about the nature of these goods, or simply what do we mean when we talk about “the good.” As the first possible answer Taylor says that the good is what “makes sense” in people’s lives (1989, 58). Therefore, to explain the meaning of the good, we have to explore how people live their lives; we have to examine the terms by

which people describe the good. These terms cannot be removed from their *explanandum* (for example, the terms like *dignity*, *courage*, *brutality*). There is no way to explain these terms scientifically in a neutral manner. The only way to grasp their meanings is to explore how people live their lives in these terms, and through these terms rediscover the meaning of the good.

Taylor introduces articulation as the key factor in the process of defining the notion of the good or the making of qualitative distinctions. By articulation Taylor refers to laying out what underlies our ethical choices, leanings, intuitions; to exposing of what moves us in our acting, what is clear, important, valuable in our moral life, and what commands our allegiance. “Articulating these distinctions is setting out the moral point of the actions and feelings that our intuitions enjoin on us, or invite us to, or present as admirable” (1989, 78). In other words, articulation is the essential factor because the values of the goods are expressed for us only through some articulation. Without articulation, the distinction of goods would not be recognized and would not require our adherence to them.

Such an articulation of the good is necessary because through it we come closer to the moral sources, and we have a clearer view of the sources (1989, 95-97). Knowing better the moral sources should increase our love and respect for them, and consequently empower us to act morally. However, not every articulation will bring us automatically closer to the moral sources. Taylor measures the quality of articulation by its capacity to empower us and bring us closer to the moral source. A good articulation will expose the moral sources in all their inherent force and capacity to inspire our love, respect, and allegiance. In the light of a qualitative articulation of moral sources, we will be able to

articulate better our feelings and our personal stories so that they will bring us into contact with the source that we have been longing for. The most powerful articulations are those in which the speaker, the formulation, and the act of delivering a message all combine to reveal the good. In this sense, for example, the Gospels continue to have an immense power over us. A special category of articulation of the moral sources represents narratives of the history of a particular nation. They have a tremendous force of attraction and inspiration, because they have the capacity to confer meaning on the lives of people in that culture. Some of these articulations in the form of historical narratives have a remarkably history.

In short, Taylor affirms that the necessity of articulation is the crucial factor for our moral lives. We cannot live without some articulation of our moral sources. Taylor insists on the necessity of articulation because silence and inarticulacy are unhealthy, preventing us from seeing ourselves clearly, and leaving us in confusion without answers to the crucial questions of our lives.

In addition, Taylor points out that articulation of the goods has to be an historical enterprise (1989, 103-104). Our present situation is always defined by its relation to the past. Thus the path to articulation has to be historical as well. Taylor's belief is evident throughout his *Sources of the Self*, where he analyzes extensively the features of modern identity through its historical development. If we want to understand who we are, what our identity looks like, what we mean by the human agent in his present relation to the good, we have to follow the evolution of these terms throughout their history. Being familiar with previous narratives and explanations about the meaning of life and the good, we will be able to better grasp our present situation.

2.1.4 Taylor's Qualitative Distinction of the Good

Not all the goods have equal importance or relevance in our lives. Some of the goods are more important in our moral space, and our relation to these defines our identity in a different sense than our relation with another of the goods. Accordingly, Taylor talks about the qualitative distinction of the goods that defines some as higher and of greater worth or importance than some other goods. Taylor calls these higher-order goods *hypergoods*, and defines them as the goods that are incomparably more important than others and provide the standpoint from which we weigh, judge, and choose other goods (1989, 63). Yet the nature of hypergoods is problematic and controversial, in that these hypergoods inevitably lead to different evaluations of the good, conflicts, and tensions. Nonetheless, these conflicts and tensions are not a sufficient reason for suspending the whole process of articulation of the goods and their hierarchy.

The hierarchy of the goods is not an absolute and universally accepted structure. So the question becomes how can we establish the hierarchy of hypergoods and how can we rank them. As a solution, Taylor refers to the principle of the best possible account, claiming that the hypergoods are the goods that offer us the best possible explanation of human life (1989, 69). There are two criteria which make an explanation the best possible explanation. The first criterion: the explanation has to include those terms that have meaning in our lives, i.e. these terms have to refer us to what is real for us, what gives us a sense of our lives, and a fullness of being as a person. The second criterion: the explanation has to present these goods in a way that they will challenge us, i.e. these goods should help us to grow from a normal condition of our life to a higher condition in

which we recognize that such goods have an incomparably greater dignity and value than any others. Acceptance and love of these higher goods should help us in reevaluating our understanding, and consequently in changing our lives.

Using a somewhat different terminology, Taylor describes the same principle in his article “Leading a Life,” in which he speaks of using a “difference of weight” (1997, 176). In any given domain, there are issues that are of great importance and those that are more peripheral. Let us apply this logic to our life. If we take our life as a whole and *weight* the different goods, we will find out that certain of the goods are preeminent while other goods can be sacrificed. So we have to evaluate from context to context, as to what is the matter at stake and what is the right action in that particular case. As the solution to finding out the right action, Taylor refers us to Aristotle’s practical wisdom (*Ethics IV*), that he finds as a helpful tool in our dilemmas of weighting the different goods. Talking about practical wisdom or reason, Taylor does not claim that practical reason has to establish goods by arguing, i.e. by convincing anybody and everybody, no matter where they start from or where they stand in their moral views and sensibility. By arguing, Taylor means that we have to start our confrontation with others not by abstracting but “by drawing on the full range of our moral sense of things” (1994c, 207). By this, Taylor means that our arguments and confrontations must be directed at a particular position and sensibility in which the human agents find themselves. In other words, our argumentation has to be turned *ad hominem* and not to some abstract principle. No wonder that Taylor opposes any kind of general and universally valid solution, applicable to every situation and providing an obligatory course of action.

Surprisingly, Taylor does not provide any *criterion* for how to accept and evaluate somebody's moral position. What Taylor does suggest very cautiously is the establishing of the best possible account, which should not be based on the rightness of an action, but "on the inescapability of some understanding of good." What is inescapable in a particular case is that we have to take some hierarchy of the goods into serious consideration. Our identity depends on this hierarchy of the goods. Once we identify these goods, we can attempt to include them in the best possible account or present them as a solution to eventual conflicts (1994, 207). Such a discovery as to what the right solution is requires from us again the capacity to evaluate the particular situation. Evaluation in this case is based on our capacity of articulation, where articulation refers us to the identification of different goods in our life and to the correspondent judgment of them. Such articulation will help us to fit together a variety of goods in our unfolding of the whole life and help us to direct different tensions in our life to some degree in one direction (1997, 178-180).

Taylor calls this whole proceeding "reasoning in transitions," the aim of which is to establish certain positions as being superior to others (1989, 72). They are superior because they include fewer errors and offer us greater clarity; they convince us and give us a better reading of our moral experience. They are superior because we feel moved by what is good and infinitely valuable in these accounts. With the best possible account, we have the sense that we have a better grasp of the situation and therefore will accept this account as reasonable and good. Nonetheless, Taylor assures us that the process of articulation will remain an unending process, in which the question about the meaning of a certain good or the question about the point of a certain practice remains open. More

important than a final definition or articulation of the good is our capacity to act morally in every particular situation. Aristotle's teaching about *phronēsis* thus remains the most profitable suggestion, teaching us how to grasp the good and how to act morally in varying circumstances (1993, 360).

In making distinctions between goods and introducing practical wisdom as the best solution to acting morally, Taylor specifies that not all goods or qualitative distinctions can be defined by comparing the actions or goods among themselves. There is another category of goods, which Taylor calls the "constitutive goods" (1989, 92). These are the goods in a fuller sense of the word, because they are good in themselves. Taylor calls them constitutive "because whatever is defined at this level is what constitutes our life goods as such" (1997, 173).

Because of our relation to these goods, our actions or aspirations become good; these goods constitute the goodness of our actions. In other words, they are the moral source of our action, meaning that the love of these goods empowers us to act in a moral way. For example, in Plato's cosmology, the constitutive good is presented as the order of being, or the principle of the Good. Using these images, the Good is like the sun, in the light of which we can see things clearly. For Christians like Augustine, it was natural to see God as occupying the place of Plato's idea of the Good. So he saw God as the moral source of human acting. Even though Kant does not talk about the constitutive goods existing outside the moral agent, he recognizes that there is something that the contemplation of which commands our respect and in return empowers us in our acting. In short, a constitutive good can show itself as such by its capacity to empower us morally.

Taylor's definition of the constitutive goods becomes clearer in his paper "Reply to Braybrooke and de Sousa," where he responds to the commentators on his *Sources of the Self*. Here he says that the constitutive goods are such not because of their *grounding* rule, i.e. giving a reason for these goods, but because of (1) their clarifying and making more vivid what is involved in a certain goal of life as good, and (2) empowering the agent by a more potent sense of the constitutive good as a source (1994b). In other words, we cannot establish the goods in a way that our argumentation will convince everyone, no matter where they start from in their moral views. Taylor believes that the *grounding* principle as the final basis of our moral lives goes beyond ontology. Without saying it explicitly, Taylor indicates that the final basis is what we believe in and what we accept as the final basis. In our case, the final basis would be our presupposition and understanding of good in the agent's moral horizon.

2.1.5 Goods are Different but always Intrinsically Connected with the Human Agent

When we talk about the good, the nature of the good, the agent's moral space or framework, articulation and evaluation of the good, we raise the essential questions of the human agent. They are essential because with these questions we touch what matters for us. When we talk about the good we measure the worth, or weight, or substance of our lives; we talk about what underlies our ethical choices, leanings, intuitions. With the good we can define our spiritual orientation. In Taylor's words, when we talk about the good, we talk about:

...one of the most basic aspirations of human beings, the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value (1989, 42).

In short, we cannot talk about the good or qualitative distinctions, without talking about the human agent's identity, and the meaning of his human life. Little wonder that Taylor from the beginning rejects naturalism, or the ethics of obligatory actions, or any moral position which tends to describe moral acting in external, universal terms, without taking into consideration qualitative distinctions of goods and the agent's insertion in particular moral space.¹⁰

It is true that certain goods depend on the existence of a certain cultural form in which these goods make sense for the humans involved. Does it mean that they are completely relative to a particular culture or society and that there is no way for us to understand and recognize the goods of another society as goods-for-everyone? Does Taylor in his writings favor the position of moral relativism? Confronting these challenges, Taylor distinguishes two elements: (1) the question about the universality of the terms that are necessary for describing our lives, and (2) the question about the commensurability of the good. On the first challenge Taylor answers that human reality cannot be understood in terms that are appropriate for the natural sciences, which claim to be universal and unequivocal in their application (1989, 58). The terms which make sense in our lives do not have universal and unequivocal meaning in every culture or human situation in the same way as do terms in the natural sciences. We use a certain term because it makes the best sense to us, and we will use it until we replace it with more precise substitutes that makes better sense. In the same way, we explain a certain human situation with an account that makes sense to us, and we keep this account until

¹⁰ ...we can see that the fullness of ethical life involves not just doing, but also being; and not just these two but also loving (which is shorthand here for being moved by, being inspired by) what is constitutively good. It is a drastic reduction to think that we can capture the moral by focusing only on obligated action, as though it were of no ethical moment what you are and what you love. These are the essences of ethical life (1996e, 15).

we find a better one, i.e. a more meaningful account. In Taylor's terminology, this illustrates the principle of the best account. People in cultures foreign to our own follow the same principles. In their search for the best possible account they take the same steps as we do. What is universal and common to both of us is the search for meaning, but the way we express and interpret it might remain different.

Talking about the commensurability of the goods, Taylor becomes very cautious with his claims, at least in his *Sources of the Self* (1989, 61-62). More explicit are his writings in "Leading a Life," where he elaborates "a plausible view of moral reasoning that reflects both its inescapable diversity and its continuing struggle for unity" of different goods (1997, 171). At least apparently, the question of unity seems to be more generally acceptable because modern ethical thinking tends to emphasize the unity of the good. For example, utilitarianism, ethical thinking based on the material sciences, and other different attempts at universalization, argue that there is only one important value or principle or purpose in human life, and that is the quest for happiness, or benevolence, or justice, or trying to avoid suffering. The rest should be subordinated to this important value or principle, which allows us to have a unity or hierarchy of the good.

A greater challenge becomes the question about the diversity of the goods, because here we talk about the crucial features of the ethical life of an agent, residing in a culture different from ours. How can we define what is really important in his life, or what does it mean for him to have a *good life* in his particular culture? Is it possible for us to grasp the meaning of *good life* in a culture foreign to us? Taylor argues that this is possible but not automatic or without a struggle. We already touched on Taylor's position on this point when we talked about the framework, qualitative distinctions of the good,

and the weighting of different goods, in making sense in our lives. With the same logic but using a different terminology Taylor argues in favor of the necessity to acknowledge a diversity of the good (1997, 171-175). The same principles which we apply to the search for the best good for ourselves, should be applied to the search for the good for other people. In this way, we can identify what is really important for them, what are their life goods, what is the hierarchy of goods for them, what are their constitutive goods, as well as the framework or larger horizon that forms their background context. Through this process we should be able to define the crucial features of the ethical life of an agent operating in a culture different from our own.

A total understanding of good across cultures seems to be a very difficult, if not an untenable task. Taylor's understanding is that transition of the good across cultures includes a certain gain or loss in our understanding. Transition of goods will increase our sensibility and capacity for critical examination of our own position. At the same time, it will prevent us from extending our position into a universally valid position. At the same time, transition of goods does not assure us a complete understanding of the goods of other people. Inevitably, in the face of certain goods of others we will remain unable to explain and defend them. In the same way, our sense of our goods will make little or no sense to other cultures. But this should not be taken as the main conclusion of Taylor's writing about the commensurability of the goods. Taylor's point is that a certain level of commensurability can be attained. The real question is how far we want to extend our understanding of the goods of others, without a priori conclusions and statements about their goods (1989, 62).

Talking about the hypergoods, and weighing the process of distinguishing and articulating different goods, Taylor reminds us of the complexity of the whole question, which nonetheless must be attended because it is an important issue for us as human beings. Through weighing, evaluation, and articulation, we express who we are as human beings or what kind of human beings we would like to become in relation to the world. This is an inescapable question for everyone. Consequently, the main question should not be how to establish the hierarchy of goods or how to resolve the challenge of the incommensurability of the goods. Rather, as Taylor suggests, we should take a different path, i.e. going beyond the incommensurability of the good to find a way toward the complementarity of the goods in our life. More important than the ranking of the goods is our living the goods, which means, a concrete realization of the goods in our lives. In this way we can resolve the problem of plurality of the goods without denying it.

Again, modern philosophy based on moral obligation or universalization is not able to provide sufficient instruments to meet this challenge. Nonetheless, Taylor insists that we should talk about the diversity and plurality of the goods, because there is a very rich but forgotten resource at our disposal in modernity, i.e. our aspiration to oneness. This aspiration can help us to shape our lives and to find a place for different goods together (1997, 182-184). At the end of the article “Philosophical Reflections on Caring Practices,” Taylor refines this aspect of modernity that will shape our lives through our contacts with other people:

The ecumenical challenge is to recognize that we must live with, work with, and be in relative commerce with people from these different positions. Going further, we need to learn to feel and appreciate the force of moral sources we do not share. [...] What we need in place of this spiritual or moral self-centeredness is the capacity to sense the power of

the other's view, recognizing that it is not one's own and probably never will be (1994, 185).

In replying to commentators to his *Sources of the Self*, Taylor expresses the same view. Modernity tends to oversimplify and judge ethics or spiritual life *en bloc*, placing the goods in conflict. What we need is a new interpretation, or creation of a better context in which these goods, despite their incommensurability, can exist peacefully together (1994c, 205).

To summarize this subchapter, we have asked what the moral sources of modern identity are. Rather than providing a short answer, Taylor suggests certain criteria for arriving at a better understanding of the moral sources. The most important feature of this inquiry is the identification of what makes for meaning in our life. Yet Taylor does not give us a clear answer on this question either; he refers us to some criteria (framework, articulation of the goods, qualitative distinctions of the goods, and their connection with the agent's life), which have to be taken into consideration. Taylor remains firm on one point: both the meaning of life and the good as such have to always be bound as closely as possible to the human agent, his life, and his embodiment in space and time. There is a reciprocal link between the human agent and the good, and this link characterizes substantially the nature of the human agent as well as of the good. In other words, the nature of the human agent is essentially conditioned by the notion of the good; no wonder that Taylor rejects any conception of morality that is divorced from anthropocentric notions.

2.2 Human Agency

The second recurring theme in Taylor's philosophical writings is *human agency*. Independently of where he begins his topic of reflection, sooner or later he touches on the crucial point which exposes the human agent as his primary concern. As a very broad summary of his entire philosophy, one might claim that Taylor repeatedly frames the human agency as a being in constant search of freedom, depth, richness and meaning in his life. Applying this logic to the variety of topics about which Taylor reflects, we can see how this agency is looking for an answer to Hegel's question (in his books: *Hegel and Hegel and Modern Society*); is in search of identity (*Sources of the Self*); claims to have an objective and neutral view of the world (*Philosophy and the Human Sciences*); struggles to find meaning in a secularized world (*A Secular Age*); and looks for new ways of living together in the globalizing world (*Multiculturalism*). The core of his philosophy unvaryingly refers us *ad hominem*. It would be too much of a simplification to hold that Taylor's philosophy is essentially anthropological, and yet the human person remains at the center of his work.

In this next section, let us start first with a general definition of human agency as Taylor delineates it. Then we will focus on particular features of human agency: (1) the agent as a self-interpreting animal, (2) necessity of embodiment of the human agency, and (3) the agent as a being in constant search of freedom. With the last feature, Taylor opposes the naturalistic conception of the human agent as inadequate because it does not refer us to the essential part of human agent, i.e. his worth. Nonetheless, Taylor holds naturalism and those conceptions of the human agent based on modern social sciences as

very important ones, because they implicitly reflect the agent's longing for freedom and for new expressions of himself, and consequently for meaning in his life.

2.2.1 Taylor's Description of Human Agent

Using a very generalized vocabulary, Taylor argues that any understanding of our own agency, which varies over history, "is closely connected to our understanding of our moral and spiritual predicament, and of our moral existence" ("Précis of Sources of the Self", 1994). Consequently Taylor rejects the possibility of a unanimous and universally applicable definition of the meaning of the human agency. More concisely, Taylor reflects in his article "The Person," where he first delineates what he calls the agent, and immediately after that specifies the contents of the human agent (1985c, 257-262). To be an agent means to be one who affirms purposes and goals, goes after them and attains them. In distinction to the inanimate agent, the animate agent has consciousness, i.e. he is aware of himself. As a conscious being, the human agent is not only aware of his purposes and goals, but of his desires, aspirations, feelings, aversions, and emotions as well. All these have to be intrinsic to the agent, which means they have an intrinsic significance for the agent. They represent different ways in which things have significance for the agent.

As the main characteristic of the human agent, Taylor emphasizes the agent's constant search for significance, i.e. depth, richness and meaning to his life. In other words, a human agent can be defined as a being to whom things matter. This search presupposes in the human agent the sense of inwardness, i.e. the sense of himself as a

being with inner depths, the sense of freedom, individuality, and the sense of being embedded in nature. The human agent as being in a space of moral issues is something genuinely essential for human nature, and hence universal.

This general but very dense description of human agency as Taylor proposes it requires further and deeper analysis. In this subchapter, I will examine some criteria for our analysis: the first and the second order desires, strong and weak evaluation, the agent's responsibility and the importance of self-reflection.

The distinction between the first-order and second-order desires is not Taylor's original idea; he borrows it from H. Frankfurt's paper "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" (1985, 15-20). The first-order desires are the ones with which we continuously deal in our daily life (to eat now or later, to take beef or pork, to vacations in the north or south, and so on). Basically in every moment of our life, we have to make choices between different first-order desires. Why we chose a certain thing and not something else (why now and not later, why beef and not pork, why the north and not the south), depends on the second-order desires or motivations, which are beyond our immediate desires. Such a distinction between these two orders, as well as the distinction between different desires, is in a certain sense a very theoretical distinction because in daily life people normally do not pay much attention to such a distinction. The proposed distinction is often not feasible because human desires and their responding actions are simply too complex to find their place within the proposed categories. Taylor is aware of this inadequacy of categories; nonetheless, he introduces the distinction in order to help us develop a better and deeper understanding of the human agent and his actions.

In his article “What is Human Agency?” Taylor repeatedly maintains that the key feature of human agency is the capacity for second-order desires, i.e. the capacity to evaluate and weigh desires (1985, 15; 22-23; 27; 42). Other features (the first-order desires, the agent’s ability to evaluate, strong or weak evaluation) are intrinsically interconnected with this first one. This capacity is crucial because in experiencing different desires and motives, humans are able to make choices among their desires. Some animals also possess this capacity for second-order desires. What is distinctively human is the power of evaluation of these desires, to be able to see a desire more or less desirable. This power of evaluation includes the capacity for reflective self-evaluation, a capacity which does not appear in other species but solely in humans.

In addition to the first and the second order desires, Taylor distinguishes between the weak and strong evaluation of desires and motivations behind these desires, on which depends one’s choice. Such a distinction between two kinds of evaluation is something more than a simple separation between quantitative and qualitative evaluation, or between the presence and absence of second-order desire. “It concerns rather whether desires are distinguished as to worth” (1985, 18).

With the weak evaluation, we are primarily concerned about the outcomes of our desires (more or less fun, better or worse value, our preferences). In Taylor’s logic, our evaluations are weak when they are based solely on desire, and not on a qualitative distinction of *the worth*, which is the case for the strong evaluation. In the weak evaluation, something *good* is seen as a sufficient reason for its being desired. Alternative desires are set aside because of their contingent incompatibility with the more desired

alternative. Taylor maintains that utilitarianism is based essentially on this kind of evaluation.

In the strong evaluation, the criterion of *good* is not, as it is in the weak evaluation, a sufficient criterion; the same *good* and its contingent action have to be inserted into a broader context. So the multitude of desires, and their incompatibility and non-contingency cannot be the main criteria for choosing, where the first act makes impossible the second act (i.e., if I eat now, I cannot go swimming later). With the strong evaluation, we go beyond the incompatibility of desires and rather base our choice on the values behind the desire. Thus, our choice is not based in terms of alternative and contrasting desires (eating vs. swimming), but from the point of view of the desirability of the acting (eating as such is good, swimming is good too). In other words, we make our choices in a non-contrasting way. We do not reject certain desires because of their contingent or circumstantial conflict with other goals. We accept them because they are good. The valued thought is understood and considered not as dependent on the valuer's choice or desire or need, but as worthy in itself.

To additionally emphasize the features of the human agent, and in the particular way the relevance of the strong evaluation, Taylor introduces the notion of responsibility (1985, 28-33): the agent is responsible for what he does. This characteristic is unique to humans and absent to animals. Both the act of evaluation in general and the evaluation of the second-order desires in particular, fall under the agent's responsibility. The agent's capacity for strong evaluation and his responsibility are inherently connected. Both together, responsibility and strong evaluation, refer us to something we do more or less consciously, and perform continuously in our daily life. If we take the act of evaluation as

an act of freedom, then it follows that we are responsible for actualizing our freedom as well. Following the same logic, the agent's recognition of what constitutes the first-order and second-order desires is also his responsibility.

However, Taylor does not propose to take the term *responsibility* in isolation, without taking into account some other components: human will, the human capacity for making choices, values, the agent's past experiences, his relation with the context into which he is inserted, and the peculiar understanding of the moral complexity of man (being honest, courageous, and generous might have different meanings in different cultures). The way in which we feel our responsibility and how we perform the act of evaluation are not two completely neutral acts taken out of their correlated context. They are always within time and space related ambiently, with values, moral predicaments, past experiences, language, social structures, collective imaginations, playing a part. Putting aside specificity of a context and claiming neutrality of such an act, is impossible. There is no need to continue our analysis of responsibility as Taylor understands it, because he proposes to adopt here the same approach we saw in the previous subchapter, when we talked about morality as part of a larger horizon and framework, and about the necessity of articulation.

The distinction between the weak and strong evaluation and analysis of an agent's responsibility are not the main points of Taylor's argumentation at this point, but only individual steps on the way to deeper comprehension and understanding of the human agent. Every evaluation basically reflects who we are as human agents.

The point of introducing the distinction between strong and weak evaluation is to contrast the different kinds of self that each involves. [...] A subject who only evaluates weakly – that is, makes decisions like that of eating now or later, taking a holiday in the north or in the south – such a

subject we might call a simple weigher of alternatives. And the other, who deploys a language of evaluative contrasts ranging over desires, we might call a strong evaluator (1985, 23).

Both the weak and the strong evaluators are expressing something beyond their articulations of preferences: they are delineating the quality of life they desire, and the kind of being they are or want to be. The strong evaluation goes deeper and touches in a profound way the principles on which the agent bases his acting, and through that the quality of his life. The strong evaluation brings out something essential for our reflecting about the human agent (1985, 26). The strong evaluator uses language that includes something higher than calculation of desires plus consequences; it refers to the “depth,” “higher,” “worth.” Its articulation is more complex, articulated and deeper than the simple evaluator, who chooses between alternatives and preferences. Its evaluation is intrinsically connected with the good, as we saw in the subchapter (2.1.5.), where we talked about the connection between goods and human agency.

As we can see, the mentioned features (the first and the second order desires, strong and weak evaluation, and responsibility) are in Taylor’s reflection intrinsically connected and build up a complex intellectual process of human evaluation and articulation. Taylor points to the fact that our reflection is a very bold venture, revealing to us the complexity of appropriate or inappropriate understanding of the human agent. Whatever notion of human agent we assume, and the way in which we assume it, reveals to us something about human agents and about our identity that goes beyond the strict notion of human agent. “Our identity is therefore defined by certain evaluations which are inseparable from ourselves as agents” (1985, 34). The way we perceive ourselves as human agents incorporates our seeing ourselves against the background of things we

recognize as of categorical or unconditioned or higher importance or worth, or things which lack these characteristics. Even in the case when we talk about radical moral choices, i.e. the choice among two apparently equal and morally equivalent possibilities, Taylor claims that we apply the same logic.¹¹

Therefore, Taylor's writing is not an epistemological reflection about how and what we know of human agency; it is rather a metaphysical, anthropological and ontological reflection about the human agent, his identity, self-perception, desirable characteristics, and his search for a better life. Taylor demands something more than a general and neutral description or interpretation of human agency that fails to provide us with sufficient principles for an adequate description of human agency. However, it would prove inadequate because it does not encompass an agent's particularities, his uniqueness, identity, desirable characteristics, and qualitative life. Even in this case Taylor is not dogmatic in his reflection, simply indicating the path and marks to be followed in our search for a more meaningful interpretation.

The question at issue concerns which is the truer, more authentic, more illusion-free interpretation, and which on the other hand involves a distortion of the meanings things have for me. Resolving this issue is restoring commensurability [of different meanings, desires, and goods] (1985, 27).

Hence, Taylor perceives the agent as involved in a struggle to find the best interpretation of who he is, how he is to seek a better life and try to unify different desires, goods and meanings in his life. This struggle is not something unusual or an

¹¹ When we have to choose between two apparently equal and morally equivalent possibilities, we make our choice not on the basis of neutral and impartial principles, but in "good faith" that the selected option presents a higher and better option, reflecting more honest, courageous, self-clairvoyant, higher mode of life. Again, the radical moral choice is something inescapably connected with the concept of the agent and his experience, with the notion of the self and with the notion of his identity (1985, 29-33).

additional burden affecting the nature of the human agent; it represents the essential part of what we are as humans. If properly done, such reflection about the human agent leads us to a deeper and more authentic understanding of who we are. Taylor suggests, therefore, that we understand self-interpretation as the condition for an adequate understanding of who we are. The way in which we agents participate in the process defines our understanding of who we are. In the next subchapter we will talk about the human agent as a self-interpreting animal.

For Taylor, there is no other way than to understand human agency as being continuously in the process of self-evaluation, which includes an ongoing articulation of how we understand ourselves and our identity (1985, 35-37). It leads us from one particular evaluation to the next, in which the present articulation of our sense of what is worthy, or higher, or more integrated, or more illusion-free and fulfilling, gains additional extensions and horizons for a future evaluation. In this struggling articulation-process, we pass from what is inchoate, confused, badly or insufficiently formulated, to something that has decisive importance for us and to which we will strive to be more faithful. In this struggle of interpretation and evaluation-process, we shape our senses of what we desire to be or what we hold to be important, which correspondingly changes our life.

As we humans become aware of this process, we will develop a different self-perception that will consequently lead us to different experiences of the world and ourselves. Self-interpretation is partially a constitutive element of our experience. Thus, our descriptions and experiences are bound together through a constitutive relation that admits causal influences in both directions:

It [constitutive relation] can sometimes allow us to alter experience by coming to fresh insight; but more fundamentally it circumscribes insight through the deeply embedded shape of experience for us (1985, 37).

Our descriptions and evaluations are neither fully independent nor simply arbitrary. They are means of opening to the human agent the object of his articulation in a new way. Such an opening represents a new form of how the articulating subject expresses himself. This process does not stop at this point. The new expression of the human agent as an articulating subject is interconnected again with his responsibility, identity, and the horizons of his evaluation; briefly, it creates a more essential evaluation. This happens not only in the case of “amelioration” of evaluation; the “deterioration” has the same power. In short: presupposing that there is a certain degree of openness and willingness to be engaged in evaluation, each evaluation leads to another evaluation, whose results will open the door for another re-evaluation. Each evaluation or re-evaluation reveals something profound about the agent doing the evaluations:

This radical evaluation is a deep reflection, and a self-reflection in a special sense: it is a reflection about the self, its most fundamental issues, and a reflection which engages the self most wholly and deeply (1985, 42).

Hopefully, we can now easily assimilate Taylor’s initial claims about the crucial features of human agency: the capacity for the second-order desires, for evaluation of those desires, for taking responsibility for carrying out the evaluation about actively participating in the process of evaluation.

2.2.2 Human Agents as Self-Interpreting Animals

In the previous subchapter we saw how Taylor considers interpretation as the constitutive factor in the identity-building process of the human agent. Taylor

summarizes his position saying *human beings are self-interpreting animals* (1985, 45). This means that *hermeneutics* or interpretation becomes a necessary condition for the normal existence of the human agent in his fullness.

With this statement Taylor wants to place himself in that stream of contemporary Western philosophy that preferentially focuses on the human being, and in which Heidegger represents the leading figure (“Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger”, 1993). Taylor would like to belong to that group of the post-Heideggerian practitioners of hermeneutics, who affirm that self-interpretation constitutes the nature of human beings. So in the introduction to his book *Human Agency and Language*, Taylor writes explicitly that human beings exist only in self-interpretation, and absolutely cannot be understood without the background of distinctions of worth (1985, 3).

This stream of modern philosophy holds *conception of man, self-interpretation, and human history* as key-concepts. These concepts have different connotations for different thinkers. Nonetheless, the common denominator among them is the claim that these concepts, and in a particular way the agent’s self-interpretation, are a matter of hermeneutics. With this claim they challenge the leading principle of modern thought, which hold clarity and objectivity as the paradigm. These two criteria, clarity and objectivity, represent the main criteria of scientific thought that originated in the scientific revolution of the 17th century with Descartes as its founder. The following philosophers: Heidegger, Husserl, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty and others, opposed the idea of applying these principles to the field of human sciences. Taylor wants to be part of this current of thought, arguing that self-interpretation is one of the essential features of human existence and one of the main characteristics for construction of human identity.

Human life and its identity are too rich and complex to be defined with the same clearness and objectivity as material objects are.

As a way of explaining his position, Taylor introduces a distinction between the primary and secondary qualities (1985, 46-59). Primary qualities are those which intrinsically belong to an object. Secondary qualities are the ones that are by their nature subjective, i.e., we perceive them only through our experience of them. These qualities are variables and not susceptible to inter-subjective validation (for example, the water that feels cold to me might feel warm to you). We perceive them through our organs of sensibility, which means that they depend on our sensibility. Additionally, they depend on our judgments, expectations, emotions, feelings, language, values, and our past experiences. The mode wherein we perceive them expresses the mode by which we become aware of our situation. Therefore, it is difficult to claim that they are an independent part of the furniture of things in the same way as the primary qualities are. We cannot describe them as neutral, indifferent, or irrelevant to us; they include something that we import into a particular situation. As Taylor says:

By “import” I mean a way in which something can be relevant or of importance to the desires or purposes or aspirations or feelings of a subject; or otherwise put, a property of something whereby it is a matter of non-indifference to a subject (1985, 48).

The way that we experience secondary qualities of an object or how we feel in a particular situation depends on our embodiment as human agents, where embodiment involves experiencing our situation as the grounds for the experience of the secondary qualities. I will discuss the importance of embodiment in the next subchapter. Secondary qualities are ontologically placed in our sensibility and experiencing of things, from

which we deduce our ideas, impressions, principles, all the necessary elements of successive experiencing, interpretations and philosophical investigations.

If we should overlook the secondary qualities, especially when we talk about secondary qualities of the human being or human action, and claim that we are taking into consideration exclusively primary qualities, we deal with human actions in a very reductive way. We are reducing human nature, human experiences, and their meanings to physical, chemical, material terminology and comprehension. The human agent becomes nothing else but another material object of scientific research. This is unacceptable in Taylor's view because so-called *objective explications* are basically our import on the analyzed object, or human being in this particular case.

Despite the importance of this distinction between two groups of qualities, Taylor acknowledges its imprecision: a strict distinction between two groups of qualities is problematic, incoherent, and impossible. In order to have an experience, we always need an object of the experience; therefore, the objective and subjective levels of experience are always intermingled. So, in a certain sense, the distinction between objective and subjective levels is artificial and misleading. Therefore, it should be seen for what it is, simply an auxiliary tool for trying to deal with the problematic. Taylor introduces it in order to claim that the standards of clarity and objectivity in the conception of men-as-self-interpreting animals cannot be the same as they are in the natural sciences.

... the claim is that our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality, nor as an epiphenomenon, which can be by-passed in our understanding of reality (1985, 47).

Rejecting again any approach to the human agency which is based on the principles of the natural sciences, and keeping in mind the complexity of the structure of

the human agent, Taylor integrates the principles of interpretation, self-interpretation, and subjectivity into his interpretation of the human agent. Thus he creates larger frameworks within which human sciences, especially social and political sciences, find their appropriate place and a justification of their existence. At the same time, those questions which have not found sufficient answers in frameworks based on the philosophy of Descartes, or foundationalism, or other similar schools, find more space within these new frameworks of interpretation.

Saying this, Taylor comes to the point of his concern, which is the relationship between the object of research and the subject doing this research. As we have seen, it is easy to slip into a reductionist account of reality, where there is no proper or sufficient place for human motivations, and for other physiological and psychological states underlying human experiences. The reductionist account might even succeed up to a certain point and with some unease include in its account, for example, the experience of feeling shameful, even though the same experience profoundly conditions the self-perception of any human agent and his perception of the context in which he is placed. Personal perceptions and the interpretation of being shameful depend immensely on what the common understanding of this experience means in the larger context of the subject. To feel shame always refers to a certain understanding of human dignity, worth, self-perception, and perception of oneself in other people's eyes, which again transcends the domain of a single subject and varies from one context to another.

At this point, Taylor introduces the subject-referring properties: "These are the properties which can only exist in a world in which there are subjects of experience, because of concern in some way for the life of the subject *qua* subject" (1985, 54a).

Subjects are who they are through recognition and articulation of the import they make as subjects. This import depends again on the previous understanding which they have as subjects. The subject-referring properties include also the circumstances of the subject in all its breadth, i.e. they include the place of the subject's embodiment. They are larger than the secondary qualities of the object, through which the subject describes his perception of an object.

Subject-referring properties involve very complex structures, including factors such as human inspirations, motivations, the desire for integrity, wholeness, moral obligation, fulfillment, flourishing, emotions, joys, anxieties, feelings, and the like. Each of these refers us to other factors and meanings, and is constantly liable to further interpretations, which consequently lead us to different perceptions of the human agent. Taylor says that all these factors offer us a potential insight into our lives as subjects, and incorporate a sense of what is important to us *qua subjects*, or what *we* value, or what matters to *us*. So Taylor talks about subject-referring feelings, which take into account the sense of what it is to be human, that is, of what matters to us as human subjects (1985, 60). This is much more than an objective or subjective way of perceiving or understanding human reality. Surprisingly, the subject-referring properties do not find any place in the objectivist's view of the world.

The point of Taylor's reflection here is the fact that subject-referring feelings open us to the domain of what it is to be human and to the awareness of the human good. These feelings incorporate a deeper, more adequate sense of the moral predicament to which we are exposed and at which we are challenged to take a stance. The terms such as *to be human* and *the awareness of the human good*, therefore, stir in us a need for a new

interpretation, i.e. a new articulation of our situation and a new understanding of our identity. The new articulation and understanding implicitly include some criteria of evaluation, which re-open the question of their validity. We find that certain articulations and goods are false and illusory, while others are of a higher level.

All of this process would be impossible without language, the essential part of every articulation. Our sense of dignity, shame, moral remorse, and other emotions are all shaped by language. Language makes possible our insight, articulates our feelings, makes them clearer and more defined. We will talk extensively about language in the next subchapter. For now, let us simply assume its importance, in order to understand Taylor's claim that man is a self-interpreting animal. The way that we understand ourselves conditions our way of being. Taylor expresses this briefly by saying that: "*Verstehen* is a *Seinsmodus*. We are language animals, we are stuck with language, as it were" (1985, 72).

To sum up this section, let us say with Taylor that interpretation is crucial for a deeper understanding of the human agency. Every interpretation at the same time closes and re-opens the circle of interpretation of our search for meaning. Taylor describes the human agent and his life as incapable of existence without interpretation, interpretation being the constitutive element of the agent's life. Interpretation in this case has a similar role to that of the articulation we talked about in the previous section on moral sources. Interpretation, like articulation shapes and validates our feelings, motivations, aspirations, and attempts to clarify what the imports mean for us. Interpretation and aspiration open us to the domain of what it is to be human. Man is a self-interpreting animal, for the

interpretation is not an optional extra, or contingent fact, but an essential part of what we understand and recognize as a full human existence (1985, 65).

Taylor summarizes his claim about man as a self-interpreting animal by saying:

...he [man] cannot be understood simply as an object among objects, for his life incorporates an interpretation, an expression of what cannot exist unexpressed, because the self that is to be interpreted is essentially that of a being who self-interprets (1985, 75).

At various points, I have pointed out that Taylor in his reflection refers to embodiment as one of the conditions for an adequate understanding of the human agency. Let us now analyze Taylor's writings on this point.

2.2.3 Necessity of Agent's Embodiment

Taylor derives the concept of the subject as an embodied agency out of modern phenomenology, especially from Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger ("Embodied Agency", 1989; "Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger", 1993; "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments", 1995a). The concept of the subject as embodied agent means that it is essential for the subject to be embodied in the world and engaged with the world. It is essential because the subject's experiences and thoughts are always those of embodied beings.

The subject is essentially embodied. And by this we mean not just that subjects in fact are embodied, or that their being subjects is causally dependent on certain bodily features; but rather that their manner of being as subjects is in essential respects that of embodied agents (1989, 3).

Therefore, embodied includes what refers us to our nature as subjects. To explain this, Taylor refers to the theory of Merleau-Ponty, who argues the thesis of embodied

agency from the nature of perception (1995a, 22-25; 1989, 3-8). Perception is the fundamental feature of subjects. To be subject is to be aware of the world, which might happen in many ways. Among different forms of perception, there is one that is basic and common to all others: I perceive the world from where I am, and with my senses. This perception is basic because it is always there as long as I am aware at all, and this is the foundation of all other perceptions. It equals our primary opening to the world, which is a precondition for all other perceptions. All other perceptions, or let us say, all of our experiences of the world, depend on this first one. Taylor summarizes Merleau-Ponty's perspective that our perception as experience is such that it could only be that of an embodied agent engaged with the world.

From here, it follows necessarily that our perception always occurs somewhere. Perception or experience cannot occur if there is no place for them. Taylor describes this as an orientational structure of perception. There has to be a foreground and a background, an up and a down, which delineates our perceptual field of the subject. These coordinates are much more than spatial or temporal marks, necessary for localization of the place of the subject or for localization of a specific object of perception. These coordinates relate to the subject's movements and action in the field. "Up," "down," "back," "forth" apply because they have a meaning for the subject and orient him within the field of potential actions and stands. Up-down directionality indicates the line of a subject's possible activity.

The subject perceives this up-down directionality only within the field of his possible action (ground, sky, land). However, what the subject perceives is not the field as such; what he perceives is the field of his potential activities. Up-down directionality

has no sense in itself. It makes sense only within the field of the subject's potential activities and relates to the subject and his capacity to stand and act within this field. The sense of himself as a bodily agent in this perceptual field is essential because it opens the agent to the world. Without this sense, the agent would lose his orientation. It follows that the world of experiences exists only as the way of an agent's seeing the world through his individual capacities. Such an analysis of the field of potential activities and the up-down directionality leads Taylor to the conclusion:

... a field of this structure can only be experienced by an embodied agent. It is essentially the perceptual field of such an embodied agent (1995a, 24).

As already mentioned, the idea of embodied agent is not original with Taylor, but with Merleau-Ponty who talks about the human subject as *être-au-monde*. This notion of "being-in-the-world" includes different meanings: to be an embodied agent, a living being who acts in and with the world, a living being whose actions are directed to things and other subjects, a being who is inescapably open to the world and constantly at grips with the world that defines his perception of the world. The perception of the world is essentially that of an embodied agent. From such a description of the embodied agent Taylor deduces that:

...our perception of the world as that of an embodied agent is not a contingent fact we might discover empirically; rather our sense of ourselves as embodied agent is constitutive of our experience (1995a, 25).

Taylor stresses this as a critique of scientific, empirical, monadic, purely rational approach to the world and the human agent. The point is that we would not understand what the articulation, up-down, near and far, foreground and background could be, if we were not embodied agents with a sense of ourselves as embodied agents. Whatever we

articulate, including our articulations of contingent facts, only make sense relative to us as embodied agents.

Saying this, Taylor emphasizes that our thought and experiences – or in general our functioning as subjects – must be described as the thought or experiences of the embodied agents. Thought and experiences say something about the nature of our lives as the subjects. Our experiences are constituted by our sense of ourselves as embodied agents. By this Taylor means that we cannot actually be subjects, or effectively exercise our subjectivity, or be aware of a world, without having the sense of ourselves as embodied subjects, which is constitutive of our awareness (1989, 14). This is decisive for the entire range of the human sciences as we know them.

From here, one might conclude that this argumentation says nothing about things as they are in themselves, including about human beings. Even though such a conclusion might be true, this is not Taylor's main concern at this point. His concern and argumentation are primarily focused on the world and human beings as we experience them. The issue about the agent's embodiment is crucial because it brings us to the essence of our understanding of human nature. If it is true that we are inescapably embodied agents to ourselves, then it follows that we have to take this into consideration in any account that invokes our own self-understanding, for example in anthropology, politics, sociology, linguistics, psychoanalysis, developmental psychology, or in short, in the entire range of the human sciences (1995a, 27). The agent's embodiment and self-understanding are tied together. Looked at from this perspective, all those scientific theories which explain human agency in terms of mechanistically reactions (i.e. behaviorism, rationalistic psychologies, theories which promulgate computer models of

the mind), provide us with insufficient and unsatisfactory accounts, because they are not sufficiently inclusive of the agent's embodiment.

In short, Taylor's argumentation points us to what appears to be an undeniable and essential feature of our experience: the up-down structure of the field, or our orientation in a wider environment. Taylor calls this feature "transcendental," referring us to Kant's transcendental argument (1995a, 25). It is transcendental because it is beyond every particular experience as such. At the same time, our embodiment is undeniable and essential because it allows us to have this transcendental feature. "...our having a sense of ourselves as embodied agents is a necessary condition of our experience having these [transcendental] features" (1995a, 25).

As the way of proving the validity of this argumentation, Taylor uses a chain of three important points that require explanation (1995a, 27-28). The first point is that this argumentation consists of a string of what Taylor calls "indispensability claims." These claims move from their starting points to their conclusions by showing that the condition stated in the conclusion is indispensable to the feature identified at the start. The starting points themselves consist of indispensability claims. The point of departure is that experience must be coherent to be experienced, and that perception is impossible without the up-down orientation. Hence, Taylor sees these arguments as chains of indispensability claims. These claims are: first, experience must have an object, that is, be *of* something. Talking about experience without an object contradicts itself. Second, it must be coherent. Third, to be coherent experience must be shaped by the understanding, which means it must be shaped by the agent's understanding through the categories applied to this experience. All this is indispensable to the experience.

The second point is that the indispensability claims cannot be grounded empirically, but a priori. They are not merely probable, but apodictic; they are supposed to be self-evident. For example, having experience means always having experience of something, it cannot be just experience. Such having experience must be accompanied by the subject's representations. But these representations must be coherent with the experience as such, which is possible only if certain categories are applied. There can't be coherence and evidence if the categories don't apply. So there is a chain of many but equally important and evident elements. Taylor calls them the chain of apodictic indispensability claims.

The third point in the chain is that these claims concern our experience. Having experience, the chain has an anchor without which it wouldn't have the significance it does. There would be no chain without experience. With the fact that transcendental arguments deploy indispensability claims about experience, we have an unchallengeable starting point. For example, we could not discuss our experience of doubt without first having this kind of experience. For how can we formulate coherently the doubt that we have experienced? From here, Taylor concludes:

So transcendental arguments are chains of apodictic indispensability claims which concern experience and thus have an unchallengeable anchoring. What they show things to be indispensable *to* can't be shrugged off (1995a, 28).

Even though proving that experience is the unchallengeable starting point, Taylor still has doubts about the aim of the whole argumentation. If the arguments are self-evident and known a priori, why do we still need a demonstration? We do not. Even though this demonstration is apparently valid and evident in itself, Taylor needs it because it allows him to step behind it and check its grounds.

With this demonstration, as well as with any description of human activity, Taylor wants to articulate and expose the insight we have into our own activity. Simultaneously, this insight becomes an essential part of this activity because it entitles us to do this activity. If we look from the perspective of the agent's intentionality, we can say that an agent must have a certain insight into the point of his activity; otherwise there is no reason for him to discuss and talk about this activity. It does not mean that he has to have a total and complete understanding of the insight or of the point of his activity; however, the insight has to be implicitly there somehow, involving a certain degree of the agent's consciousness, understanding, and self-awareness. Without an insight, there would be no activity.

Taylor illustrates this statement with the example of the chess game (1995a, 29). A chess-player has to know the rules of the game; otherwise, he cannot play the game. Just moving around the pieces is not equal to playing the game. The rules present the constitutive element of the game. The player has to be aware of these rules and of his playing the game. So the perception of the game on the part of the player is as essential as the rules of the game are.

With this example in mind, Taylor switches back to the transcendental argument and focuses on the question of its intentionality (1995a, 30-33). The chess-game example helps Taylor to understand the question of intentionality better, even though this example is somewhat misleading. Once the player knows the rules of chess, he applies them to the game. His awareness of the game and understanding of the chess rules are necessary conditions for the game; otherwise, he might be playing something else. In the case of our perception of the world, the whole dynamic is different because we do not have the

same level of awareness of our perceptions as the chess-player does. Our perception of the world contains by contrast a never- ending activity of articulation. The rules of articulation are not as defined and as evident as the rules of the chess-game. The activity of articulation as such presents a never-completed work in which we repeatedly articulate our experience of being in the world. Our articulations also include possibilities of failure, confusion, unawareness, and incoherence much more than a knowledge of the clear and evident rules of chess.

All these possible perceptions of the world have a common ground, which is unchangeable, i.e. experience as such. Taylor maintains this as the indispensable claim (1995a, 31). Experience as such is certain and evident, because it is grounded in our grasp of activity, and we have to have this grasp to carry on the activity.

Even though this is an indispensable claim of the whole argumentation, Taylor considers it as not as obvious and evident as it seems to be. The conclusions of the transcendental argument are in Taylor's view paradoxical because they are apodictic and self-evident on the one hand, and on the other hand, open to endless debate (1995a, 32). For example, the same experience might lead us to different and contradictory articulations. In this case, are we still talking about the same experience? In the case that our experience remains unarticulated, are we still talking about an experience, i.e. an experience without our articulation? In addition to this, we have to keep in mind language as the tool by which we articulate our experiences. Our language is often unclear, imprecise, misleading, calling for invention, open to different formulations, and other similar modifications. I talk about language in the next subchapter. The point is that Taylor introduces the transcendental argument and claims its essentiality, but at the same

time, he stands at a critical distance from the same argument and rather prefers to keep it open.

They [the transcendental arguments] articulate a grasp of the point of our activity which we cannot but have, and their formulations aspire to self-evidence; and yet they must articulate what is most difficult for us to articulate, and so are open to endless debate. A valid transcendental argument is indubitable; yet it is hard to know when you have one, at least one with an interesting conclusion (1995a, 33).

2.2.4 Human Agency beyond Naturalism

From the point of view of the previous paragraphs about human agency, we can easily deduce with Taylor why naturalism cannot in a sufficient way cope with human understanding of the self: it does not explain adequately the nature of the human agent. By naturalism in this case Taylor refers to a view that man can be seen as part of nature, and that this nature of which man is part is to be understood according to the canons of the natural sciences (1985b, 2). So naturalism tends to provide us a full or absolute understanding of what we are as persons, following the principles of the scientific language, which essentially aspires to neutrality and objectivity. In Taylor's reflection, human agency must be seen outside the frameworks of naturalism because naturalism is not broad enough to grasp adequately the mystery of the human person. Taylor wants to make this thesis as clear and convincing as possible, even though he confesses that he does not always do this in his writings. The human person is a kind of mystery in a sense that we cannot provide a full and absolute understanding of who we are as persons; nonetheless, there is something apparently powerful behind naturalism's description of human agency, and this is what Taylor wants to expose in his reflection.

Naturalism's understanding of human agency is not acceptable because there is no place for the distinction of value that has to be included in our descriptions of the human agent, or the person, or the self. Even though value is more explicitly part of the culture and civilization to which a person belongs than of his elaboration as an individual, it is part of the person in a sense that it is incorporated into his self-understanding. Such incorporation is not a contingent but an essential fact about the human agent, which the naturalistic account does not take seriously enough into consideration. From the previous subchapters we already know that (1) the human agent exists only in self-interpretation and therefore, cannot be understood absolutely; (2) the human agent can be understood only against the background of distinctions of worth that scientific language cannot grasp.

Despite his clear opposition to naturalistic theories, Taylor does not want to reject them completely. It is true that a negative critique of naturalism and its boundaries provides us with an insufficient account of human agency. But the same critique leads Taylor to an account which will disclose the human agent in a new perspective, including the metaphysical motivations which are leading and inspiring naturalists in their interpretations. So Taylor applies to the naturalist account the criteria of the weak and strong evaluation, the notion of self-interpretation, and the notion of self-definition against the background of distinctions of worth. In this way he elaborates a richer account, which will expose naturalism's account within a broader horizon and context and illuminate modernity in a new perspective.

Behind the impetus of naturalism and the exclusive dominance of a natural science model, Taylor perceives a certain image of the human agent, which is very

attractive and inspiring to the moderns: an agent who is capable of achieving a kind of disengagement from our world by objectifying it (1985b, 4). Disengagement from our world means being free of the perspective of embodied experience. Taylor states that such a picture of the disengaged agent does not seem to be elaborated and sufficiently present on the conscious level of the modern mind. It exists more like a preconception, an invisibly present but vigorously acting power of a reflecting mind, which Taylor wants to expose and reflect on. Disengagement and objectification are two ways in which the human agent expresses himself: distancing himself from the world, overcoming his perceptions, going beyond any determinations of the nature of his agency. The world becomes a neutral environment, completely to his disposition, offering him what is necessary for realization of his purposes and ends which are previously determined in his mind. Following this line, for example, we have social sciences which claim an apparent neutrality and objectivity in their research, and explain human behaviour through the principles of natural sciences. In spite of their objectivity and neutrality, the underlying image of the agent behind their claims remains basically untouched and unclear.¹²

The origin of this view, Taylor sees again in the epistemology of the 17th century, when the great shift in cosmology occurred. The picture of the universe conceived as a mechanism replaced the previous picture of the world-order based on ideas. This new picture can be fully objectified, and modern consciousness claims to be able to reach full

¹² Regarding this topic, Taylor finds many inspiring thoughts in Heidegger's position. Taylor agrees with Heidegger's writings at the point where he claims that "grasping things as neutral objects is one of our possibilities only against the background of a way of being in the world in which things are disclosed as ready-to-hand. Grasping things neutrally requires modifying our stance to them that primitively has to be one of involvement." In other words, grasping things neutrally cannot be an original and fundamental stance of our comportment (2007, 218).

disengagement from this constellation of the world. The universe becomes like a sandbox, in which the modern human agent can realize his ideas. Even more:

The ideal of disengagement defines a certain – typically modern – notion of freedom, as the ability to act on one’s own, without outside interference or subordination to outside authority (1985b, 5).

These two ideals, disengagement and freedom, are linked to the ideals of efficacy, power, and imperturbability, which in different ways find their place in the modern practices of economics, science, technology, psychotherapy, and so on. Disengagement, liberation, and objectification, become possible modes in which the human agent relates to the world, and consequently, the criteria by which he defines the world and his nature. In his paper “Social Theory as Practice,” Taylor illustrates how unconsciously the human agency often favors the naturalist world-view because the improvement suggested by the naturalist’s theories leads him toward a more efficient way to cope with the world, and consequently to a better playing-ground for his self-realization.¹³ Hence the natural science theories seem to better explain the underlying processes and mechanisms of society, and provide the basis for a more effective planning of social life.

Taylor illustrates with some examples the connection between a certain theory and its corresponding social practice (1985b, 92-94). Let us take a society, he says, that is primarily based on economic theories and principles concerned with production and distribution of material goods. This society will tend to favour specific knowledge that

¹³ In his paper “Social Theory as Practice,” Taylor writes: “...part of what is involved in having a better theory is being able more effectively to cope with the world. We are able to intervene successfully to effect our purposes in a way that we were not before. Just as our common-sense pre-understanding was in part a knowing how to cope with the things around us, so the explanatory theory which partly replaces and extends it must give us some of what we need to cope better. Theory relates to practice in an obvious way. We apply our knowledge of the underlying mechanisms in order to manipulate more effectively the features of our environment” (1985b, 92).

makes possible a constant growth of material goods in the society. If this knowledge becomes the common good of society, the same principle and theory will automatically modify other social spheres. Even more, the same principles and theory will condition the agent's self-perception and his understanding of society. If this is the case, then we can conclude that social theories might both strengthen and undermine social practice. In both cases, social theories become constitutive factors in the agent's self-description.¹⁴

It is not difficult to see why a world-view based on disengagement is so attractive: it promises a better and more efficient social order that will allow us a higher level of self-fulfillment. If this is true, then epistemological and scientific considerations do not represent the primary source of the philosophical reflection of naturalism and social theories; they resign their primacy to the agent's drive for freedom and self-realization. The same drive subordinates scientific theories in the agent's imagination, which is in constant search of new possibilities of self-fulfillment.

The agent's drive for freedom and self-realization through disengagement is the main topic of Taylor's paper "The Concept of a Person," published in his book *Human Agency and Language*. Here, Taylor asserts that in general we comprehend the concept of person as a synonym for a being with a certain moral status, a bearer of rights, a being who keeps in his mind a sense of self, and a notion of the future and past, a being who can hold values, make choices and adopt life-plans. A person is a being who can be addressed and who can reply (1985a, 97). Modern social sciences apply this concept of

¹⁴ Taylor's paper "Philosophical Reflections on Caring Practices" (1994) illustrates very well how a certain way of thinking can improve the public health care system. The quality of this system depends on how we define the common good (health care). Sometimes it is necessary to redefine it. If this is the case, the moral philosophy has to find new ways of describing/discovering the criteria for determining how to act rightly.

the person to their interpretations of social reality that in Taylor's reflection produces a reductionist view of social reality.

Even here Taylor tracks the origin of the reductionist view of social reality back to the epistemology of the 17th century, which perceives a person as a being with consciousness. Consciousness in this case signifies the same as the power to frame representations of things. Behind the understanding of a person as a being with consciousness, and the epistemology based on this understanding of a person, lies the idea, though still in germ form, that the human agent is in principle distinct from other things because he can represent things clearly, calculate and chose between different possibilities, and plan his life (1985a, 104). Such an interpretation of consciousness is in Taylor's view problematic because it takes the process of representation of things as something completely independent from the agent. It does not take into account the agent's purposes, desires, and aversions, which might modify the agent's representations and conceptualization of things. Additionally, it does not take into account the agent's self-perception, or what influences his perception of the world. Human emotions and the agent's understanding of them should not be excluded from the process of interpretation because they deeply condition the process as well as the constitution of representations. In addition, human emotions present a kind of link with other agents, which indirectly open the question of language as the medium of communication. When we talk about human emotions, we divide them into different categories which introduce the question of standards for such a division. This opens the door to a certain point of view in which the categorization depends on the agent's plans more or less consciously elaborated in his mind. Here we are in the domain of the strong evaluation, already discussed previously.

And when we talk about moral agency, the question of standards becomes even more relevant, constituting the agent's perception. With all these points, Taylor concludes that the interpretation of consciousness as the power to frame representations of independent objects presents an insufficient account of the human agent and a reductionist view of social reality (1985a, 103).

In Taylor's view, the reductionist view of social reality as well as agent's disengagement from the world opens the door to a certain point of view, in which things matter only in the perspective of the agent's planning (1985a, 112). If the agent understands himself in terms of certain absolutely defined ends, then his end becomes proper thinking and related to the world. Taylor calls this strategic thinking. As for being disengaged from the world, the agent is aware that he is in the world of meanings that he understands imperfectly. Despite his disengagement from the world, the agent would like to have a complete, sufficient and absolute understanding of things and himself. This is his final end and the goal of his thinking. Therefore, his task is to find a better interpretation and understanding of the world. To understand things in the absolute perspective means to understand them in abstraction from their significance for him. First, clear ideas will allow him to take his distance and disengagement from the world, and second, enable him to look at his world in a better way, control it, and to be able to choose more efficient means for the realization of his plans. In order to do that, he wants to understand things in the absolute perspective, i.e. in abstraction from their significance for himself. Taylor concludes that neutralizing the significance of the world means reaching freedom, "the freedom of the self-defining subject, who determines his own purposes, or finds them in his own natural desires."

Behind an agent's capacity to elaborate a plan, including the agent's ability to conceive different possibilities, to calculate them, and to choose between them, Taylor sees strategic power, as making the human agent superior to other agents (1985a, 104-105). This power represents a special capacity of the human agent which allows him to use things of the world in a more efficient way. Even more important than this is the fact that this capacity opens up the questions about the ends of human agents. What are these ends and how can we recognize them? In Taylor's view, these questions are linked with the primary meaning of human consciousness, understood not as the power to frame representations, but as that which enables us to be open to concerns like purpose, goals, ends, and the quality of human life. The essence of consciousness as this special power of the human agent is as a help to a human agent in his development of sensibility for standards, which are necessary for definition of human goals. If absent the consciousness, the human agent has only insufficient validation of his theories. In his essays "Social Theory as Practice," Taylor explains that an agent in this state remains in the sphere of a self-defining use of theories, which is ideological in the pejorative sense of the word. Theories cannot be seen only as reflections of interest, because they always make a certain kind of claim, i.e. a perspicuous account of the good which is the point of a certain norm (1985b, 108-109). At this point Taylor briefly announces a major shift in his interpretation, with the introduction of questions that are by their nature spiritual.

My claim is that the ideal of the modern free subject, capable of objectifying the world, and reasoning about it in a detached, instrumental way, is a novel variant of this very old aspiration to spiritual freedom (1985a, 112-113).

Interpretation of the natural world, of society, and the human agency in terms of disengagement, neutralization, and control, hides in itself an incredibly attractive force

linked to the desire for increased human freedom. This desire expresses the human aspiration to rise above the merely human, to step outside the prison of the peculiarity of human emotions, to be free of the burden cares and bonds of material conditions. Taylor sees the origin of this aspiration in the Greek and Christian traditions, and finds it to be the consistent concern of our Western religious tradition. Analogous forms of this aspiration can be found in other cultures as well. This aspiration is crucial because it is closely bound up with spiritual freedom.

Taylor's introduction of spiritual awareness makes the conclusion of his paper "The Concept of a Person" original and almost surprising, even though he does not offer any elaboration at this point. It is only in one of his later books, *A Secular Age*, that he develops this thematic and interprets modernity from the point of view of religion and spirituality. In short, spiritual matters are important if we want to elaborate a more complete picture of a person and his aspiration to freedom. Therefore, neglecting the spiritual horizons of human agency represents an unacceptable option.

Taylor is very aware of the fact that introducing spiritual dimensions into human agency might seem to be an audacious claim to many moderns, especially to those who base their philosophy on naturalism. In introducing the spiritual dimension, Taylor does not want to oppose naturalism completely or other similar approaches. Different approaches vary in their interpretations, but all of them relate to the same human agency. Therefore, a sharp division between them is neither possible nor reasonable; the accounts are intrinsically and reciprocally bonded. Hence Taylor does not want to oppose the modern scientific ideals of austere truth to the Western spiritual tradition, because the opposition is not as deep and unbridgeable as it seems to be at first glance. The two sides

have something in common: “the aspiration to spiritual freedom, to something more than the merely human” (1985a, 113). In both cases, the human agent wants to stand outside the context of his emotions in order to determine what is truly important for his life. The aspiration to spiritual freedom is something too fundamental to be simply set aside. So Taylor concludes that this defines the paradox of modernity: the spiritual dimension of the human agency goes on, independently of what approach the human agent takes; whether recognition, or acceptance, or rejection, or ignorance. So the real question is not the epistemological one, i.e. how can we know this reality, but the moral one, i.e. do we want to accept it or not? (1985a, 114).

Summarizing this subchapter, we can see how Taylor slowly elaborates a richer and more complete description of human agency. Naturalism and other similar social theories will remain reductive in their nature until they come to recognize their insufficiently examined presuppositions. They have to attend to those aspects of reality which are, intentionally or not, left out of their horizon. These aspects are in Taylor’s view anthropocentric properties, also called subjective properties that in an essential and constitutive way are part of human reflection.

Taylor proposes that we take these overlooked anthropocentric properties into serious consideration. His inclusion of anthropocentric properties represents a step above the reductionist’s view of the human agent, and provides us with a new and richer definition of the human agent: a fully human agent is a person, or a self in the ordinary meaning, who exists in a space defined by distinctions of worth. This distinction of worth includes evaluation of things recognized as categoric, or unconditioned, or higher

importance, or worth, and things that lack these features and are of lesser value. In the third chapter I discuss distinctions of worth in relation to a particular culture (Taylor's theory of recognition). Each culture constructs and influences the agent's understanding of worth in a crucial way. In short, Taylor in his reflection elaborates an original and distinctive approach to the human agency.

From our point of view, what is relevant to underline here is Taylor's constructive critique within the framework of his historical hermeneutic, in which the criticized object does not lose its place but gets incorporated into a larger horizon. In Taylor's view, a kind of reductive interpretation is always based on certain presuppositions which are dominant in a given historical moment. For this reason, historical hermeneutics and a constructive critique remain important: they dismember these presuppositions in their one-sidedness, and move them into a richer, deeper, more meaningful narrative. So through his critique Taylor elaborates a new narrative which illuminates the worth of human life in a more attractive way.¹⁵ Even so, Taylor's main concern is not the epistemological question, i.e. how do humans get to know this worth? His dilemma is primarily a moral one: do we moderns want to expose ourselves to these new possibilities? Are we willing to open ourselves to those spiritual dimensions of human agency that have been neglected for too long? Those interpretations of human agency which exclude spiritual dimensions offer us an impoverished view of ourselves. A more-inclusive account will give us a richer and more meaningful interpretation of our nature.

¹⁵ For example, Taylor's article "On 'Disclosing New Worlds,'" published in 1995, proposes entrepreneurship as the new way how to get at that whole dimension of social life which provides the context in which our goals, beliefs, or feelings make sense, the context of meaning which makes them possible and goes beyond those forms which are based on altruism and egoism. An entrepreneur in this case is someone who is excited by and committed to a new mode of practice.

Strictly speaking about our interpretation of Taylor's writing from the point of view of Hegel's concern, the neglected spiritual dimensions of human agency are narrowly bound up with the two coordinates of Hegel's concern, i.e. the human desire to be free and the search for new ways of human fulfillment. As we saw in the last subchapter, both coordinates explicitly find their place in Taylor's critique of naturalism. The search for new ways of expressing human fulfillment, i.e. the search for meaning, can be seen everywhere as our recurring themes in Taylor's writings. The search for moral sources is basically the search for meaning. The nature of the human agency can be defined only through its relation to what is meaningful in an agent's life. In short, we can trace the way Hegel's concern becomes Taylor's constant concern as well.

Let us consider a possible objection to Taylor's reflection at this point. In following his extended description of worth, its distinctions, evaluation of human acting, and the human agency in general, one may legitimately raise the question of what this worth finally consists. How can we grasp better this categoric, unconditioned worth of higher importance that defines and constitutes our nature as a human agent? An answer to this is a legitimate expectation of the reader. In defense of Taylor, however, he does not propose an explicit answer but only some tools for discovering this worth. In raising the reader's expectation, Taylor's primary intention is "only to open" the reader's mind for questions about worth and the unconditioned. For example, a thorough rumination of naturalism and a reductionist's mindset should open our modern mind to those realities which are too easily omitted from the horizons of speculation about the human agency. Inclusion of the neglected reality should enrich our perspective and offer us a more meaningful narrative. In a certain sense, Taylor's intention is to prepare us for the

exploration of what is greater than our present comprehension; his philosophical reflection opens the door and encourages us to enter.

2.3 Human Language

As an attempt in modernity to explain the question of freedom, Taylor presents his philosophy of language. Previously we saw how Taylor describes human agency in terms of self-defining subjectivity, as an embodied agent in constant search of freedom and meaning. In this subchapter, I show how Taylor elaborates the connection between human nature and human language. Taylor's point is that the understanding of both human nature and human language is always part of a larger context, wherein they find their meaning. This belonging to a larger context comprises a dynamic process of continuous creation of new ways of understanding and the deepest concerns of human life. With and through language we humans construct our nature, identity, and the search for meaning; the domain of language involves our agency in every stage of our acting. Therefore, Taylor constantly refers us to the linguistic element as one of the key concepts for an accurate understanding of modern identity, and the human search for meaning and fulfilment.

An adequate understanding of the human agency is possible only through an understanding of the agent's constant interaction in and with his context. In the same way, the proper understanding of language is possible only within a larger context in which we use the language. With this argument, Taylor opposes (1) the modern understanding of language that assumes the independence of language at the disposal of the human agent, and (2) all modern theories of meaning that see it as a representation that can be achieved

from the standpoint of the individual and monological subject. To support his claim, Taylor elaborates his theory, in which he interconnects human awareness and articulation, creation of public space, and language as the medium through which we formulate our concerns (I will talk explicitly about Taylor's theory in the subsection 2.3.3). Individuals can never entirely master this complex activity, but it is always a common domain, something that happens among people. Consequently, such an understanding of language requires from us a recognition and appreciation of other people's languages as an expression of their rationality and their search for meaning.

Keeping in mind these general assertions, we can see the importance of language in Taylor's philosophical reflections. I reconstruct Taylor's understanding of language separately, which does not mean that the whole issue should be looked at apart from Taylor's philosophical investigation. On the contrary, the relevance of language is so crucial that it transcends any single word and involves all of them. In this chapter I mention only some of his most specific writings on language: "Language and Human Nature," published in 1985 in his book *Human Agency and Language* (1985a), his articles: "Explaining Action" (1970), "The Person" (1985c), "Language and Society" (1991), "Von der Macht der Sprache: Interview mit Charles Taylor" (1991). In short, with different intensities, Taylor constantly returns to the importance of language throughout his philosophical investigations.

We will start our analysis of Taylor's reflection with an insertion of the topic into its historical context.

2.3.1 The Origin of the Historical Shift

Once again, Taylor takes a hermeneutical approach, which first reconstructs the history behind the question under discussion with the understanding that claims in the present can be explained through the past. At the beginning of his article “Language and Human Nature,” Taylor maintains that “language is a central area of concern in the twentieth century” (1985a, 215). Not only individual philosophers of the past century (Jakobson, Saussure, Chomsky), but also some of the most influential philosophical movements have also given language a central place (structuralism, logical positivism, linguistic analysis, Freudian psychoanalysis). They have taken language not just as a problem of philosophy; they considered philosophical understanding to be essentially bound up with the understanding of language.

Behind this remarkable interest in language in the 20th century, Taylor understands the modern concern with meaning (1985a, 218). In speaking of meaning in this case, Taylor has a specific use in mind. The question is not about the meaning of life, or the “meaning” when we speak of love or a job being “meaningful”; in these cases, the “meaning” has only a relative sense. What Taylor has in mind is the significance things have for us by virtue of our goals, aspirations, and purposes. Taylor proposes the question that he himself considers to be a radical one:

How is it that these segments of a medium that we deploy, when we talk, make music, paint, make signals, build symbolic objects, *how is it that these say something?* How is it that we can complete sentences of the form: ‘What this means (to say) is...?’ whereas we cannot say this of sticks, stones, stars, mountains, forests – in short, of the things we just find in the world? ...what is it that we see in things when we understand them as signs which we do not when we fail to apprehend them as such, but just as the furniture of a non-expressive universe? (1985a, 218)

Such an understanding of meaning includes not only human language in the strict sense of the word as the tool of communication, but also the arts, music, painting, other signals and symbolic objects with which we humans search for meaning.¹⁶

Without much explanation or foundation, Taylor distinguishes between two dimensions of meaningful objects: designative and expressive (1985a, 218 - 221). Such a distinction is necessary if we want to understand properly the historical background of our present situation. It seems that certain historical periods belong more either to a designative or an expressive dimension. However, a too rigorous division in this case would be something of an exaggeration, of which Taylor is aware, because the two dimensions are in some sense reciprocally connected. Nonetheless, noting the boundary between the two dimensions can help us in our reflection on language.

In the designative dimension, the medium, a sign or a word, gets its meaning by pointing us to what it designates in the world. It refers us to an object somewhere in the universe. The meaning of the word is explained by its relation to things or states. This relation is relatively simple, unpuzzling and unmysterious. One signifies or points to the other. It is not difficult to conclude that this dimension is one of the fundamental features of scientific thought in the modern age.

In the expressive dimension, a sign or a word, or art in general expresses the primary agent's thoughts, his perceptions, beliefs, and emotional states. By *expressive* in this case Taylor refers to the embodiment of something in such a way that it is manifest and made directly available for all to see. The expressive dimension of a word basically manifests the subject and his power to be expressive. Expression is the power of the

¹⁶ Taylor often refers to poetry as having the constitutive power of language; through creating symbols it establishes new meanings. See the article "Selan and the Recovery of Language" (2011).

subject. If we look at it from another perspective, expression refers us to the subject to whom things can be manifested. The manifestation of expression becomes possible only through the expression itself. Hence, the meaning of the expression cannot be accounted as being independent of its expression. There is a very fine connection between expression and manifestation, which in general makes explanation puzzling and mysterious, removed from any objective understanding of things. Differing from the designative dimension, in which the meaning of the expressions was explained by their being related to something else, now the meaning of the expression can be explained only by another expression. Consequently, the method of isolating the terms and tracing their correlations does not make sense anymore.

Keeping in mind this distinction, we can easily understand the importance of language in Romanticism which is marked by an intense reflection about language. As we already know, Herder, the movement *Sturm and Drang*, and Romanticism represented a strong opposition to the radical Enlightenment with all its features. We spoke about Herder's understanding of *expression* in terms of a human activity that expresses the entire personality of the individual or the group. Here, expression refers to realization in external reality of something that we humans feel or desire, or believe we are. Expression also relates to the realization of a purpose or an idea in this purpose, which consequently leads to the realization of the subject. It does not mean that the subject is following an established plan of how to realize himself. The plan resides within him and takes place through his acts of expression. Such a expressivist anthropology strongly emphasizes self-awareness and self-definition of the subject, the importance of human desires, identity, and originality.

This is the context in which Taylor interprets Herder's understanding of language, as well as the shift taking place in the eighteenth century. It is the shift against the designative understanding of language and its relation to the world, so typical of the Enlightenment. In Taylor's interpretation, Herder wanted to point out something greater than the designative approach to the world. Using a word or language means primarily to be capable of a reflective awareness, which allows the subject to choose a certain word and to confer on it a certain meaning. But in order to give it a meaning, the subject has to be able to speak, i.e. to give expression to this reflective awareness. Ideas, words, and thoughts do not exist until they are expressed. So the expressive dimension becomes fundamental, i.e. constitutive for language, because it is only in expression that language comes to be. Taylor calls this an expressive theory of human language (1985a, 229).

Following Herder's intuition about human language, Romantic philosophers perceive language as the capacity to speak, express, and realize reflective awareness. Through language we become aware of our thoughts, ideas, images, presentations residing in our mind. Language, therefore, primarily refers us to the subject using this language, and not to the objects that the words are designating. But to be able to use one particular word, the subject presupposes the existence of the whole of language as the background for the appropriate use of that word. To know the meaning of a specific word, we compare and contrast it with other words, which might have a similar or completely different meaning. Taylor reformulates Humboldt's and Herder's conception of language this way:

To speak is to touch a bit of the web, and this is to make the whole resonate. Because the words we use now only have sense through their place in the whole web, we can never in principle have a clear oversight of

the implications of what we say at any moment. Our language is always more than we can encompass; it is in a sense inexhaustible (1985a, 231).

After the understanding of language as a web, Taylor mentions the second characteristic of language: language is not a realized work, but an activity, whose consequences we as individuals cannot control or dominate. When we talk, we constantly recreate, extend, alter, and reshape language. So language becomes:

...a pattern of activity, by which we express / realize a certain way of being in the world, that of reflective awareness, but a pattern which can only be deployed against a background which we can never fully dominate; and yet a background that we are never fully dominated by, because we are constantly reshaping it. Reshaping it without dominating it, or being able to oversee it, means that we never fully know what we are doing to it; we develop language without knowing fully what we are making it into (1985a, 232).

So we have language as a background which we can never fully dominate on the one hand, and on the other hand, language as an activity by which we express our being in the world. Within these two parameters, Taylor inserts the revolutionary idea of expressivism: “the development of new modes of expression enables us to have new feelings, more powerful and more refined, and certainly more self-aware” (1985a, 233). It is revolutionary because it opposes the Enlightenment and its understanding of language as the instrument at our disposition, with which we describe our world. Language is an activity through which we express our feelings. Through the expression we give our feelings a reflective dimension which transforms them. By doing this, we are transforming ourselves because through expression and reflection we reach new levels of awareness, i.e. new perceptions of ourselves. Consequently, language becomes something greater than an activity of talking about things.

In addition to that, when we take language as an activity, this activity exists only in conversation and dialogue in a community. Whenever men speak to each other, they create or alter or modify words, and consequently extend, alter, or reshape their language. So language represents one of the essential parts of every community. It can never be just my language, it is always ours. I cannot create language by myself or learn it by myself. It comes to me from others, from a community of which I am part. Therefore, language has a constitutive function of the speech community because it creates, shapes, transforms, and defines relations within the community.

In short, when we talk about language as a range of activity, we talk about our being in the world, which includes: the reflective awareness, through which we describe our surrounding; human emotions, human relations, something that is beyond our control. Taylor claims, therefore, that “language has become central to our understanding of man” (1985a, 234). In this perspective he claims also that the Romantic understanding of language in terms of expressivism and activity has survived up to the present time and become the central notion for our modern understanding of human nature. We all have become followers of the expressive view that is profoundly influencing our modern culture. This is the reason why language remains so fascinating in modernity.

2.3.2 Modernity in Search of Fulfillment of the Human Expressive Powers

It would not be correct to conclude that Taylor perceives a direct or strict causal relation between the Romantic explanation of language and our contemporary fascination with language. The relation is causal as well as parallel and lineal. As Herder and the Romantics found in the expressivist view of reality something meaningful and appealing,

so do we moderns, following their example and interpretation, search for a new and more fulfilling comprehension of ourselves and the world around us. Taylor perceives in both periods a similar energy or necessity underneath the struggle of man, and an equal aspiration to freedom, requiring new ways of realization. In this sense, Taylor tracks a parallel paradox in two different periods. Nonetheless, it would be misleading to insist that the similarities between Romanticism and modernity are purely contingent. The reason why Romantic ideas, solutions, and views of reality have survived up to our time and remain an inspiration for our imagination, is the fact that we moderns feel and think in many ways as people in Romanticism did. The connection should be seen in the historical perspective as an irreversible one, where the previous stage influences the development of the next stage. So what the Romantics intuitively perceived and recognized to be the right path, we moderns absorbed as ours. To see how Taylor sustains this position, we recall how Taylor felt that Herder and the Romantics experienced something insufficient and unsatisfactory in the Enlightenment view of reality with all its claims. Their souls remained unquiet and unfulfilled; what was required from them was a new and more meaningful vision. In reaction to Enlightenment, they elaborated the expressivist vision of man and human language, in which they found a deeper meaning. Language was seen as much more than an instrument at the disposal of humans for their designative approach to the world, as in the 17th century, of Descartes' and empiricists' theories, in which "the contents of the mind were in principle open to transparent inspection by the subject himself" (1985a, 241). Thinking was considered as a process in which the subject claimed to be self-transparent and entirely in possession of himself. These philosophers perceived the world as the objective order, with which they replaced

the old cosmology. Their philosophy was based on ideas existing in their minds. Ideas were equal to little units of representation of things. Knowing things meant grasping how things are put together. Thinking was considered an assembling or disassembling of these ideas. Using this resolute-compositive method, they accessed what is outside in the world: first they broke things and ideas down into their component elements, and then they put together these component elements in new ideas. This is how Galileo, Descartes, and Hobbes explained the process of understanding. Within their framework, language became an instrument of control of ideas and knowledge of the world, to be found in thoughts and mental discourse. These ideas and knowledge, therefore, seemed to be transparent, objective, verifiable, and without any mystery. The meaning of a word could only consist of the idea it designated, always fully in the human control and purview. Taylor summarizes the Enlightenment understanding of language in terms of control and verification of words, through which the philosopher hoped to escape from any kind of illusion and reach a deeper level of freedom (1985a, 222-226).

Keeping in mind the Enlightenment understanding of language, we can better grasp why Taylor dedicates so much time to Herder and Romanticism. They represent the opposition to the understanding of human nature and language in terms of objectivity, where there is no place for human desires, aspirations, moral sentiments, and no space for expressive human activities, subjectivity, and mysteries. Taylor depicts the shift from Enlightenment to Romanticism as a radical and deep one, because it touches something fundamental about human nature and our way of being in the world. Even though the shift is so radical, we struggle to formulate it properly and to find an answer (1985a, 241).

We moderns do not believe that objective accounts are truly satisfactory ones, even though some psychology, sociology and political sciences claim this to be the case. Taylor strictly opposes their claims, as we will see in my third chapter talking about the disengaged and the instrumental use of reason, the necessity of overcoming epistemology, and the neutrality and objectivity of the social sciences. Taylor claims that the reason why some objective accounts are still so strong in modernity is the fact that we are heirs of the Enlightenment (1985a, 246-247). We would like to have an objective account of ourselves and our world, in which clarity and control would be the founding principles. Holding to the scientific mind-set, we tend to be men of the Enlightenment with utilitarian values. Thus growth, productivity, welfare become the founding principles in our understanding of social structure. Scientism, technocracy, and domination of nature come to be the criteria for any evaluation of society. In all these cases we use the designative notion of human language.

Taylor claims that we moderns are also heirs of the Romantics as well. As Romantics did, we look towards recognition of the intrinsic, irreducible nature of expression, the new sense of history, the intrinsic value of certain forms of life, and the reconciliation with nature. We moderns try to find new and original ways of expressing our subjectivity, using expressive terms like *I feel fulfilled by this, not by that, that speaks to me, something is more me*. It is not difficult to see that these expressions go beyond the designative perception of language and human nature. In this sense, we follow the steps of the Romantics, even though their solutions prove to be insufficient for us today.

Therefore, Taylor asserts that a modern understanding of language differs from what the Romantics understood with their expressive theory of language and human

nature (1985a, 236). When we talk about the expressive power of the subject, we focus less on the act of expression as such. Our concern asks how can this expressive power come to its fullest and best realization? What are the characteristics of human perfection? How can we qualify the excellence of expression? Those are matters which the Romantics did not think about because it was not their concern, but it is ours.

With these assertions Taylor displays how modernity goes beyond the Romantic understanding of language in terms of self-expression/realization of the subject (1985a, 239-244). What is expressed is not only the self of the subject, but a world. This is a large claim, with which Taylor first criticizes the Romantic features of modernity, promulgating sentimentalism or any kind of extreme subjectivism. Taylor also shows that modern expressivism seems in many aspects anti-subjectivist, going quite beyond the expressive power of a subject. In modernity, it is commonly accepted that language is a complex speech activity, in the domain of the community and not of an individual, and an activity of which we are not fully aware and which we do not fully control. All these indicate that we understand language as something beyond the power of the subject. What the Romantics were struggling to discover has become obvious for us moderns.

As the most important point in the modern approach to language, Taylor claims the following: we see language as a whole, as an activity with “a depth structure” (1985a, 240). By depth structure, Taylor refers to what underlies the activity of language as such and introduces his agenda as how to give an objective account and explanation of this depth structure. The modern science of language wants to understand the unobservable structures and mechanisms beyond the immediate perception of the world and the surface of language. For example, modern psychology tries to explain human behaviour on the

level of consciousness and un-consciousness; sociologists talk about the structures and functions framing a certain society; behaviorists want to explain human conduct in terms of stimulus and responses. So we deal with metaphysical questions about the nature of these structures, and consequently, about the objectivity of our claims. The answer requires from us a reflection based on the designative understanding of language, where the meaning of language depends on its relation to the extra-linguistic reality. Language is to be explained in terms of something else. It does not mean that the expressivist components of language should be put out of our reflection; they will remain there, but they require from us a more scientific and objective account.

In the article “The Person,” we can find an explanation of what Taylor means by explaining language in terms of something else. This is the space or the *locus* (what might be human language, or cosmos, physical or mythical regions, sacred space, space of social intercourse) where things emerge at their fullest, clearest, most salient. This space is not to be sought somewhere outside the person, but inside, in his mind. This space cannot be represented, but needs to be interiorized, appropriated and developed in the person. This is the space which connects a person with something meaningful.

Taylor illustrates all this as the dilemma of modern objectivist theories of language. These theories can avoid the questions concerning the nature of expression only by espousing narrower and more primitive theories which are either implausible, or which fail to explain something important about language. Or they can win plausibility and an explanatory range, but at the cost of opening themselves to these questions (1985a, 245).

At this point I will reformulate Taylor's questioning modern objectivist theories, saying that Taylor pushes us to look beyond a direct confrontation with language and to touch the underlying motivations and desires stimulating our reflections on language. Whether or not we (or the modern objectivist theories of language) want to touch these motivations and desires, is another question. It is more than a question; it is a moral dilemma, which will enable us to grasp the meaning of expressiveness in modernity. The positive answer to this dilemma requires from us our consent and active participation.

From the previous analyses, we already know that scientism (objectivism) and the subjectivist forms of expressivism cannot provide us with sufficient explanations. Thus Taylor suggests to us that we take a critical approach to both of them that should open to us a very fruitful line of enquiry. Taylor describes this enquiry as how "to go beyond subjectivism in discovering and articulating what is expressed" (1985c, 247). This enquiry is a very challenging one; to avoid embracing it would be like neglecting the question about human nature. Saying this, Taylor re-confirms his initial statement that our understanding of language is bound up with our understanding of human nature. As a solution, Taylor proposes his theory about the connection between language and meaning.

So far we have seen how our understanding of language, human nature, and the modern search for meaning are three components, which are in Taylor's view narrowly bound together. We already spoke about Taylor's interpretation of language as a very complex activity, which in itself reflects human nature. Let us now focus on the human

search for meaning, which will complete the picture of Taylor's understanding of language.

2.3.3 Taylor's Triple H-Theory of Meaning

In the paper "Theories of Meaning," published in his book *Human Agency and Language*, Taylor starts his search for meaning in this way: "What we must seek is not to identify ideas or meanings, but to build an adequate representation of things" (1985a, 249). By "representation" in this case, Taylor refers to an independent reality that goes beyond our projection of meaning into things, and beyond arbitrary mixing of our own intuitions of meaning, relevance, and importance. In this way, Taylor rejects the designative linguistic approach to reality as being insufficient, because it claims that the meaning of a word is what that word designates. Simultaneously, Taylor rejects the normative claims of subjectivism also, because the meaning stays beyond an individual subjective perception and cannot depend exclusively on the subject. If we want to understand meaning, we must keep in mind that we cannot grasp it as a single act but as a many-sided process, in which we frame our representations with words. Through representations we try to achieve our purposes. It is true that some purposes might be expressed or reached without words, but at the moment we effect them in language, the words have meaning. Words serve us to frame our representations. Taylor concludes that once we understand this, we understand meaning (1985a, 254).

In Taylor's view, currently dominant theories of meaning in the Anglo-Saxon world do not adequately express the complexity of language in its dynamics and in its relation to meaning. Therefore, Taylor elaborates a theory which he calls the triple-H

theory (1985a, 255-263). His theory offers an alternative conception of meaning, even though not a completely original one, because it is based on what came to us through Herder, Humboldt, and Hamman (hence, Taylor's calling it triple H-theory). Following the main claims of Humboldt's and Herder's understanding of language, Taylor stresses the idea that man exists as man only when he uses language; at the same time, language exists only in talking, where language simply happens or takes place in relation to the talkers.

With the triple H-theory, Taylor highlights three important functions of language activity. Each one of them presents one part of the answer to the question: What are we bringing about in language and essentially through language that can only be brought about through language?

(1) *Explicit awareness and articulation*: In language we formulate things and bring to explicit awareness that about which we formerly had only an implicit sense. Formulation helps us to reach a fuller and clearer consciousness of things or to identify a specific feature of the matter at hand. In this way we can better grasp the contours and boundaries of the matter and find an appropriate word for it, which helps us to articulate our view of the world.

(2) *Public space*: Through language we create a public space where an expression does not have meaning only for me or for you but for us together. Language creates a common vantage point from which we survey the world together. It creates a specific way of being and focusing where we are together qua participants in a common act of focusing. This is much more than any pure exchange of information about facts between the critical individuals.

(3) *The medium through which some concerns can impinge on us:* Certain human concerns can be formulated only through language. Moral concerns are here in the first place. For example, when we talk about the right or wrong of an action, we need certain standards which we formulate only through using language. The same happens when we talk about rituals, gestures, different styles of comportment, or similar human concerns, i.e. feeling of shame, of a sense of dignity, of pride, of aspiration to fulfillment. Thus, the essential human concerns, their description, and distinctions of different levels, are disclosed only in language.

These three functions should not be taken separately, because they merge and interconnect in different ways, which Taylor affirms with a series of examples (1985a, 263-273). With language we not only articulate but also express. Language does not exhaust itself in description or characterization of things; through expression it creates a rapport with someone. Once we express something, we put it “there,” where it becomes the object for us together. This is so essential and fundamental that we cannot do away with it. Even the austere and abstract forms of language, i.e. scientific language or mathematical representations, which try to step out of the conversational context, still reveal one’s stance toward the discussed matter and display the author’s self. They exist only in a kind of conversational limbo, never by themselves.

Another example showing how these three functions of language are interconnected is the relation between the public space and language as the medium through which some concerns can impinge on us. For example, moral concerns and standards of human behaviour exist only in the public space from which they impinge on an individual’s behaviour and stimulate our reflection. It means that our concerns only

exist through articulation and expression. Out of the public space, they lose their reason for being.

With his third example, Taylor refers to the constitutive function of language. Certain human feelings, desires, actions, intentions, sensations, get their shape only through our description and formulation. For example, I feel guilty about a certain practice, and through the articulation of my feelings I might realize that there is nothing wrong with it. Something similar can be said about the ways in which we describe ourselves, our relations to other people, different nuances of familiarity with someone, and the like. All these are constituted in and by language, where the language assumes the constitutive rule, i.e. it conditions our way of acting. This does not mean that there is a causal relation between language and action, where the language causes action. The accounts of action embedded in our language are intentional and teleological, i.e. they refer us to the inclinations of the subject. Yet description and explanation of inclinations and desires require among others language-vocabulary. Nonetheless, a complete and exhaustive description or explanation of inclinations and desires is an untenable task. There will always remain something inexplicable and mysterious in the whole process; to become the human agent cannot absolutely perceive the complexity of an action, as Taylor explicitly illustrates in his article “Explaining Action.” In any case, the constitutive dimension of language refers us back to the nature of the agent and his concerns.¹⁷

¹⁷ In the paper “Language Not Mysterious?”, Taylor characterizes human language with the word *mysterious*. “Something is a “*mystery*” ... when we cannot come to understand it by taking a disengaged stance to it, applying already articulated concepts, but when we have to open ourselves to our experience of it, explore it by immersing ourselves in it. For example, the behaviour of people of another culture can be mysterious, but we can learn to understand it by immersing ourselves in it, interacting with the people, remaining open to their values, norms, ways of thinking” (2011, 50).

Consequently, it becomes evident why the articulation of a specific word assumes a defined meaning in one culture or linguistic milieu, while the same word in a neighbor culture might have a different meaning, depending on human inclinations, desires, motivations, and concerns.

Through this somewhat repetitive and lengthy reflection Taylor approaches the question of meaning. Each one of the three functions of language indirectly presents one part of his critique of modern theories of meaning, which are based on representations as the basic phenomena to be explained. Taylor's triple H-theory of meaning appears to be more complex and persuasive in that this theory includes the expressive and constitutive dimensions, both of them irreducible to representation.

In other words, Taylor has problems with accepting the truth-conditional theories of meaning, which assume the independence of meaning and truth (1985a, 274-277). In uncritically assuming the independence of language, these theories neglect to account for the relation between the putative truth-conditions and the language they are using. If we do not have an adequate grasp of language, even our understanding of the truth-conditions will remain incomplete. If we want to understand specific terms in their representative function, we have to understand them in their articulating-constitutive function, i.e., within their context. The observer has to be within this context involved as a participant, and not as a detached and monological subject. Properly understanding context depends partially on the agent's exchange of mutual clarification with other participants in the same context. Hence to understand what these terms represent, we have to understand them in their articulating-representative function. We have to see how they bring a horizon of human concern to a certain articulation. Thus Taylor concludes

that there is no need to establish the independence of language or to talk about an independent reality because there is no such reality. The matter is not how to grasp an independent reality but how to articulate and shape our concerns about meaning in a certain context.¹⁸

Taylor illustrates this point very clearly in his article “Vor der Macht der Sprache,” where he claims the following: it is not true that we first understand or keep in our mind what the meaning of life is, and then express it. It is just the opposite: once we express something, we can grasp its meaning (1991a, 87).

In addition to that, Taylor argues that all modern theories of meaning which assume that the meaning can be seen in terms of representation and achieved from the standpoint of the monological subject are limited. If we want to understand language, and consequently the meaning that language represents, we have to see the place that language with its representations has in a specific culture. If we really want to understand language, we have to understand it as a form of life - Taylor repeats the Wittgensteinian slogan (1985a, 291). We cannot understand how words relate to things until we have identified the nature of the activity in which they get related to things. So we are again back to our initial claim that the understanding of language is interconnected deeply with human nature, human activities, and the search for meaning. Taylor concludes his reflection about language by claiming that only where we understand the nature of the

¹⁸ As an example Taylor illustrates how the term “equal” has different meanings in different circumstances. To be equal in Athens does not have the same meaning as to be equal in Sparta. The meaning “equal” has to be articulated in the polis, where the equality represents an ideal shared by the members of the polis. The process of articulation of this term shows us how the members of the polis express their concern about the desired ideal, and how the articulated term defines their life together (1985a, 277).

(social) activity, can we understand how sentences relate to their truth-conditions, or expressions to their satisfaction-conditions or assertability-conditions (1985a, 292).

Summary: Our analysis of Taylor's reflection on human language and his triple H-Theory leads us to different conclusions, which we will divide into two groups. (1) Taylor's understanding of language fits coherently into his understanding of human nature. Previously we talked about Taylor's statements that we can understand properly conceiving human agency only through the agent's embodiment, constant acting, and engagement in his context. Taylor maintains that we can grasp adequately the importance and meaning of language only if we take into consideration different functions of language. Language does not exist by itself, but only through human agency embedded in a certain context. As the human agent is always part of a larger context that is defining his nature and self-understanding, so is language also always part of a larger context in which we can define meaning. The nature of the human agent is to look for new ways of self-interpretation, self-realization, and the elaboration of deepest human concerns. Language with its expressive and constitutive function should never be put outside of its dynamic process of creating new ways of understanding and elaborating deepest human concerns, in this case, in the search for meaning. Consequently, we are supposed to recognize and appreciate other people's languages because they express in a visible form their deepest human desires and concerns. With this last thought, we already anticipate Taylor's theory of recognition, about which we will talk later on.

Following the same line, Taylor's understanding of human language reflects his vision of reality that is very complex, many-sided, and connecting different layers of

reality. In Taylor's vision, all these layers combine in a harmonious unity. The present time finds its explanation and justification from its past. Hence, Taylor's interpretation of language finds its foundation in the last 200 years of intensive reflection on language. It was the time when philosophers claimed objectivity or subjectivity to be the coherent way of exploring reality. Through his historical hermeneutical approach, Taylor shows that the theories about neutrality and objectivity of language, as well as those theories which are based on subjectivity or the monological understanding of meaning, are unacceptable because they are based on false premises. Nonetheless, Taylor does not reject them, but critically integrates them into his account, presupposing that different philosophical claims reflect in various ways the same human concern for finding meaning. Therefore, modernity represents in Taylor's mind a strong challenge to elaborate new meaningful horizons.

(2) The second group of conclusions refers us to the first chapter of this writing, i.e. to Hegel's concern and tensions between the Romantic and Enlightenment elements. The same concern and tension remain palpable in Taylor's writings on human language. Let us remind ourselves of the claims about the objectivity, neutrality, and independence of language. These Enlightenment elements are to be found in many modern language theories. For Taylor, they are unacceptable because they are too one-sided. We also mentioned Taylor's resistance to the modern theories of meaning which consider meaning as the representation achieved from the standpoint of the monological subject. The search for balance between these two groups of language theories expresses the tension with which Hegel had to deal in his time. Even though expressed in different forms, the same tension is still vividly evident in modernity. We can say that this is

another example of Taylor's adopting Hegel's challenges from the point of view of modernity and looking for an adequate solution.

Let us connect this subchapter about human language with my first chapter, where we analyzed Taylor's interpretation of the Hegelian description of the struggle to define and find meaning. When Taylor talks about different language theories, he basically talks about the same struggle. If we take language as one of the substantial parts of the self-defining process of the human agent, then different language theories express the human's struggle to define meaning and himself. In the first chapter, we spoke about the search for meaning, and consequently for human fulfillment, as a very complex but never-ending process, taking place in a variety of modes, but with no universal or homogeneous solutions. In a similar way we can see here in the second chapter that language is a never-ending process of creation and self-realization of the speaker.

At various points so far we have mentioned how Taylor transcends the direct confrontations of certain statements. In Taylor's view, more important than rightness of these statements, are the motivations and reasons on which these statements are based. These motivations and reasons are what Taylor is looking for, because they are always based on something deeply human. In an analogous way, Taylor deals with different language theories, more interested in the motivations and reasons underlying the agent's reflection about language than about the theories of language. For Taylor, the main motivations are human concerns and the desire to find meaning; these are what trigger his reflections about language.

In interpreting Taylor's reading of Hegel in my first chapter, I mentioned the importance of the embodiment of the human agent in his context. In this subchapter we

saw that language is no exception to that. Taylor is convinced that for a coherent understanding of language, it should never be removed from its context.

In short, we can conclude that many of Taylor's statements about human language find their explanation in Hegel's philosophy. We can see that Taylor's statements on the domain of human language reflect conclusions which he took from Hegelian philosophy. Taylor's reflection about language should not be seen as outside of his entire philosophical opus. My intention is to present Taylor's reflection on language as a theme that continuously recurs in his writings. Familiarity with Taylor's understanding of language is necessary if we want to comprehend completely his reflection in other areas. In the third and fourth chapters we will talk about modern epistemology, social sciences, the politics of recognition, and the modern search for meaning in terms of religion, secularization, and human flourishing. Each one of these areas refers us back to language, especially to its constitutive rule of the human agent.

In the interview "Von der Macht der Sprache," Taylor says that we should imagine language as the power which opens us to the world (1991a, 86). No wonder that Taylor pays so much attention to the importance of language, since it opens us to the world of so many areas of life: epistemology, social sciences, secularization, the modern search for meaning and human flourishing, and other fields as well. Since we cannot speak or write without using language, it is obvious why Taylor devotes so much attention to language as an expression of this special power which only the human agent owns and through which the human agent constructs both different worlds and himself.

2.4 Taylor's Descriptive Approach

As the fourth and last step to understanding Taylor's reflection, we will analyze his descriptive approach and method of proceeding. My claim is that Taylor uses this approach as the most appropriate way for explaining certain topics. We have already looked at Taylor's descriptive methodology in our analysis of the moral sources of modern identity, of human agency and language, as well as his exposition of Hegel's philosophy. In the interest of brevity and avoiding repetition, I will first delineate Taylor's methodology by referring back to the three themes discussed previously and to the methodology of Hegel. After that I will present the normative and regulative aspects of Taylor's methodology.

2.4.1 Taylor's Methodology

Reading Taylor's most important books, i.e. *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*, leaves us with the impression that Taylor is a very complex thinker who interweaves into his narrative various positions of other philosophers from different historical periods. This makes our reading of his extensive works an intriguing and at times a somewhat puzzling process; there are times when the reader can follow the principal stream of the author's thought only with some confusion. Some commentators of Taylor's books are critical of his extended deliberations. His shorter writings do seem to be better organized and more focused, even while still including numerous philosophical positions and arguments borrowed from many thinkers from different periods. Even here, however, Taylor rarely makes strong statements or conclusive resolutions either in his articles or

his books. He rather deduces conclusions in a way that challenges the reader to pay special attention to what is missing or neglected in the theory or the position under discussion. As a result, one might easily conclude that Taylor's approach is primarily a descriptive one, lacking normative aspects or regulative principles. For example, in *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*, Taylor explains and justifies modernity through a long historical-philosophical-spiritual exegesis. The present age is explained through its historical background. Everything seems to be changing through time and in relation to different circumstances. Even though all this is true, we have to look more deeply, if we want to comprehend properly Taylor's methodology.

We can encapsulate Taylor's methodology in his definition of philosophy. "Philosophy is an activity which essentially involves, among other things, the redescription of what we are doing, thinking, believing, assuming, in such a way that we bring our reason to light more perspicuously" (1984a, 18). With redescription, we can better explain our action, thought, belief, and assumption. Our justification has to necessarily include a historical perspective because we can grasp who we are in the present time only through grasping the immediacy of our past. So philosophy is inherently historical.¹⁹ Its task is to explore the past and to reach an understanding of things which are entirely contemporary. Philosophy can save us from the errors and illusions of the past, and from rigid ways of thinking in the present. This does not mean that there is not dialogue with the earlier writers. Dialogue with them is necessary because often their formulations are much better than ours. Recovery of our past and

¹⁹ In Taylor's words: "...the fact that our practices are shaped by formulations, and that these impart a certain direction to their development, makes it the case that self-understanding and reformulation sends us back to the past: to the paradigms which have informed development, or the repressed goods which have been at work" (1984a, 27).

interpretation of our present in historical perspective are two elements that are crucial for Taylor's comprehension of philosophy. For this reason, philosophy and the history of philosophy are one, which means that an adequate understanding of certain problems, questions, and issues, requires from us an understanding that is genetic.

It is at this point that Taylor explicitly follows Hegel, defending his position and adopting his understanding of philosophy (1984a, 17). The search for the reason behind an action, thought, belief, or assumption, becomes the normative aspect of Taylor's methodology. Despite his adoption of Hegel's understanding of philosophy, Taylor does not agree with Hegel's ontological vision based on *Geist* and the self-authenticating of knowledge. At a round-table on Hegel, discussing Hegel's "*die sich denkende Idee*", the absolute knowledge, Taylor clearly expresses his doubts about the Hegelian philosophical project, i.e. final recuperation and interpretation of history and final discovery of the significance of things (1982, 595). All three aspects: recuperation, interpretation and discovery, seem to be implicit in Hegel's notion of a self-authenticating and self-justifying form of knowledge. The way in which Hegel explains the self-authentication and self-justification of knowledge appears to Taylor to be an impossible project, breaking down at many points, and as such unacceptable. However, this is not problematic for Taylor because he is not interested in Hegel's absolute knowledge or self-authenticating of knowledge, but in Hegel's underlying intention of doing philosophy. This is the best we can learn from Hegel, as Taylor puts it at the same round-table discussion.

Hegel's intention was to introduce into Western philosophy something tremendously interesting and valuable, i.e. the question of how to transcend the modern

European epistemological tradition based on Descartes and Kant. As we already know, this epistemological tradition, as well as modern epistemology, is insufficient as such because it does not give us an adequate account of the human agent who carries on this tradition and epistemology. The elaboration of a more complex account of the human agency in its historical perspective became something that influenced Hegel's reflection. The same challenge and inspiration have been constantly feeding Taylor's mind, as we can see in his writings.²⁰

As the way to a higher and fuller understanding of reason and to an elaboration of these propositions, Taylor suggests that we not attempt a kind of direct access to some transcendent realm, but to start off from where we are and put there a kind of meta-critique, which will lead us to a higher and fuller notion of reason. Such a notion of reason, offering more meaningful explanations, becomes the goal of Taylor's philosophical reflection, as it was Hegel's. Hegel had been criticizing Herder and Kant in their search for a more solid foundation of knowledge than those of the epistemological traditionalism; Taylor does the same through his critique of nihilism, certain forms of liberalism, naturalism, modern social and political sciences, secularization theories, and in general, any kind of a closed reading of reality. Hegel and Taylor take a similar path forward: a larger, more far-reaching and complex vision that will allow them to elaborate a more solid foundation of knowledge from epistemological traditionalism. At the same

²⁰ In connection to this topic, Taylor distinguishes in his paper "Philosophy and its History" between the epistemological model, based on Descartes' vision, which is, as we already know, insufficient as such. On the other hand, Taylor identifies the creative redescription, which should bring to light better positions and deeper reasons for the agent's acting. Such a redescription is inseparable from doing the history of philosophy.

With this separation of two models in mind, Taylor places the epistemological model in its historical context. Doing this, Taylor hopes to catch the reasons and motives behind the success of the epistemological model and Descartes' dualism. Once familiar with these reasons and motives, we should be able to find alternative interpretations. Taylor talks in terms of liberation from earlier formulations in order to restore a picture of what is important to us (1984a, 19-23).

time, this foundation should allow them a deeper and more meaningful reading of human existence. In contrast to Hegel, Taylor does not conclude that this process and reason itself will become self-authenticating, i.e. having the power to give definitive and irreversible definitions. Contrary to Hegel, Taylor maintains that the process of constant formulation might also be reversible. There will always remain a certain distance between a truth-searching subject and truth itself; the certitude of having absolute knowledge is a kind of an illusion.

Taylor supports the process of constant formulation with the help of “transcendental arguments,” taken from the first three chapters of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Taylor extensively elaborates this argument in his paper “The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology” (1972). This argument is not completely new to us. We have already spoken about this argument in our section on “Necessity of Agent’s Embodiment.” With the transcendental arguments Taylor states that we always start from some putatively undeniable fact of our experience in order to conclude that this experience must have certain features or be of a certain type, otherwise this undeniable fact could not be. In other words, we always start with our conscious experience, which must be sayable. In grasping the particulars of our conscious experience, we are forced to have recourse to descriptive expressions (some universal concepts); otherwise, the particular on its own remains ineffable. Hegel argues very strongly that immediate knowledge of particulars is impossible. The experience of the particular can never be a purely receptive pre-conceptual experience, as Descartes claimed to be the case.

From having a conscious experience, we can criticize certain ideas or negate certain contents or revise certain formulations, which automatically creates a new

context, where the same idea or content or formulation through its negation or revision bears something new. This revision or negation is based on new or different criteria (*Maßstab*, yardstick), through which we illuminate the object with its characteristics in a different perspective; for example, comparing it with other objects or particulars. This leads us beyond, i.e. to a higher and fuller notion of the object. Taylor says that we pass from a less adequate conception of reason to a more adequate one. Through the constant revision of our formulations, we are able to avoid confusions and contradictions, and look for better formulations. In this perspective, the valid propositions of yesterday might become imperfect today. This is the point at which Hegel talks about the dialectical movement of our thoughts, where negation and contradiction construct our thinking. This movement constantly challenges us to look for better formulations through the critique of the previous formulations. The same movement challenges us to look for a better formulation about ourselves through a self-critique. This process brings us a new and supposedly better grasp of reason, and new criteria for the creation of more adequate formulations. In contrast to Hegel, Taylor prefers to keep the process of continuous formulation open. Hegel on the contrary states that we can reach the point where we know that the new conception is the most adequate one, i.e. irreversibly adequate. This is also the position of the Western epistemological tradition, when it claims to be able to provide an objective view of reality. These claims are based on the concept of self-authenticating reason, borrowed partially from Hegel and partially from Descartes' and Kant's tradition.

From the analysis of Hegel's introduction to *Phenomenology*, Taylor deduces a chain of intrinsically connected transcendental arguments (1972, 183). With the first

argument Taylor shows that every conscious experience must be sayable. With this, Taylor opposes the idea that we can have a pre-conceptual experience of the particular, or a purely receptive experience. When we grasp a particular, we require recourse to descriptive expressions, which consequently means that we can grasp a particular under an indefinite number of descriptions. It follows that a thing has an indefinite number of properties. The particular on its own remains ineffable.

The second argument follows: things and properties cannot be separated in consciousness, because the identification of properties requires that they have to be seen as belonging to things. At the same time, the distinction between things requires that they have properties. Hence, any notion of experience that would make the thing not an object of perception but rather a construct must be set aside.

Finally the third argument: if things and properties are to be part of the same experience, then the object of experience must be seen as the place of causal backgrounds, i.e. the place where the same thing and properties causally relate and build the unity. Particulars must be identified at least in part by causal properties.

With this chain of transcendental arguments, Taylor wants to clarify the necessity of our interaction with the world:

...our experience of things is bound up with our interaction with them; ...this interaction is prior, and that what we think of as conscious human experience is an awareness that arises in a being who is already engaged with his world. From this point of view there is no level of experience that can be thought of, even as an abstraction, as pure receptivity. For our most original experience can only be understood by reference to a prior handling of or engagement with the world (1972, 185).

This reference to Hegel's *Phenomenology* should be sufficient for our understanding of why Taylor prefers the descriptive approach in his writings. He does so

because it offers the best instruments for any description of human existence as such, as well as of human interaction with the world, without reducing human existence to a static or life-less reality. Human existence is in Taylor's reflection something dynamic, constantly in interaction with the agent's ambient, in continuous search of deeper meaning. No wonder then that Taylor insists that we can describe ourselves and our nature only in the controversial way, i.e. contrasting our present situation with the previous one (1978, 151).

It should not be difficult to recognize at this point how Taylor's descriptive approach, his way of proceeding, is reflected in our three recurring themes: moral sources, human agency and human language. Each one of these themes includes constant movement, change, revision, negation, self-critique; all of these elements represent constitutive factors of Taylor's description of moral sources, human agency and human language.

(a.) Moral Sources: In order to define the moral sources of modern identity, we saw how Taylor introduces the necessity of framework and articulation. The descriptive approach seems to be the most appropriate tool to grasp all dynamic and constantly changing elements of framework and articulation. Living in a framework is crucial because it constitutes our identity as human agents. This framework is like the background picture of our spiritual nature and human predicament; it incorporates the set of qualitative distinctions with which we classify our actions or modes of life and feelings; and it helps us to orientate our lives to our relation to the good.

If the framework is the first factor for definition of modern identity, the second one is articulation of what makes sense to us. By articulation Taylor refers to what

underlies our ethical choices, leanings, intuitions. Articulation is essential because the good exists only through our articulation. In addition, articulation is an historical enterprise, in which we define our present situation in its relation to the past.

(b.) Human Agency: Taylor rejects a definitive definition of the human agency, one that would be universally applicable. He proposes a descriptive definition of agency, which includes human purposes, goals, desires, aspirations, feelings, and aversions. All of these elements are subject to continuous modification. The human agent is in constant search for the significance, i.e. the meaning of his life, which presupposes the sense of freedom, individuality, inwardness, embodiment in nature, and responsibility. So our reflection about the human agency leads us to a deeper and more authentic understanding of who we are. Taylor talks about self-interpretation as the condition of an understanding of human agency. This self-interpretation is a continuous struggle, in which we pass from a less coherent to a more meaningful articulation of the present position. This process is always under the influence of the agent's embodiment, i.e. his engagement in and with the world.

(c) Human Language: Similar to his interpretation of human nature, Taylor also understands human language as a part of a larger context, in which language finds its meaning. This belonging to a larger context comprises a dynamic process of continuous creation of new ways of understanding. Language is much more than an instrument at the disposal of the human agent; language is the medium through which the agent formulates and brings to light his deepest concerns. Language is an activity through which we express our selves, and in doing so we transform ourselves. In addition, language is the manifestation of the subject's power to be expressive. Expression refers to our realizing,

in external reality, something that we humans feel or desire. Language is an activity whose consequences we cannot control or dominate.

In all three cases, Taylor is very prudent in his statements about self-authenticating or self-justification of knowledge and reason, and far from proposing any kind of definitive conclusions about the human agency. Taylor continuously criticizes those approaches which apply the natural science model of interpretation to the investigation of human agency. Human agency is simply too mysterious and overwhelming to be understood in the same way as material beings are. If we wish to understand someone correctly, we have to understand his emotions, aspirations, what he finds admirable and contemptible, what he yearns for and what he loathes. We have to penetrate his world and be able to use key words in the same way he does. These and similar characterizations are linked to the strong evaluation and extreme sensibility. As such, they cannot reflect a value-free scientific discourse (1981, 192-194). In short, Taylor wants to protect the human agency from any kind of oversimplified, narrow or one-sided reflection about who we are. Therefore, he sets out some parameters which coordinate our approach to the human agency, without pretending that we can attain a complete and exhaustive definition.

At this, Taylor distances himself from Hegel's position, especially from Hegel's ontology and self-justification of reason and knowledge. This is surprising to a certain extent because Hegel's descriptive methodology reflects his ontology as well (we saw this in 1.3.3, where we talked about "Dialectical Argumentation" and "Reality as a Movement"). Hegel perceives reality in constant tension, movement, and dialectical relationship that keeps singular parts of reality apart and together at the same time. Taylor

describes this as the *ontological conflict*. Nothing can exist except in struggle, opposition, and developing itself out of its opposite. Such a conflict is not a fatal one, because the single parts do not exist independently but always in relation to the whole. Hegel applies this logic of conflict to the finite spirits, animals, things, various forms of civilizations, historical events, people, including human mortality. This dialectic goes through different stages from unsatisfactory notions to the only satisfactory conception – *Geist*. The whole movement is bi-directional at the same time: ascending (from the finite reality to *Geist*) and descending (from *Geist* to the finite reality). This process of movement presents the essential feature of *Geist* that cannot simply exist; it exists only in movement by overcoming its opposites and by negating its own negations. In the same way, even the human subject has to go through the cycle or drama of divisions and oppositions. The human subject is in conflict with himself because he is separated from his essential goals. As a solution to this conflict, he is supposed to see himself from a higher perspective as the vehicle of *Geist*. As such, the oppositions, changes and constant movement become something permanent and absolute in his life.

In short, Taylor adopts Hegel's methodology and his inspiration for doing philosophy, but not his vision of reality based on *Geist*. Everything in Hegel's writings is subordinate to the realization of *Geist*, which becomes the normative aspect of the entire philosophical structure. Is there any normative aspect in Taylor's writings?

2.4.2 Normative Aspects in Taylor's Methodology

Taylor's descriptive method or approach to human reality includes normative and regulative aspects as well. This is to a certain extent a surprising statement, if we know

that Taylor delineates the human agency primarily with descriptive and not normative terms. In the previous subchapters we saw when Taylor interprets moral sources of the agent's identity, he sees them in a larger context, in which the moral sources are exposed to an ongoing articulation of their meaning. When Taylor talks about human language, his definition of language includes a dynamic process of continuous articulation of new meanings. In short, Taylor's definitions of moral sources, the human agency and human language, always include dynamic, changing features, which keep the analyzed subject in continuous alteration. Let us take this as the first, but not as the most important normative aspect of Taylor's descriptive methodology. The most important normative aspect in Taylor's philosophical reflection seems to be the agent's continuous search for meaning. Let us see how we can justify such conclusion.

Taylor states that when we talk about human life, we do follow certain rules and normative aspects, by which we describe human life, even though these rules and normative aspects are not entirely evident. They are not like the rules or principles on which the natural sciences are based; these rules can not be reduced to the pure representations residing in the agent's mind and guiding the agent's practices. What Taylor means by following a rule in these cases is something different. What is the proper way of understanding these rules, or grasping the meaning standing behind these rules?

There are at least two articles in which Taylor explicitly talks about the normative aspects in his methodology: "Understanding and Explanation in the *Geistwissenschaften*" (1981), and "To Follow a Rule," published in 1992 and reprinted in his book *Philosophical Arguments* (1995a). In both articles Taylor refers to Wittgenstein as the one who opposes the statements of the intellectualists, i.e. those who understand the rules

in terms of representations residing in the agent's mind and being completely clear to the agent's understanding. Wittgenstein's claim was that we can understand our rules only in relation to a background understanding that which allows us to grasp the meaning of these rules. Taylor adopts Wittgenstein's approach first, and then refines it with the help of Pierre Bourdieu's reflection about social understanding. Hence Taylor elaborates his statement that our understanding of the rules depends on the background understanding, i.e. the place where these rules are embodied (1995a, 167). This statement includes the normative and regulative aspects of Taylor's methodology. How does Taylor derive this statement?

In a very general way Taylor defines the rules "as patterns of reasons for action" (1995a, 179). These patterns operate in our way of thinking, and guide us in practices in our lives. The problem is that reason has a limit and as such cannot explain the patterns of reasons in a completely exhaustive manner; therefore, it has to refer outside of itself to another kind of understanding. The reference to something *outside* becomes the crucial issue of Wittgenstein's and Taylor's position against those who claim that there is no need for such a referring. Wittgenstein is convinced that our understanding of rules goes beyond our awareness because there is a whole host of issues which we are not aware of, but nevertheless they have a direct bearing on our understanding. For example, misunderstanding and doubt are always two possible options in our understanding, which require from us a new interpretation and deeper understanding, referring us to something *outside* the pure understanding.

With this almost self-evident assertion, Taylor goes against the modern intellectual tradition as well as the scientific culture and epistemology, when they claim

to be able to provide evident self-explanatory or self-authenticating foundations of human knowledge. Following this tradition, the agent is seen as a subject who creates and holds in his mind representations, i.e. formulations of what the world is like, what he aims at, what he is doing. These representations are “within” the subject and offer the tools through which the subject enters into relation to the outside world and other subjects. Despite this relation with the *outside*, the formulation of these presentations takes place “inside” the subject’s consciousness, independently from the *outside* world. Taylor calls this subject a monological subject, a center of monological consciousness, and the locus of representations (1995a, 169).

In the subchapter “Human Agency,” I have already spoken about Taylor’s critique of the monological understanding of the human agent. This kind of agent pretends to be able to transcend his own embodiment and engagement in the world (see “Human Agency Beyond Naturalism”). Taylor opposes such a notion of the human agent, defined in terms of disembodied and disengaged agency, capable of standing in a neutral position before the world pretending not to be part of the same world, and offering a value-free interpretation. Taylor is clear in this point: the human agent cannot exist if not embodied somewhere in a concrete place and engaged with the world. Even his representations or formulations of the world do not stand independently from the world; they depend on the agent’s embodiment and engagement in the world. Thus Taylor concludes that any understanding of the human agent which describes the agent as an independent entity of the world is deficient because it does not provide an adequate place to the background through which the agent articulates his representations and understanding of the world and himself. As a more appropriate description, Taylor’s elaborates a definition of the

human agency which includes an agent's engagement in practices, acting in and on the world. Only through practices and engagement with the world, can the agent elaborate his understanding of the world and himself. These practices always take place in relation to a background (a concrete time, space, society, culture), which has as such an inescapable role. It is inescapable because it is always there, even if the representations might not be; and it is inescapable because we need it for formulation and understanding of representations (1995a, 170). In short, representations as well as agent are not comprehensible in themselves, but always against a background or within a context in which they make sense.

On the same page Taylor states that not only has the agent to be embodied, whereby his embodiment affects his relation to and his understanding of the world, but the agent's understanding also has to be embodied. For example, if the agent moves within an environment familiar to him, he moves and acts differently from his moving and acting in an unknown place. With familiar instruments in our hands we manipulate differently than we do holding something completely new and unfamiliar to us. Including the sense of myself is somehow embodiment. For example, I act differently in front of a person of honor than in front of my friends. The sense I have of my own importance (as macho, or timid, or calm, or eager to please) affects my projection in a public space. In other words, our understandings are always embodied in a concrete place and depend on their embodiment.

With all these descriptions Taylor wants to point out that there is a certain level of understanding that is not necessarily or automatically captured in our representations and rules as such; nonetheless, it does not mean that it is not there. For example, at times we

simply know how to do certain things, and we sense what is appropriate or not in certain circumstances. In the same way we follow certain norms, even though they are not clearly formulated. We follow them because they make sense in these circumstances. These rules seem to be natural to us because everybody else follows them in the same way. In this case Taylor talks about the dialogical character of our actions, which means that our action is affected by an integrated, non-individual agent (1995a, 172). This means that our action is in a dialogical relation with the shared understanding we are part of. Many times we perform our actions insofar as we understand and constitute ourselves as integrally part of a *we*. This shared understanding and *we* condition our action, our way of thinking, and our understanding. Bourdieu describes all these together with the term “habitus” (1995a, 171), by which he means the social understanding that has to be included in our account of the background understanding, as well as in our account of the normative aspects or the rules governing our acting.

Taylor’s and Bourdieu’s reflections go against structuralism, and in a special way against the school of Lévi-Strauss, who would say at this point that rules are underlying *structures*, operating behind the backs of agents; that is, when we talk about unsophisticated agents, who deduce and formulate certain behaviours or rules from the regularity of given actions in their ambient. This repeated behaviour is then becoming a rule that orders their future practices. Agents simply follow, unconsciously, these norms and rules without thinking about their action. This pattern of thinking does not change much with more sophisticated agents, who are more aware of their way of thinking and acting. They are following rules residing not somewhere in a shared understanding but in

their own mind. The understanding of rules in terms of underlying structures remains the same in both cases.

Regarding structuralist theories, Taylor claims that they offer an inadequate explanation (1995a, 176-177). Structuralism perceives the rules as representations of something residing in the agent's mind or in the shared understanding, and having an operative causal function in the agent's life. The existence of these rules-as-representations is problematic because we can easily slip into reification of these rules, attributing to the rules an autonomous existence independent of the agents' lives. Perceiving the rules in this way means putting aside their embodiment in the ambient from which they are derived. These rules exist on a disengaged level. Therefore, Taylor prefers Bourdieu's proposal which offers a better solution, by taking into account also the social understanding in which these rules dwell.

The reification of the rules offers a distorted description of human actions. Taylor offers three reasons why. (1) The reification of the rules abstracts the human action from lived time, which means that it blocks out certain features essential to action. For example, when we act in uncertainty, time is a crucial factor. Even though we know by a rule what the appropriate action is, our delayed action irreversibly affects the situation we are in (it may make a marked difference whether we offer thanks immediately for a gift received or only after a lapse of time). (2) It is not enough to have an appropriate knowledge of the formula, if we do not know how to enact this formula in the right way. Human situations arise in infinite varieties, wherein each situation requires a different application of the same rule. Besides understanding of the rule, we need the virtue of *phronesis*, i.e. insightful understanding of how to apply this rule. (3) There is a reciprocal

relationship between rules and actions, where the actions do not automatically flow from the rules. Application of the rules does not necessarily lead to the desired practice, because the applied rule can transform the given situation (for example, in recognition of his work, I give a gift to my friend, but he refuses it). This means that practice does not necessarily fulfill the rules. Practice gives to a particular situation a concrete shape that requires from us a new interpretation and understanding of what the rule really means.

From here, Taylor derives his description of rules, arguing that the *rule* lies essentially in practice.

The rule is what is animating the practice at any given time, and not some formulation behind it, inscribed in our thoughts or our brain or our genes, or whatever (1995a, 178).

Let us say that a rule is what makes sense in a given situation, where sense animates our practicing. It might be that we do not have an adequate formulation of the rules or sense, but the rules are still there in the embodied understanding, i.e. habitus. As being part of this habitus, we recognize these rules and follow them because they make sense to us. For example, the habitus informs us how to act, or to behave, or to gesture in a certain situation. Therefore, the habitus always has an expressive dimension, giving expression to certain meanings that things and people have for us. By giving expression to it, we confer the meaning on it.

In Taylor's interpretation, rules are not static but something very dynamic and energetic (1995a, 179). Rules are not self-interpreting or self-justifying; they require us to be continuously in search of the meaning behind these rules. If we do not look for the meaning, a rule become a "dead letter" or rigidly institutionalized. Our search for the

meaning, or our affinity with the spirit behind the rules, will activate our practices in following the rules.

As the conclusion of my analysis of Taylor's descriptive approach, I state that Taylor is cautious in his descriptions, independently of the object in his analysis. In his descriptive methodology, he avoids strong affirmative principles or closed terminology, that is, language producing closed or narrow-minded versions of reality. In the next chapter, we will analyze Taylor's rejection of the scientific interpretations of human agency. These interpretations are necessary but insufficient because they are unable to describe properly and exhaustively the reality of the human agency, without reducing it to a set of specific principles.

In the face of this reality, Taylor basically proposes that we apply some contemplative guidelines to understanding who we are as agents. These guidelines are contemplative because they challenge us to be more observing, careful, and respectful, in an effort to understand ourselves without pretending to be able to grasp completely the meaning of our lives. To grasp the meaning of our lives, we have to continuously look at the meaning. The continuous search for meaning appears to be the most important normative aspect in Taylor's methodology. The aim of this methodology is to find a better formulation or a deeper meaning-giving interpretation of the human agency. Taylor's vision is that independently of where we are or what we do, deep down our acting always reflects our desire to do something meaningful in our life. Applying this logic to Taylor's broad reflection, we see how he continuously looks for the meaning behind the agent's acting in the world; for example, in the agent's interpretation of the

world with the principles of natural sciences and in the agent's search for a new multicultural order and new ways of expressing authenticity. In the last chapter of this dissertation, I will talk about different types of secularization, through which the modern agent struggles to find new spiritual meaning, rejecting the traditional forms of expressing his religious and spiritual life.

To conclude this subchapter: Taylor's descriptive approach includes historical understanding, polemical proceeding, interpretative study and hermeneutics. It seems to be an appropriate way of delineating human existence in that it accepts and respects human existence as it is, on the one hand, and on the other hand, challenges it to reach a higher level. With the same simplification we can say that in Taylor's reflection everything in the agent's life seems to be an expression of his search for meaning. Taylor's descriptive approach is no exception in this: the search for the meaning comes to the fore again, and remains normative in his perception of the changing reality. The way of discovering and expressing the meaning finds different forms, which cannot be easily grasped with normative terms. For Taylor, more important than claiming the right way is the search for a better and more meaningful way.

Summary of the Second Chapter

Keeping in mind the three recurring themes (moral sources of modern identity, human agency, and human language), as well as Taylor's descriptive methodology, our reading of Taylor's philosophical writing becomes easier, allowing us a firmer grasp of Taylor's position. At the end of each subchapter I have summarized in a few words of conclusion the main points of that subchapter. Here at the end of the second chapter, I return to the initial question expressed in the first chapter, i.e. Taylor's adoption of Hegel's concern, specifically to the union of two ideals, radical freedom and expressive fullness in our time. I limit my summary to one particular aspect: how these three themes reflect Hegel's concern about the union of radical freedom and expressive fullness.

In the subchapter on moral sources of modern identity, I described how Taylor explicitly counts freedom among the aspirations of modern moral philosophy and the modern search for identity. This general statement becomes more specific when Taylor talks about the procedural conceptions of ethics and its substantiation of human thoughts and feelings (see 2.1.1 "Normative Ethics Lacks Sufficient Foundations for Morality"). Taylor describes this ethic as an expression of human desire for freedom and the human search for meaning. Freedom in this case equates with an ideal, i.e. the ideal of being governed solely by one's own reasoning procedures, and not by some external authority or cosmological order. Through the achievement of this rational control and government, I achieve my own dignity and find the meaning of life (1993, 341).

In Taylor's view, such a conception of freedom transcends a direct connection with ethical matters. Freedom in this case becomes a belief, or ideal, or source of power,

which stimulates our ethical reflection. “What is supposed to be an outlook-independent metaethical thinking, setting the rules of reasoning for all possible moral positions, turns out to be just the preferred interpretation of one ideal among others” (1993, 342). For example, the advocates of procedural ethics say that freedom is an independent and autonomous domain, not directly connected with ethical issues. Thus, they consider freedom to belong to the metaethical sphere allowing them to subordinate substantial ethical issues to freedom. Taylor disagrees with these views. While claiming autonomy of freedom, they forget that their claim makes sense only from within a certain ethical viewpoint in which freedom is taken as a good. Taylor rejects their way of thinking: he unmasks the validity of their metaethical propositions that in fact outrageously fix the rules of discourse in the interests of one viewpoint (1993, 342).

Taylor takes a similar position on the naturalist understanding of human agency. In subdivisions 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 we talked about the insufficiency of those descriptions of human agency which are based on principles and conceptions taken from natural sciences. These descriptions appear to be independent and objective, but they are not, as Taylor showed us. However, the naturalist conceptions of human agency with all of their scientific principles taken from natural sciences have an importance in Taylor’s eyes, because they represent just another expression of the modern aspiration to be free. When the human agent believes he has some objective, neutral, scientific explanation of the world, he feels a greater sense of protection and safety in the face of threatened events that he cannot control (natural disasters, calamities, wars, and the *unknown* in general). The scientific explanations help him to better understand the matter in question, and to reorganize his world in the best possible way in view of his pre-established goals, i.e.

greater freedom, security and protection from natural disasters, economical growth, peaceful coexistence with other cultures, or other similar issues). In short, an agent's capacity and willingness to organize the world for the best effects are, in Taylor's view, expressions of the agent's desire to be free and to express himself in the best possible way. My summary regarding Taylor's interpretation: for a better account of human agency, we have to take these desires and expressions into consideration as well.

In these two cases as well as in other similar cases (Enlightenment understanding of human language, empiricism, naturalism, modern epistemology), Taylor normally takes a critical position, showing the narrowness of their positions. There are too many assumptions and presuppositions in modernity, which are uncritically adopted in their whole process of reflection. Taylor's critical reflection shows us these adoptions, assumptions, presuppositions on the one hand, and on the other hand, indicates to us their insufficiency. Nonetheless, their insufficiency is exactly the point through which Taylor highlights the positive sides of these insufficient and uncritical statements: they are the expressions of the human desire to increase freedom, i.e. to reach a higher level from which we can organize our life-conditions in a better and more meaningful way. These insufficient statements are an expression of the human desire to find meaning. This search for meaning represents the bases on which Taylor elaborates the unification of the human desire to be free on the one side, and on the other side, a continuous human search for new ways of expressing himself. In the third and fourth chapters we will talk about some specific approaches (scientific interpretation of the world, naturalist approach to human existence, secularization theories, the agent's search of authenticity, and others) which Taylor criticizes because of their narrow-mindedness. At the same time, Taylor

recognizes them as expressions of the human desire to be free and of the human search for a new meaning.

Taylor's reflection about moral sources of modern identity, the nature of the human agency, and human language are basically three different areas of the same reality – human agency living in modernity. These themes are closely interwoven and only if taken together can offer us a complete picture. Each one requires being seen through embodiment in concrete temporal and spatial conditions. The same embodiment becomes the only possible place in which the human agent can experiment and live in freedom. It does not mean that this embodiment represents the boundaries of freedom; rather, it represents the conditions of freedom. For this reason Taylor challenges every kind of narrow-minded way of thinking, whether based on science, or spiritual-religious principles, or moral guidelines from past times, or previous social orders, as we will see in the next chapter. Freedom means being able and willing to find and to accept new and better solutions that will provide us more meaningful interpretations for our lives. Without exaggeration, Taylor's conception of freedom encourages us to think in a new way.

One might argue that there is only a weak connection, if not purely coincidental similarities in Taylor's and Hegel's position in this point. On the contrary, I emphasize the relevance of this connection because it is important. When talking about moral sources of modern identity, we saw how Taylor argues in favor of the substantive ethics, whose main characteristic is the agent's embodiment in a space and time (2.1.1 and 2.1.2). Talking about embodiment of the substantive ethics, Taylor does not refer explicitly to Hegel; nonetheless, the similarities with Hegel's position remain evident. In

the first chapter (1.3.3) we talked about embodiment, hierarchical structure and ethical life as Hegel understood them in his late period. In order to describe the right action, the human mind should not strip itself of all particularities, like human desires, traditional principles, external authorities, or other determinations of the subject. These particularities are in Hegel's view crucially important for any coherent understanding of the embodied subject. They express what man is as a man; they refer us to certain substantial points, which define the subject in his embodiment and ethical life. In order to be free, the human agent has to discover and accept this larger reality of which he is part, and then actively participate with reason which also includes the search for connections between singular parts of reality in view of reaching a new unity.

This pattern of thinking is recognizable in Taylor's position, as he emphasizes the connection between the good and the human agent. Articulation of the good as Taylor understands it can be seen in Hegel's perspective in terms of the agent's active participation within the larger system, in which everyone has to find his place. Taylor talks about frameworks and larger horizons, where the good takes its place and where the human agent resides; Hegel talks about *Geist* or cosmic spirit, in which the individual has to discover his own place of active participation. Taylor opposes utilitarianism, universalism, and any conception of the good which is freed from anthropological notions; Hegel opposes Kant and his moral principles based exclusively on reason. Both Taylor and Hegel see integrated reason as the essential part that has to be included in the ethical deliberation. Doing this, they reject Romantic theorists and their representatives in modernity who struggle to find an appropriate place for human reason in their conceptions of human agency. Both Taylor and Hegel emphasize the importance of the

historical perspective, in which we must place our present ethical claims. Taylor talks about the historical development of the meaning of the good, and inserts the moral orientation of our lives within the coordinates of the past, present, and future time. Hegel describes reality in terms of movement and the process of constant change within time. Despite these similarities, nevertheless, we should not overlook the main difference between Taylor and Hegel. Hegel's primary focus – at least in his later period – remains *Geist* or universal spirit, which is not the case for Taylor.

In short, the similarities between Hegel and Taylor are simply too evident to be called purely coincidental. Taylor's way of thinking remains deeply influenced by Hegel's interpretation of reality.

Synopsis of Chapter One and Two: Hegel's Presence in Taylor's Writings

At the end of this relatively long and extensive presentation of Taylor's interpretation of Hegel, the first chapter requires a summarizing and a recapitulation of the main points. There is no doubt that Hegel has been one of the most influential philosophers since Kant. In accordance with the book *The Hegel Reader*, no major philosophical scholar would deny the importance of Hegel's writing in, for example, the existentialism of Kierkegaard, the historical materialism of Marx, British Idealism, American Pragmatism, the Frankfurt School of social philosophy, Heidegger's "history of being," Gadamerian hermeneutics, Derridean deconstruction, aesthetic theorists, or in the writings of many theologians (*The Hegel Reader*, 1998, 1). But why are Hegel and his philosophy so important to Taylor, and why does he persist so much in claiming the relevance of the German philosopher today?

Let me answer summarizing these questions by analyzing Taylor's interpretation of several major points: a different understanding of modernity, the self-defining subject, situated freedom, and new expressions of modernity.

In the first place, Taylor claims that for a profound and adequate understanding of modernity, Hegel is more important and significant than the pragmatism of the Anglo-Saxon world considers him to be. Taylor demonstrates this conclusion gradually, affirming that Hegel's philosophical statements offer an answer to the challenges of our

time. This conclusion is based on the presupposition that Hegel's challenges are our challenges as well.

Taylor first reconstructs the historical background of Hegel's time and analyzes Hegel's main concerns. In this way, he elaborates the main question of Hegel's philosophical deliberation, i.e. the question about radical freedom and expressive fullness. Consequently, Taylor reads Hegel's intellectual development and his entire philosophical opus as the answer to the primary question about the union of freedom and fullness.

Hegel's philosophical system and solutions based on *Geist* are far from being solutions for our concerns in modernity. Taylor is very clear on this point. He does not pretend to re-introduce Hegel's philosophical statements as solutions for the concerns of modernity. Taylor wants to direct us to the same source of disquiet that animated Hegel in his search and is animating energetically us today. Hegel had faced the Enlightenment, Kant's rational approach, Herder's investigation about freedom, the romantic desire of finding new ways of expressivism, and the challenge of the French Revolution. As moderns, we deal with utilitarianism, materialism, positivism, atomism, and liberalism, as well as a society based on the principles of greater production, empiricism, relativism, secularism, ethical theories based on logic, and globalization. As we saw, Taylor argues that behind the similarities and differences of two periods lies the same concern, which is the question of uniting radical freedom and expressive fullness. Therefore, our interpretation of Taylor's reflection about Hegel is based less on the differences and similarities of two different periods and more on the reasons behind these similarities and differences.

Once we assume with Taylor that we share with Hegel the same concern, and see Hegel's philosophical opus as the answer to this concern, and recognize the differences between Hegel's time and our time, it is not difficult to propose Hegel as a teacher who can help us in finding our answer. And this is exactly what Taylor is doing with his writing. Hegel in his philosophical reflection touches the most important philosophical claims of his time, shows their limits, and resolves them into a greater synthesis, in which these claims find their place within a horizon of a different and deeper meaning. Basically Hegel advances a new perception and paradigm of reality.

The question of whether or not Hegel succeeded with his proposal is in Taylor's writing not as relevant as one might think it should be. Again, Taylor is very clear on the point that Hegel's synthesis presents a non-answer today. What is relevant for us is Hegel's strategy of dealing with his concerns. In effect, Hegel teaches us how to (1) approach the challenges of utilitarianism, materialism, positivism, atomism, liberalism, a society based on principles of increasing production, technology, globalization, or whatever else shapes our society and us; (2) show the limits and weaknesses of these challenges, i.e. those horizons which are intentionally missed or avoided; and (3) integrate the challenges as well as the differences into a new synthesis in which these challenges reach a deeper meaning, offering us a more sufficient answer to our primary concern.

Considering Taylor's writing on Hegel from this point of view, we can understand why Taylor wanted to re-introduce Hegel into the Anglo-Saxon world, the philosophy of which was at that time based primarily on the principles of empiricism, positivism, logic, and rationalism. With Hegel's help, Taylor points out those aspects that were missing or

treated inadequately, for example, anthropological aspects, metaphysical dimensions, assumptions on which are based the epistemology of positivism.

Therefore, Taylor's critique of modernity through Hegel's philosophy is much more than an analysis of our time; it attempts to provide a sufficient answer for our main concerns. If this is the case, then we can conclude with Taylor that Hegel's influence on modernity and his relevance today is basically an indirect one. Without exaggeration, except in academic circles, Hegel's philosophy does not directly dominate and determine the course of thoughts and actions in modernity. With some degree of certainty, we can assume that, for example, Nietzsche's nihilism, Wittgenstein's language-games, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, or other influential philosophies, are probably more popular among students of philosophy and more challenging to our modern mind than Hegel is. Nonetheless, Taylor presents to us Hegel as a kind of intellectual mentor, who shows the path to be walked, provides the tools to be taken, indicates the goal to be reached, but does not walk with us along the path. If we take the elaboration of a new synthesis as our final goal, i.e. an account about modernity which will provide us with new horizons of meaning, Hegel encourages us to construct it ourselves.

As the second point of this synopsis, let us say a few words about the importance of a self-defining subjectivity and freedom, which seem to be two of the key concepts of modernity. As we saw in our analysis of his writing on Hegel, Taylor provides us with a relatively long exposition of Hegel's philosophical development, and a shorter description of the further development of Hegel's philosophy. This description of Hegel and the Hegelian movement seems to be missing certain critical points. Taylor does not seem to be excessively interested in other Hegelian scholars and their interpretations of

Hegel's philosophy. In short, Taylor's goal is not a more orthodox exposition of Hegel's thought, but rather an interpretation of how Hegel's thought can be relevant for us in modernity.²¹ In other words, Taylor exposes and interprets Hegel's philosophical statements as preliminary and necessary tools for a better understanding of modernity, especially the concepts of self-defining identity and freedom.

Taylor takes a historical approach to Hegel's philosophy, and comprehends him as one of those philosophers who wants to elaborate a new vision of the whole. There are not many, if any, philosophers who after Hegel tried to elaborate such a vision. In the last centuries, man came to define himself no longer in relation to a cosmic order or other all-inclusive vision, but as a subject who possessed his own picture of the world, with his proper motivations, drives and purposes. Such a notion of subjectivity is linked with the *objectification* of the world, which for Taylor means that the world is no longer seen as a reflection of a cosmic order to which man is essentially related, but rather as a domain of neutral, contingent facts, open to a manipulative process aimed at fulfillment of human purposes. Utilitarian ethics, atomistic politics of social engineering, and mechanistic sciences of man, might be other words for describing the same objectified reality.

As the opposite answer or as the reaction to this reality, Taylor tracks the development of the concept of human as *expression*. He starts with Herder who understands this term as an expression of the entire personality of the individual or of the group. In Kant, Hegel, and modernity, this concept finds new meanings and realizations. With this historical overview, Taylor rejects a view of human life as a mere external

²¹ John N. Findlay in his article "*The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel*" advocates Hegel's relevance for a better understanding of our modern problems. He emphasizes primarily the importance of Hegel's dialectic, and then focuses on the way Hegel sees human experiences and the world. His suggestions and interpretation of Hegel are surprisingly close to Taylor's position. John N. Findlay, *The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel*, in *Hegel: a Collection of Critical Essays*, (1- 20).

association of elements without any intrinsic connection. Man is much more than a compound of body and soul; society is more than an association of individuals, of actions, of what is right or wrong, of external consequences of actions, of pleasures; nature is more than a sandbox ready for utilitarian games. Thus, in talking about expressivism, Taylor points our attention to the intrinsic values of certain actions or modes of life, to a view of life as a whole, to the true expression of who we authentically are. In modernity, authenticity becomes the matter of the self-defining subject, who rigorously watches and exercises his capacities for determining his own identity. Doing this, the self-defining subject assumes, first, the condition of freedom, wherein he can exercise his capacities, and, second, a new vision of the whole, wherein his acting in freedom reflects his desire to find new meaning. So the idea of the self-defining subject is narrowly bound up with the conception of freedom, the intrinsic value of certain actions and modes of life, and a new vision of the whole. Even here, Taylor suggests Hegel as the teacher who can show us how to elaborate this new vision where both subject and freedom find their rights of existence.

It is interesting to note how Taylor dedicates much of his analysis to the reconstruction of Hegel's ontology, on which is based Hegel's synthesis, i.e. his new vision of the world where the subject can find his place within the system and yet exercise his freedom. Taylor states the goal of his reconstruction candidly as a way to show how to combine the vision of nature as the expression of spirit with the implicit call to man to recover expressive unity with it, on the one hand, and with the aspiration to rational autonomy on the other. In this vision, man can give himself to unity with the whole without losing his rational freedom (1975, 545). But once Taylor reconstructs

Hegel's vision, he quickly rejects it as an inadequate solution for modernity. Modern civilization is too romantic in its search for fulfillment in private life, to be confined by a Hegelian system or any other similar system. The differentiations that were necessary in Hegel's state become an unacceptable option. It is unacceptable also when modern industrial, technological, and rationalized civilization treats all structures as a neutral, objectified domain that has to be organized in view of higher individual standards. These higher standards do not appease the disquiet of the self-defining subject. Therefore, Taylor asserts on different occasions that more important than the social structure is the subject with his desires, goals, new ways of expressing his deeper motivation as natural being, of the spontaneous, the natural, the sensuous in him. Expressions of these motivations require restoration of the particular facts about man -- his heredity, language, tradition -- because these are concrete and visible expressions of his deepest motivations. These expressions would not have existed without a certain freedom, in which man found concrete ways of realizing his motivations. Since Hegel's synthesis seems to be too limiting and too strongly focused on *Geist*, Taylor shifts his focus to new anthropological dimensions, different social systems, a re-evaluation of the relations of the individual to society or, in short, to new visions of human realization and fulfillment.

As inadequate examples of human realization and fulfillment, Taylor cites the Hegelian Left, Marxism, socialism, communism. He classifies them as inappropriate, empty, leaving humans in despair and at the mercy of destructive forces. As we mentioned before, Hegel was a sharp critic of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and any other similarly disruptive movement, which imposed freedom, or proposed such elevated ideas of freedom that they became empty. Following the example of Hegel,

Taylor criticizes Marxism, which raised expectations of creating better conditions of freedom through socialism and communism. Transformation of external nature should lead to the transformation of men and consequently to reconciliation with the universe. This was not the case. The new conditions of freedom evolved into empty and sterile concepts that finally become destructive.

...this whole tradition, whether Marxist, anarchist, situationist, or whatever, offers no idea whatever of what the society of freedom should look like beyond the empty formulae, that it should be endlessly creative, have no division, whether between men, or within them, or between levels of existence (...), involve no coercion, no representation, etc. All that is done in these negative characterizations is to think away the entire human situation. Small wonder then, that this freedom has no content (1979, 559).

So Taylor concludes that the modern search for freedom, as well as the condition of the self-defining subject, should not become the matter of an abstract, purely rational solution, imposing general answers for every situation. Conditions of the human existence are always embedded in a concrete time and space, and this is the only space where the self-defining subject can exercise his freedom in constructing his identity. In other words, our freedom is a freedom rooted in *our* nature, in a particular situation, which can be endorsed, rejected, reinterpreted, and distorted. Our freedom gets its shape and form through the process of human concerns, practices, and activities.

Therefore, Taylor does not suggest a new vision of the whole or a new system as Hegel did; he prefers to put in the first place in his reflection the self-defining subject in search of freedom. As we already know, even this concept is not unknown to Hegel, who reflects long on the conditions of the subject. Taylor repeats on different occasions that, far from being something abstract, the subject's search for freedom is always situated in a concrete place and time. The question which modernity should deal with is how to accept

our defining situation, and find their meaning, without falling into either emptiness or the irrational. With this, Taylor points us toward a new challenge and partially indicates its answer through the modern understanding of language. A particular word finds its meaning only within language as its larger horizon. In the same way, the self-defining subject, far from being an independent atom in the universe, has to be seen as a part of larger whole.

From the second point we can deduce a third point of our synopsis. Let us say a few words about Taylor's analysis of modernity, this time in terms of evaluation and elaboration of its positive aspects. We have talked extensively about Taylor's claim that behind Hegel's philosophy, as well as the philosophy of Hegel's successors and modernity, the same aspiration to radical freedom initiates our reflection and action. This aspiration has been moving Hegel and other philosophers in the past and present time in different directions and to proposing various solutions. Taylor points out how the same aspiration prompts, in the self-defining subject, new ways of expressing himself, his identity, his realization in action. Let us restate the same claim from the opposite view: new ways of expressing identity, search of authenticity, realization in action that comes from the true self, are expressions of the genuine aspiration to radical freedom.

In time, we will meet Taylor in evaluating these expressions as an immense spiritual potential of modernity, too often easily overlooked or neglected. This point will be one part of the positive contributions of Taylor's reflection on modernity. Here let us simply remind ourselves that Taylor takes these expressions very seriously and positively, considering them as ways for an individual to search for authenticity, or as the individual's desire for truth. In doing this, Taylor opposes those proposals or suggestions

that offer universal and global solutions, seemingly so important in our society informed by the globalization process. Taylor does not want to neglect their importance, but rejects the idea of homogenization as the only path to be followed. Seeing him from this point of view, we can understand better why Taylor wants neither to elaborate a new system nor to propose something that would replace the Hegelian ontological vision. Our time is simply not favorably disposed to new systems that the self-defining subject would have to accept as the horizon of his realization.

Nonetheless, Taylor continues referring us to Hegel's philosophical approach as a help in our reflection. As we know, there is a perfect synergy of the homogenization and differentiation principles in Hegel's system, which is not the case in Taylor's description of modern society. Modern ideologies based on the equality of members and total participation of all lead to a homogenization of society. A society imbued with homogenization of life produces in members feelings of deep dissatisfaction, followed by new aspirations toward absolute freedom. As a more appropriate and complementary solution for a society based on homogenization, Taylor advocates for a society which recovers the meaningful differentiation of its members and fosters a participation of all in the process of constructing society. The recovery of a meaningful differentiation should introduce into society new forms of self-realization.

Previously I concluded that the self-defining subject exists as an embodied social being situated in a concrete space and time; this is the place where he can realize himself in freedom. Now I state with Taylor that the subject's desires, his search for identity and authenticity, in aspiration to radical freedom, and transformation of the material world, including his struggle to find new solutions, should not be overlooked as insignificant,

but seen as expressions of something existentially human. Of course, this opens a new question about a verification of these expressions, because not every expression is authentic and good.

Pulling together the second and the third conclusion, we can discover Taylor's intention in his philosophical rumination on the meaning of Hegelian thought and its relevance today. Through reflection on how to situate human subjectivity and his search for freedom, and through the positive evaluation of human expressions, Taylor attempts to gain a new conception of man, "in which free action is the response to what we are – or to a call, which comes to us, from nature alone or from a God who is also beyond nature (the debate will never cease)" (1979, 169). This conception of man will always be Hegel's conclusion to his strenuous and penetrating reflections on embodied Spirit. In this way Taylor concludes his *Hegel and Modern Society*. Let us complete the third conclusion with Taylor's words, in which he positively evaluates the greatness of his German teacher:²²

Hegel's writing provides one of the most profound and far-reaching attempts to work out a vision of embodied subjectivity, of thought and freedom emerging from the stream of life, finding expression in the forms of social existence, and discovering themselves in relation to nature and history (1979, 168).

As the fourth and last point of conclusion, let me summarize in a few words the recensions of Taylor's work on Hegel. In my interpretation of Taylor, I always keep in the forefront of my mind the general intention in his writing, i.e. to explain Hegel's influence on Modern society. Simultaneously, I read his writings about Hegel within the

²² Raymond Plant in his book *Hegel* comes to a similar conclusion about the task of Hegel's philosophy: "For Hegel, then, the task of philosophy is not just the elaboration of sets of general principles, but is rooted in our personal, social and cultural experiences, providing an interpretation of what is and through this interpretation transforming and transfiguring it" (1999, 50).

context of his entire philosophical opus, and not from the point of view of one particular book. My reading of Taylor's books on Hegel is unintentionally influenced by Taylor's later writings. Therefore, the perspective in which the book reviewers write their critiques is not necessarily my perspective. This might lead me to different evaluations and conclusions about Taylor's work. Nonetheless, my reading of Taylor's works does not differ markedly from other interpretations.

Some commentators: Steven B. Smith, David J. Sullivan, Allen W. Wood, André Liebich, Paul D. Eisenberg, Peter G. Stillman, Geoffrey Hawthorn, read Taylor's books *Hegel* and *Hegel and Modern Society* as a kind of bridge between analytical and continental philosophy. They approve Taylor's writings as a great contribution to the field, i.e. as a re-exposition of Hegel's philosophy in our time, especially from the point of view of political and social philosophy. Many of them evaluate positively Taylor's effort to re-describe the nature of human subjectivity and its relation to the world. Let us assume that they would agree with the general thrust of our reading.

The comment of André Liebich is very insightful – Taylor is genuinely interested in reaching a sympathetic understanding of Hegel. Eva Schaper talks about a “magnificent synthesis,” in which Hegel is presented as a truly revolutionary spirit, trying to capture in a system the essential ongoingness and dynamism in all there is and can be. George Armstrong Kelly points out that Taylor meets Hegel faithfully, without embarrassing gaps or apologies. In his view, Taylor studies Hegel with insight and largesse, absorbing the best of recent scholarship and contributing originally to the plethora of disputes of other Hegelians. Paul D. Eisenberg talks about Taylor's Hegelian task of “situating freedom” as the most important development of the 20th century

philosophy. Yet Steven B. Smith complains that with *Hegel and Modern Society* we get less Hegel than Hegel for the purposes of contemporary philosophical polemic. Jean-François Lessard reads the same book as a view of modern identity, rather than a direct exposition of Hegel.

Despite the general approval, Allen W. Wood perceives Taylor's account of Hegel's notion of dialectical contradiction as not satisfying at all. Hegel's concept of an organic whole is a kind of image or metaphor for society, for consciousness, and for absolute *Geist*. These strands of Hegel's contradiction do not seem to be integrated into Taylor's account, in Wood's view.

Not all of the commentators agree with Taylor's interpretation. Nancy Gerth disagrees with Taylor's interpretation, starting with Hegel's question of how to reconcile "radical freedom" with "expressivism." Following Taylor's writing, the natural and social worlds are expressions or embodiments of a spiritual being. Living within the frames of these expressions of the natural and social world, the individual subject is allowed to be free. Free in this case does not mean in a radical sense of the world, because only *Geist* is free in this way. In this regard, Nancy Gerth claims that not only *Geist* but the individual has to be radically free. By way of demonstration, she refers to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, where there is no mention of individuals as "vehicles of cosmic spirit." In the same vein, she states that Taylor's treatment of Hegel's metaphysics is not rigorous enough. In short, in her view, Taylor's *Hegel and Modern Society* does not help to remove the analytical prejudices.

I claim that Taylor in his middle and recent periods continues his search for a more adequate answer to Hegel's central concern, even though he slightly modifies the

emphasis of the question. Hegel's question of how to unite two ideals, radical freedom and expressive fullness, becomes in modernity the search for freedom in terms of modern subjectivity. A slightly different version of the same question might be the following one by Taylor:

How to go beyond a notion of the self as the subject of a self-dependent will and bring to light its insertion in nature, our own and that which surrounds us, or in other terms, how to situate freedom? (1975, 563)

In his best-known book *Sources of the Self*, Taylor formulates his answer to Hegel's problematic in terms of "the making of modern identity."

In short, I argue that Taylor continuously looks for the answer to Hegel's concern, which became his own concern as well. From this perspective, I analyze Taylor's further writings on modern epistemology, the neutrality of social and political sciences, the search for authenticity, the religious spheres, and secularization. All these topics are in Taylor's view nothing other than attempts to find a sufficient answer. Before we go to specific areas of Taylor's reflections, I present three recurring themes in Taylor's research.

Chapter Three: Taylor Delineates Modernity in Terms of the Agent's Search for Fulfilment and Freedom

From the previous two chapters of this dissertation we learned that human agency, as Taylor interprets it, continuously looks for new ways to express freedom. The only place where an agent can actualize his freedom is the place of his embodiment. Since the agent's embodiment is always and everywhere conditioned by a concrete time and space, so are the modes of actualizing his freedom. If we want to adequately grasp human agency and find more adequate ways for expressing freedom, Taylor suggests that we have to analyze modernity as the temporal and spatial framework of the agent's embodiment.

From the point of view of my main thesis, the analysis of modernity becomes the horizon in which Taylor searches for the answer to Hegel's concern. In Taylor's reflection, human agency living in modernity seems to be locked up within scientific interpretations of the world, liberalism, and atomism, struggling in contact with other cultures, and looking for new foundations of a unity for society. The theory of secularization with all its meanings, including the theory of "death of God," represents another field that shapes the agent's mind with apparently narrow assertions. I will expand on this in my last chapter. In any case, Taylor does not intend to provide us a detailed description of modernity as such. He rather intends to delineate fully the disquiet and struggle of the human agent as to how to express adequately his identity in modernity. In his longing for authenticity, freedom, and fulfilment, the human agent looks for new and more original ways to appease his inner unease.

In this chapter, I examine – following Taylor’s reflection – four different modes or areas in which the human agency in modernity expresses its longing for freedom. First, the modern agent favours the scientific interpretation of the world. Second, he asserts the neutrality of human sciences. Third, he lives in a multicultural and multireligious society. Fourth, he searches for new ways of expressing his authenticity. These four areas are only some of the possible features through which Taylor describes modernity. I chose them because they represent particular and significant areas of Taylor’s attention. For a more inclusive presentation of Taylor’s understanding of human agency living in modernity, we could also include other features as well: language, moral issues, psychology, technology, Western history, tradition, religion, new spiritual movements, modern art and others too numerous to explore here.

For a more limited purpose, I start with the so-called scientific interpretation of the world and then with the affirmation of the objectivity and neutrality of the human sciences. These two delineations of modernity are crucial because through them the modern agent claims to be able to represent reality in a completely objective manner, as existing independently of his interpretation. Taylor argues, however, that they are not as neutral, objective, free-standing, independent, as they claim to be. They represent rather the modes by which a human agent in modernity perceives himself and the world around him.

In Taylor’s perspective, scientific interpretations portray the human agent exercising his freedom by adopting at least apparently *independent*, *neutral*, and *objective* principles, and applying them to the world of his embodiment. Taylor critically analyses this thinking, by pointing out assumptions underlying the scientific reflection, as well as

others uncritically overlooked or ignored. Despite his criticism, Taylor does not reject these modes of exercising freedom in modernity; he rather indicates to us some of their weaknesses and challenges us to weigh them in our assessment of modernity.

It would be relatively easy to depict our lives in modernity if we moved only within our Western culture and tradition. Modernity, as Taylor analyzes it, surpasses the boundaries of any single culture. A variety of social systems and religious denominations with heterogeneous values and ethical principles all profoundly shape modernity. Taylor maintains that a rigid scientific approach cannot adequately encompass the necessary recognition of otherness. Hence *multiculturalism* becomes the third feature of my interpretation of how Taylor comprehends modernity -- a challenging feature because it goes to the foundation of peaceful coexistence in a globalizing world.

The fourth and last feature of our analysis of Taylor's description of modernity is the agent's quest for authenticity. Due to the complexity of modernity, traditional ways of actualizing values are losing their relevance and inspirational power. Individuals look for new ways to spend their lives in a more original and authentic way. Modern man seems to be more attentive to and in touch with his inwardness, and at the same time, more sensitive to his spiritual exigencies. Taylor claims that the human agent's quest for authenticity is an expression of his desire to define anew his identity and live more fully. This desire demands new categories of evaluation; a strictly rational approach appears inadequate for evaluating human expressiveness.

Taylor appears to be more encouraged with these third and fourth features than with the first two, finding them more attractive and challenging, allowing a greater potential for further philosophical modulation and articulation. In addition, these topics

have been less explored and thus represent a more original area of thought. Hence Taylor's approach is noticeably less critical and negative here than in his analysis of science and objectivity. Even his writing - style becomes less rigid than it was before. Unfortunately, however, his conclusions about multiculturalism and authenticity, suggestive as they are, at times lack the precision and sharpness of his treatment of human sciences and their supposed neutrality.

All four features -- scientific interpretation, neutrality of human sciences, multiculturalism, and the quest for authenticity -- are intrinsically grounded in language. These features and the nature of language are reciprocally connected and mutually modify each other. My second chapter dealt with the relevance of language in Taylor's philosophical reflection. When we talk about these four features of modernity, we must always keep in our mind Taylor's *triple H-Theory* of meaning and his understanding of language. In language, we formulate ideas and bring to explicit awareness those for which we formerly had only an implicit sense. Through language we create a public space where an expression has meaning not only for the speaker but for the audience. Language is the medium through which it can disclose our concerns. Whichever of four areas of modernity we refer to, human language remains unconditionally its crucial factor.

After all, Taylor's primary goal is not to describe modernity in itself. His focus remains the human agent in his struggle to define his identity, to find new ways of expressing himself, and to re-discover meaning in his life. Therefore, not only Taylor's interpretation of human language, but also his interpretation of moral sources and understanding of human agency have to be kept in mind when we talk about modernity.

In other words, four preconditions of Taylor's philosophical research as we saw them in the second chapter will be here in the third chapter applied to the four diverse topics Taylor examines in modernity. All four of them, and in a very explicit way the modern quest for authenticity, offer in Taylor's eyes new modes of searching for meaning, fulfilment and freedom. Thus, we are back to Hegel's concern with uniting two unities: radical freedom and expressive fullness.

With this in mind, I can justify the division and organization of this third chapter. We will start with a scientific approach to reality, in which, at least apparently, there is no space for human agency. From there, we will move to the agent's confrontation and coexistence with other agents, cultures, languages, and different ways of living and searching for meaning. Finally we will come to the agent's interiority and his search for authenticity. In this way, we can clearly observe Taylor's growing emphasis on human agency and its progressive movement towards the agent's inwardness. In the fourth and last chapter, I will trace Taylor's focus on the human agent's inward progression towards a sense of religion and spirituality.

Anticipating conclusions, we will see how Taylor through his analysis of the scientific approach to modernity shows us its limitations. Nonetheless, there is some positive energy and power in the agent's scientific approach, i.e. the desire to create a better world. For an adequate description of modernity with its multi-cultural and multi-religious characteristics, new frameworks are needed. As a possible step in this direction, Taylor suggests to us his theory of recognition. Finally, Taylor regards the agent's longing for authenticity as an extraordinary potential of modernity. An accurate analysis

of this longing keeps the doors open to those horizons that have been insufficiently explored or even avoided.

In the present chapter, we will deal primarily with Taylor's articles published in the following books: *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (1985), *Human Agency and Language* (1985), *Sources of the Self* (1989), *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1992), *Multiculturalism* (1992), *Philosophical Arguments* (1995c), *Varieties of Religion Today* (2002), *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004).

3.1 The Scientific Interpretation of the World and the Assumed Priority of Epistemology in Modernity

Taylor argues that the scientific approach deeply pervades the intellectual culture of modernity, not only in the field of science taken in the narrow sense of the word, but also in the areas of criticism, ethics, morality and politics. Epistemology enjoys a privileged place in this culture, one that Taylor in his introduction to *Philosophical Arguments* represents as the very heart of the problem in modernity. Assuming the superiority of epistemology and its way of proceeding as the only defensible way, he states that “we can somehow come to grips with the problem of knowledge, and then later proceed to determine what we can legitimately say about other things: about God, or the world, or human life” (1995c, vii).

In the same introduction Taylor states that to claim that epistemology can provide us the foundation for the whole knowledge structure is to fall into a terrible and fateful illusion because we can never get to the bottom of what knowledge as such is, “without drawing on our never-fully-articulable understanding of human life and experience”.

The need to overcome the limitations of epistemology is one of those questions that have been occupying Taylor's mind for decades, starting with his book *The Explanation of Behaviour*, published in 1964. Some of the most important articles about scientific interpretation of the world were published in Taylor's book *Philosophical Arguments*.

3.1.1 The Pretentious Assertion of the Foundational Enterprise of Epistemology

In talking about overcoming epistemology, Taylor means the epistemological writings represented mainly by Descartes, Locke, and Kant and their followers in the 19th and 20th centuries. Adopting the explanation of Richard Rorty, Taylor says that the advocates of modern epistemology must keep in their mind the foundational enterprise, i.e. the creation of a rigorous discipline that could check the credentials of all truth claims (1995d, 2). What they propose is not a new philosophical system, similar to those which we know from the history of philosophy (e.g. Plato's or Aristotle's system), but rather the foundation of a new theory of knowledge, which would be distinct and independent from all other forms of knowledge, because it would be beyond other sciences in the sense of their foundation. This kind of philosophy becomes *primary* not in the sense of being the *highest* but in the sense of *underlying* of all other sciences. In Taylor's words from his article "Overcoming epistemology":

If I had to sum up this understanding [of epistemology] in a single formula, it would be that knowledge is to be seen as correct representation of an independent reality. In its original form, it saw knowledge as the inner depiction of an outer reality (1995d, 3).

From the early beginning of his philosophical reflection Taylor attempts to overcome this kind of epistemological enterprise, because it is inadequate and insufficient

for an accurate description of reality. As we discussed in the second chapter, terms such as *independent reality*, *agent's detached position from external reality*, *neutral language*, *impartial description of the world*, *objective statements*, do not exist in the abstract. These statements always depend on the agent who makes them, on the language he uses, the culture he comes from, and the values of the culture he belongs to. Taylor has been very clear on this point since his first publications more than 50 years ago.²³ The agent, his mind, his language, his whole life are always somewhere embodied in the world, as we saw in the first chapter when we talked about Taylor's interpretation of Hegel's position, and also in the second chapter where we talked about the recurring themes of Taylor's research.

Let us remind ourselves that at this point Taylor takes a very straightforward position, one with no ambiguity, and one that is something of an exception in his philosophical style. At least two reasons suggest themselves for his position. (1) The foundational enterprise of epistemology is as such still very deeply rooted in modernity. Obviously Descartes' enterprise was modified, criticized and superseded in many ways (by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein); however, the ways of superseding it leave many open questions. Many of the applied argumentations against the foundational enterprise are in Taylor's view not coherent and based on many unchecked presuppositions. Therefore, Taylor wants to participate in the whole debate, clarify differences, and propose a better solution. (2) The second reason seems to be even more

²³ For example, in one of his first articles, "Can Political Philosophy be Neutral?", published in 1957, Taylor concludes that every description of the world must also include the subject of this world – man. The world may appear "neutral" until we realize that man's moral choices and actions are events in this world. Then, Taylor continues, we must decide either we opt for a description completely purged of value-content, or we reject the word "moral". Following the same direction, the moral and political philosophy of linguistic analysis is not a neutral or completely independent option, but one option among many others, based on an agent's view of the world.

important than the first one. Through his critique of the foundational enterprise, Taylor shows how much our philosophical debate loses or overlooks, if we uncritically remain within it. Therefore, to re-discover this overlooked and neglected reality, Taylor constantly refers us to the presuppositions upon which the foundational enterprise is based. Through analysis of the nature of these presuppositions, Taylor unveils the human agent's motivations and intentions behind this enterprise.

We can find confirmation for this interpretation of Taylor's reflection in his article "What's Wrong with Foundationalism? Knowledge, Agency, and World" (2000). Here Taylor delineates the epistemological enterprise in terms of foundationalism and antifoundationalism, and shares with other contemporary philosophers a concern to break free of the limits of epistemology. Almost everyone from Quine to Heidegger seems to agree that the great enterprise of Descartes, to build up certain knowledge from undeniable blocks, needs to be superseded. However, in view of superseding Descartes' position, they propose various approaches that take diverse ideas as their starting point and accordingly generate conclusions with very different anthropological and political consequences. In his article Taylor draws a kind of strategic map, in which agency, human knowledge, and the world are intrinsically bound together. To explain their interrelationship, Taylor uses many of the key factors we have discussed -- the agent's embodiment, the embodiment of meaning, background information, articulation of meaning, transformation of meaning and human practices over time -- to show that if we fail to take into consideration these factors, we cannot reach an adequate understanding of reality. Foundationalism, or anti-foundationalism as its negation, offers us a distorted or partial picture of reality.

In the article “Foundationalism and the Inner-Outer Distinction” (2003), Taylor sees the epistemological thinking in Modernity as based on a sharp distinction between the human mind and the world, which he calls the “Inside/Outside” (I/O) division. In his words:

A crucial feature of this view [of foundationalism] is that it portrays our understanding of the world as taking place in a zone, surrounded by and (hopefully) in interaction with a world, which is thus seen as playing the role of Outside to its Inside (2003, 106).

Taylor does not perceive this division of “Inside/Outside” as a necessarily problematic one; what remains less evident and more problematic is the nature of the interaction between these two components and the location of the boundary between them. Inside and Outside have to interact: what goes on in the inner zone is at least partially modeled on what exists outside. What is unacceptable in Taylor’s view is to keep this division I/O as a value in itself.

...this division between inner and outer, mind and world, is fundamentally false. The thinking agent is already deeply involved in the world as an acting body (Merleau-Ponty), and thinks only through the forms (language, social practices, etc.) which he/she shares with others. Mind is always in the world, and social. All this Hegel brilliantly pioneered (1999a, 158).

Taylor explains that this division is false because it assumes the outside world is a disenchanted inanimate nature, following the laws of naturalism (2003, 106). Following this assumption, all things, the outside world, are simply there. What they do is “impress” themselves on human senses; what happens next is that human reason (“the inside”) works with these *ideas, impressions, sense data, surface irradiations* as a way of justifying the establishment of new relations, either to validate or refute. At the same

time, reason provides us a coherent account of the double existence: the existence of reason with its view of things, and the existence of disenchanted nature.

This I/O division embedded itself deeply into our scientific, technical, freedom-oriented way of life – at times so deeply that it has become the dominant image of the last three centuries. This vision appears attractive in that it promises to the human agent a higher level of self-fulfilment, and allows him to explore new fields of freedom. However, it becomes problematic when we talk about truth, right, local standards of reason, morality, history, relativity, and the absolute. Following his teacher Hegel, Taylor refuses to adopt this I/O division; together with Hegel, he feels the necessity to re-define the agent's interaction with the world.

Before Taylor proposes his redefinition, he describes some proposed but ultimately unacceptable approaches to this interaction. The most extreme solution is the repudiation of this issue as irrelevant. Another solution is a reconstruction of the inner zone on the principles taken from disenchanted nature. For example, certain schools of contemporary cognitive psychology see the human mind as a computer; they claim that human mental processes -- how people think, perceive, remember, and learn -- can be likened to the operating of the computer. Another response, with Richard Rorty as its main representative, calls for abandoning this whole field of endeavor as being too difficult to resolve.

Taylor rejects all such responses because they do not touch the real problem – the I/O division and the agent's interaction with the world (2003, 107). What Taylor proposes as the solution is not an analysis of the I/O division as such, but an analysis of the philosophical motivations that generate such an I/O division and consequently lead

towards foundationalism. Identification of motivations allows an alternative interpretation. To accomplish this, Taylor refers again to Descartes, who is in a certain sense the founder of the I/O division. And again, if we want to understand our present situation, we have to reconstruct its historical background.

Facing a continuously changing reality, Descartes felt filled with doubt and uncertainty, leading him into profound skepticism about the world around him and about self-knowledge. As the way out of this skeptical environment, Descartes suggested an accurate analysis of doubt itself and of the subject filled with such doubt. This led him to the conclusion that doubt as such is the most fundamental reality; as such, it should be the starting point of the whole epistemological reflection.

Taylor is not concerned whether or not Descartes' argument is convincing. "What is important is that the foundationalist argument required the stabilization of doubt in a clearly defined issue" (2003, 109). Doubt became the single clear issue which Descartes hoped to handle firmly. Maintaining a focus on this single point, about which there would be no doubt, Descartes could reconstruct the rest of his epistemology.²⁴ Descartes' belief in starting from one certain point is the place from which Taylor deduces the first motive lying behind the whole Cartesian project: the agent's self-certainty.

The confidence that underlines this whole operation is that certainty is something we can generate for ourselves, by ordering our thoughts correctly – according to clear and distinct connections (1995d, 5).

²⁴ Taylor describes Descartes' project as follows: "The aim of foundationalism is to peel back all the layers of inference and interpretation, and get back to something genuinely prior to them all, a brute Given: then to build back, checking all the links in the interpretive chain. Foundationalism involves the double move, stripping down to the unchallengeable and building back up" (Foundationalism and the Inner-Outer Distinction 2003, 109).

In Taylor's interpretation, Descartes was convinced that certainty is something that the mind has to generate for itself. Our certainty depends on reflexive clarity and examination of our own ideas in abstraction from what they present. Such clarity and certainty cannot be found in the Outside that is constantly changing and modifying itself. Clarity and certainty are what the mind has to generate for itself. Descartes firmly believed that human thought about the real can be distinguished from its objects and examined on its own.

This is the point at which Descartes moves away from previous epistemological understanding. The generation of certainty is not something that happens through the shifting from uncertain opinion toward the order of the unchanging, as Plato and some other ancient epistemologists claimed to be the case. For Descartes, certainty finds its place in the reflexive nature of the agent's mind. The seeker of certainty does not turn to opinions, tradition, authority, or anything else outside, but to the contents of his own mind.

With this conviction Descartes became the scholarly example for all foundationalist epistemologists. He initiated the modern notion that the human mind can generate certainty for itself. Certainty does not depend any more upon examination of external reality, but depends upon the examination of the agent's own ideas in abstraction.

After the ideal of self-given certainty as the first motive behind the foundationalist project, Taylor places the second motive or incentive lying behind the I/O division, that is, the foundationalist project itself.

My thesis is that an important motive behind the I/O picture, which generates all the aporiai of the sense datum, is the foundationalist project

itself. It is not just that the picture of the mind in disenchanted nature generates the notion of the brute input, a site for insoluble philosophical problems, as an unfortunate side-effect. I think, this is true; that is, indeed, one motive. But it is also true that the foundationalist drive generates the unfortunate notion for its own purposes (2003, 109).

Descartes believed in the solidity of his project and in the division of the I/O reality. He sought to make it universally valid by ontologizing it. By ontologizing, Taylor means the following: the right way to deal with a puzzling issue and build a reliable body of knowledge is to break down the whole issue into sub-divisions and sub-questions, until one comes to the unchallengeable starting point and, from there, to rebuild the whole structure step by step, building on our initial certainty.

With Descartes, the gap between the Outside and Inside reality receives its theoretical foundation. The Outside world loses its independence and autonomy. In modernity, Descartes' epistemology finds new expressions, especially in investigations and explications based on mechanical operations. As an example, Taylor refers to computer-based models for explaining the working of the human mind. With a machine, i.e. computer, some scientists seek to accommodate explanations of human intelligence. These explanations, however, uncritically assume that intelligent performance can be reduced to formal operations, similar to those of a computer. Taylor argues that this belief is an extreme application of the ideal of reflexive and self-given certainty, previously discussed; he calls this phenomenon "overdetermination of the epistemological construal" (1995d, 6).

In short, the ideals of self-given certainty and foundationalism represent in Taylor's reflection two motives behind the I/O division of foundationalism. Using them, Taylor puts forth an alternative interpretation that can overcome the I/O division and the

limitations of foundationalism. Before we analyze Taylor's account, let us see how the ideal of self-given certainty and foundationalism find their place in modernity and modify modern forms of thought. Here we will find the third motive, the modern ideal of freedom, in some way present in Descartes and crucially important in modernity.

The phenomenon of "overdetermination of the epistemological construal" expands beyond the boundary-lines of the epistemological domain. Taylor sees the same pattern of thinking transferred to many other spheres. Normative ethics, modern ideals such as self-responsibility, reliance on one's own judgments, and finding purpose in one's life by oneself, are all based on the powerful belief in a reflexive, self-given certainty (1995d, 7). These ideals follow the same pattern of thinking as Descartes suggested with his epistemological construal. From the Outside reality, we turn to the Inside, where we independently define the meaning and content of the same ideals, and then we re-turn to the Outside.

Despite similarities between Descartes' epistemological vision and ideals posited in modernity, Taylor does not assert that modernity holds the same focus of interest and attention as Descartes did. Descartes' primary focus was creation of a new theory of knowledge. Fascinated by his new epistemology, he laid down the basis for further development of the epistemological tradition, whose evolution he could not foresee.

In Taylor's interpretation, we moderns may talk about theories of knowledge and sciences, but we are not as interested and focused on epistemology as Descartes was. Our primary focus is the human agent, his nature, his aspiration to autonomy and freedom, and the purpose of his life. So we deal with the same epistemological tradition as Descartes did, we apply to this tradition more or less identical patterns of thinking.

Nevertheless, our intentions, motivations and main focus of interest are not those of Descartes.

To better illustrate this point, Taylor refers to the modern ideal of freedom. This ideal was of course somehow present in Descartes' reflection, but more as a seed which needed some time for its growth. However, in modernity the human agent's aspiration to freedom becomes something essential. Taylor illustrates this increasing drive toward freedom with three pictures of modern agency; all three of them are closely connected with the epistemological tradition and its gradual development in the course of history (1995d, 7-8). (1) The first picture is very close to Descartes' position of dualism and his belief that the subject can withdraw even from his own body and look on himself as an object. The subject feels distinguished from the natural and social worlds; the outside world does not define his identity. The agent's ideal is in effect to be disengaged from the outside world. (2) As a second picture, the same subject embraces a pragmatic view of the self, as free to treat the world instrumentally toward the end of increased security for himself and others. This view of the self originates in the ideals of the government and in relation to the reform of the self, with Locke as the main representative. (3) As a consequence of the first two pictures, we have a third, an atomistic construal of society, constituted by or explained in terms of individual purposes. Out of this view grew the social-contract theories of the 17th century and contemporary liberalism and mainstream social sciences.

With these illustrations, however sketchy or oversimplified, Taylor makes the point that the modern ideal of being free is both ubiquitous and at the same time narrowly tied to the epistemological tradition. He sees that the agent's desire to be free finds in the

epistemological tradition good soil for its growth toward something beyond. Desire to be free as such becomes an important element for Taylor's project for ultimately overcoming the limitations of foundationalism and epistemology.

In saying this, Taylor is arguing that the epistemological tradition originating in Descartes becomes in Modernity a source for important moral and spiritual aspirations, i.e., the ideals of freedom and self-given certainty. They represent the area to which Taylor dedicates his investigation, not through rejecting the epistemological tradition but in rediscovering its potential. In other words, for a successful overcoming of the limits of the epistemological tradition and the foundationalist project, Taylor maintains that the modern ideals of freedom and self-certainty have to have at their roots a grasp of the fundamental issues of epistemology.

Before moving to the next subchapter, let us recall how Taylor shifts the focus of his interpretation from Hegel's *Geist* to man. When talking about Descartes and the epistemological tradition of modernity, Taylor's *ad hominem* shift finds new dimensions. This shift will be the main topic of my next subdivision. Whether interpreting Hegel's philosophy or talking about modernity, Taylor's primary concerns are the anthropological aspects of human agency and not epistemology as such. Exposing Hegel or analyzing the foundational enterprise of epistemology in modernity, Taylor strives to save our comprehension of the human agent, his nature and identity, from a one-sided or reductive understanding. To accomplish this end, he searches out a new answer to Hegel's concern.

3.1.2 Taylor Overcomes the Foundational Enterprise of Epistemology by Shifting to the Agent

For Taylor, overcoming epistemology means abandoning foundationalism (1995d, 2). Abandoning in this case has a specific meaning. It includes much more than depriving epistemology of its privileged status among the sciences. By abandoning foundationalism Taylor intends to go beyond foundationalism's understanding; at the same time, he wants to understand what made the theory once possible, and yet insufficient for philosophers today.

The knowledge that epistemology claims to provide us as objective and independent reality is, unless we also take into consideration the subject who is providing this knowledge, found to be misleading. Accordingly, Taylor intends to overcome epistemology's

... distorted anthropological beliefs through a critique and correction of the construal of knowledge that is interwoven with them and has done so much to give them undeserved credit. Otherwise put: through a clarification of the conditions of intentionality, we come to a better understanding of what we are as knowing agents – and hence also as language beings – and thereby gain insight into some of the crucial anthropological questions that underpin our moral and spiritual beliefs (1995d, 14).

Besides our achieving a better understanding of who we are as knowing agent and of our intentionality, Taylor also wants us to achieve

...an awareness that would help us to overcome the illusions of disengagement and atomic individuality that are constantly being generated by a civilization founded on mobility and instrumental reason (1995d, 14).

Taylor's shift *ad hominem* should not surprise us. We already know of his primary concern, human agency, at this particular point seized by the epistemological enterprise. This enterprise presents in Taylor's eyes a new occasion for philosophical exploration,

discovering unveiled horizons of the human agent. So his new project: overcoming epistemology, with the goal of reaching a better understanding and deeper awareness of human agency. We are already familiar with this project from the earlier discussion about human agency in general, and in particular the necessity of the agent's embodiment, his search for the meaning and use of language.

As a way out of the epistemological enterprise, Taylor suggests taking into consideration the agent's embodiment, the transcendental argument, and the intentionality of the agent's activity. Whatever the agent experiences or perceives, he perceives from the place of his embodiment. His perceptions and experiences always occur in a locus conditioned by spatial and temporal marks. Thus the agent's perceptions of the world are not a contingent fact that he might discover empirically in a purely objective and neutral way, out of nowhere, and independently from his preferences. The agent's experiences and perceptions are always experiences of the embodied subject, who is engaged with the world in a precise time and place, and who through his engagement with the world perceives himself. Whatever he articulates, including his articulations of contingent facts, only make sense to him as an embodied agent. Therefore, his thoughts and experiences must always be described as the thoughts or experiences of an embodied agent. The agent's embodiment is in fact the undeniable and essential starting point of every perception and articulation. Hence, Taylor calls this point a "transcendental argument", referring us to Kant's transcendental argument (1995d, 20). It is transcendental because it starts from some feature of our experience that is indubitable and beyond cavil.

As a condition of coming to a better understanding of what we are, Taylor also mentions clarification of the conditions of intentionality. In the paragraph “Necessity of the Agent’s Embodiment,” we emphasized Taylor’s claim that the agent must have a certain insight into the point of his activity; otherwise, there is no reason why he should engage in any particular activity. It does not mean that he has to have a complete understanding of the insight, only that the insight has to be there in some form, involving the agent’s consciousness and self-awareness. Using the chess game as an example, Taylor explains that the agent’s awareness of the game, his knowledge and intentionality to play chess, are the conditions of the game. Applying the chess-example to the project of overcoming epistemology, the intentionality behind the epistemological enterprise comprises in Taylor’s view an essential part of the whole project. Modern epistemology tends to provide us an absolute understanding of what we are as persons and what our world is like, by applying scientific terms, such as *neutrality* and *objectivity*. But more than serving a neutral and objective description of outside reality, this language refers to the agent’s desire to be free and disengaged in the face of his world, as he searches for ideals of efficacy, power, imperturbability, and self-realization. No wonder that the epistemological tradition can appear so attractive and powerful, enjoying in Taylor’s terminology “undeserved credit” for providing the tools for an agent’s self-realization.

In the project of overcoming foundationalism, Taylor reminds us that we have to take into consideration the role of language as well (1995d, 13). Any kind of philosophical exploration always requires the application of language as we continuously construct our nature and identity and search for meaning. Language is neither an independent reality in the sense that it exists for itself, independent of the subject using it,

nor a reality under the subject's absolute control. This is a fact that foundationalism and modern epistemology have to take into consideration. Without it, the picture of reality and knowledge as represented by foundationalists is not as complete as they claim to be the case.

As I have shown in the second chapter, Taylor stresses the importance of setting his accounts into their historical horizon. When he talks about overcoming epistemology -- in his words a "distorted anthropological belief" (1995d, 14) -- he follows the same pattern. His intentions go beyond rejection or negation of foundationalism, as is the case with some anti-foundationalist philosophers. Their proposals for overcoming epistemology represent a radical break with the tradition of the last four centuries, in which epistemology has taken a leading role. Taylor rather suggests a continuation of the same tradition but with a deeper understanding of the knowing agent and the limits and conditions of his knowledge. What Taylor proposes is integration of foundationalism and anti-foundationalism into a larger historical horizon, or creation of a more comprehensive view of the modern epistemological project, with its useful elements as well as its illusory aspects, so that we might better understand ourselves and our forbears (1995d, 15).

In rejecting both the anti-foundationalist and anti-epistemological position Taylor chooses instead to critically analyze those philosophical-scientific stands which, with their unaccepted claims of validity, strongly influence modern thought. He wants to show us that human knowledge, and science as such, is not an independent but rather a dependent reality. The I/O division and foundationalism are not, in fact, persuasive

evidence of independence. Self-standing reality, existing in the form of knowledge, cannot be the starting point of our explorations.

In other words, the starting point is the agent's ability to articulate the background of his life perspicuously (1995d, 15). Taylor points to the key role of critical thinking here in revealing to us, for example, that morality based on the instrumental use of reason, i.e. utilitarianism, is only partial. Critical thinking will also reveal that such social theories as atomism are inadequate because they cannot accommodate inter-subjective meaning. Critical thinking has to be applied to any area of thought that involves our own self-understanding (anthropology, politics, sociology, psychology, linguistics, or human sciences in general), as well as our understanding of the world (natural sciences). If this is not the case, Taylor claims, we have insufficient and unsatisfactory conclusions, obscuring the indispensable and distinctive features of our reality. Keeping this importance of critical analysis in mind, we will "come to a better understanding of what we are as knowing agents" (1995d, 14). Since the goal of critical thinking is to discover different ways of living freely, of reaching a new understanding of one's identity, and finding deeper meaning in life. Taylor insists on taking a historical perspective, and always citing positions from different historical periods, as the best way to understand our present situation.²⁵

²⁵ Introducing the project of overcoming foundationalism, Taylor sees himself in company with other modern philosophers (Kant, Husserl, Foucault, Derrida, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, Habermas). In critical dialogue with them, Taylor adopts from them those aspects of their reflections which indicate how to overcome modern epistemology as well as the agent's subjectivity, and how to express in a new way the deeper and more authentic self. Even Nietzsche is one of Taylor's dialogue partners, especially when he talks about human will as the essential part of our deepest and most authentic human nature. Without too many details, Taylor includes these philosophers into his own reflection and by doing this emphasizes the actuality of his project. In other words, Taylor is far from being isolated in his critical approach to the epistemological tradition in Modernity; he wants to be part of the modern critical tradition that tends to go beyond merely utilitarian, pragmatic, rationalistic, and instrumental claims, which are in different ways based on foundationalism.

In short, Taylor overcomes the foundationalist enterprise with a profound interpretation of human agency and its exigency, intentionality, and struggle to find something deeper and more meaningful in existence.

3.1.3 The Relevance of Overcoming the Foundational Enterprise in Taylor's Philosophical Opus

Taylor's overcoming of the foundational enterprise presents only one step in his larger project, i.e. the elaboration of a better understanding of the role of human agency living in Modernity. To put it differently, we cannot at this point entirely comprehend the relevance of Taylor's overcoming the foundational enterprise, or his critical analysis of modern epistemology, because we are here only at the beginning of something that has been occupying Taylor's mind throughout his entire philosophical opus.

My last two sections dealt with foundationalism as a pattern of thinking that Taylor finds influencing both philosophical and non-philosophical ways of reasoning in modernity. In the next subchapter, I will focus on certain elements of human sciences shaped by the logic of the foundational enterprise. Taylor sees these sciences as comprehending human existence only in a narrow way. They provide us some truth in their anthropological, sociological, psychological, religious, political, ethical, and moral assertions. To a certain degree their assertions can provide an accurate description of reality; as such, Taylor does not hesitate to accept them. He rejects, however, the view that their descriptions offer a complete picture of reality. Descartes and all those who argue in favor of the I/O division of reality and foundationalism fail to realize that their

starting point is insufficiently grounded. As we have already seen in Taylor's critique of modern epistemology, here we begin to see him taking a similarly critical attitude toward the social sciences, or secularization theories, as presenting a picture of reality that is insufficiently grounded.

Taylor is posing the question of why Descartes and the foundationalists take into consideration some aspects of reality, and at the same time exclude or ignore some other aspects (for example, why do they ignore the agent's embodiment and the importance of language)? How can doubt and our awareness of doubt become the foundation of the whole epistemological structure? Does Descartes give us a scientific explanation of his starting point, or is his explanation just a presupposition of validity? Here we come again to the area of our first precondition of Taylor's research, i.e. moral sources of modern identity.

These and other similar questions go beyond the domain of epistemology. Taylor wants us to deal with the realm that touches the agent's presuppositions, assumptions, and decisions based on his intentions. If we base our explanations on the agent's disengagement from external reality and the concept of self-defining subjectivity, we base them on something that is not self-evident at all. So a critical analysis of the agent's intentionality in the act of approaching reality is crucially important, and this is the point at which Taylor's philosophical contribution to modernity is most substantial.

Overcoming epistemology is, therefore, a spiritual enterprise because it challenges our comprehension about human nature: who are we, who do we want to be, where are we heading? The way we relate to these questions and how we uncritically evaluate the domain of epistemology indirectly reveals how we perceive ourselves and what we think

about ourselves. For this reason Taylor bases his critical analysis of modern epistemology upon human agency, especially on the directions and goals of the agent, his intentionality and preferences, which are deeply connected with his spiritual struggles to live a free, fulfilled, and meaningful life. We will see how Taylor again and again returns to the same spiritual struggle of human agency.

We can come to a similar conclusion if we recall Taylor's reflection about modern epistemology, that is, moral sources of modern agency. Through the qualitative distinction of our living we comprehend some of our actions or modes of life as being higher, deeper, purer, and more admirable than other actions or modes. Such a distinction implies different features: articulation of the goods toward which we orient our lives, and choices of the goods based on certain criteria, along with the practical wisdom for using these goods in particular circumstances. Taylor implicitly integrates all these features into his project of overcoming epistemology. The human agent living in a tradition shaped by epistemology favors certain goods and articulates certain priorities. These are goods and priorities belonging to that area of reality that cannot be empirically grounded; nonetheless, they address questions essential to the agent's identity. Taylor believes that in overcoming foundationalism we touch "the crucial anthropological questions that underpin our moral and spiritual beliefs" (1995d, 14).

By rejecting the limitations of epistemology, Taylor is challenging the validity of these goods and priorities, as well as the agent's beliefs, motivations, desires, and hopes underlying the epistemological tradition. With this challenge Taylor pushes modernity to a more explicit articulation of the meaning of the good. Such an articulation is an inevitable philosophical task with moral consequences. Even should we choose to avoid

such articulation or formulation of the good, we still have to face a moral question in the reasons behind this choice.

In general, any philosophical reflection about human acting, or epistemological reflection in particular, involves the expression of the agent's spontaneity and his search for freedom; this is how Taylor reads human agency. Accordingly, Descartes' epistemological conclusions, the I/O divisions, and foundationalism, have also to be seen as expressions of the agent's spontaneity and his search of freedom. They are the agent's reactions in the face of otherness, i.e., other people, nature, God. None of these reactions would be possible without the agent's capacity to reason. These activities are expressions of his longing for freedom and fulfilment.

Presupposing that philosophical reflection is an activity and an expression of the agent's spontaneity and freedom, Taylor confronts us with the challenging question of the nature of freedom as seen in the epistemological tradition. This question goes to the heart of Taylor's life-long philosophical reflection, summarized in terms of Hegel's concern: how to unite two ideals, radical freedom and expressive fullness. Descartes' foundational enterprise with all its consequences presents in Taylor's perspective one step in the agent's ongoing search for freedom, this time in the form of epistemology and foundationalism. Descartes, of course, could not imagine all of the consequences of his epistemological claims.

Taylor sees Descartes' epistemological project and its subsequent epistemological tradition as attempts to express and exercise fullness of life and freedom, growing out of an agent's discontent and intellectual curiosity about possibilities for his own fulfilment. At this point, Taylor makes a key philosophical contribution: whenever the human agent

considers himself to have reached a self-sufficient and self-evident articulation, he risks finding himself in a closed thought-system, totalitarian by nature, shutting out the possible alternative solutions, limiting himself from exercising his freedom at a potentially deeper level. Sooner rather than later, he will fall into disillusionment and despair. Taylor's philosophical contribution at this point is to show us the boundaries and deficiencies of closed and self-sufficient systems. He points out what is missing and calls on us to reconsider and revise our position. The authentic human search for freedom and meaning cannot be realized within the boundaries of self-inclusion and uncritical self-sufficiency.

3.2 The Neutrality and Objectivity of Human Sciences is an Untenable Claim

In analyzing the epistemological tradition, Taylor pays special attention to the human sciences and comes to the conclusion that they, when based on the model of the natural sciences, cannot adequately express the complexity of human existence. Human life is much more than an object of material reality; therefore, it cannot be treated in the same way as material reality.

In the introduction to his book, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Taylor states his position clearly:

I wanted to argue against the understanding of human life and action implicit in an influential family of theories in the sciences of man. The common feature of this family is the ambition to model the study of man on the natural sciences. Theories of this kind seem to me to be terribly implausible (1985b, 1).

The implausibility of theories of human sciences modeled on the natural sciences, based on an ambitious attempt to capture the insights of the ordinary human life in scientific language, leads to conclusions that are reductive and pretentious by their nature.²⁶ Despite their aim of coming to a complete understanding about human existence, their theories avoid certain questions on the grounds that these questions are irrelevant, uninteresting, or meaningless. These approaches, modeling human lives on natural sciences and over-simplifying the human condition, are in Taylor's view one of those factors that profoundly shape the modern mindset.

Taylor's disagreement with applying the natural science paradigm to human existence reflects his overall critique of the naturalist approach to human existence. "Naturalist," in this case, to Taylor means a very strong stream or way of comprehending reality which adopts the natural science model of interpretation as the primary model for every kind of interpretation. This model originated in the 17th century scientific revolution that claimed that the universe and everything in it works according to "laws of nature." Opposed to the Platonic-Aristotelian conception of the universe as the instantiation of forms, that defined the standards by which things were to be judged, naturalism considers the whole universe as a neutral reality, with no place for intrinsic worth or goals that could make claims on the human agency. The whole reality can be

²⁶ In the article "A Response to MacIntyre", Taylor claims the impossibility of constructing the sciences of man on the model of natural sciences with the following words: "Now insofar as self-interpretation are unsubstitutable in the language of social science, and insofar as these are grasped through explicit formulations which are attributed to the agent, and insofar as explicit formulations can never be fully adequate to the relevant experience in all its scope and depth – except in that never-never limit case where our motivation is totally transparent to ourselves – to that extent a crucial element in our formulation of the phenomena to be explained will remain approximate and uncertain, that is, constantly open to potentially more acute and adequate reformulation, and hence continually uncertain as to the degree of adequacy of the currently accepted formulation" (1972a, 17).

explained in a scientific language, which is supposed to be neutral, objective, and value-free (1995a, 38).

We have seen that the language of the natural sciences cannot express adequately the complexity of human life. Human life cannot be considered as a purely material and neutral object, despite what advocates of the naturalist approach claim. Similarly, the language of the human sciences is neither neutral nor objective; it is informed by personal values, intentions and desires, and social influences. All these factors limit the usefulness of the naturalist approach to the human existence.

When Taylor opposes the naturalist position and argues against the possibility of neutrality in human sciences, he reinforces his disagreement with naturalism by adopting a philosophical stance that he calls “phenomenological” (1995a, 38-39). By phenomenological in this case Taylor refers to our actual practices of moral deliberation, debate, and understanding. If we want to explain adequately human thought, actions, and feelings, or to analyze ourselves, or to deliberate about a course of action, we need to apply judgments based on *worth* or a certain good. If we want to make sense of our lives or determine how to act, we need access to a richer ontology than the one that naturalism proposes. Phenomenological in this case means opposition to the naturalist understanding of human existence, based on an apparently neutral, objective and value-free vision of reality.

All this will become more explicit when we look at three examples of the naturalist comprehension of human existence: behaviorism, mechanist psychology, and atomist theories, as Taylor understands them. We choose these three because Taylor clearly elaborates on them in his critique of naturalism. We could add other

manifestations, such as artificial intelligence, or the human mind as a computer, or the role of psychoanalysis, but the three examples chosen can serve to illustrate Taylor's position on naturalism, its limitations, the necessity of an alternative and more complete account of human existence, including the unanswered questions of naturalism, e.g. the importance of culture, of human language, values, social institutions, community life, and others.

We have seen how Taylor does not simply take an anti-science position, but rather looks for an integration of the sciences into a richer account of human agency. We will now see Taylor taking a similar position on the human sciences. Taylor does not propose a final or definitive conclusion. He rather maintains his original assessment but adds to it a new account of Modernity, in which the openness to new aspects, as well as heretofore insufficiently appreciated aspects of human existence would find their adequate place²⁷.

Since our three examples of the naturalist approach to human existence follow to a certain extent a similar pattern of argumentation, we will focus primarily on behaviorism, and then apply Taylor's conclusions to mechanist psychology and atomistic theories.

²⁷ Taylor in his opposition to the objectivity and neutrality of human sciences includes also modern debate about the creation and foundation of the modern liberal society in modernity, based on the principles of historicism. Following these principles, the existence of the modern liberal society finds justification in its ethically superior position, thanks to its accumulation of knowledge, liberation from disturbing factors, higher scientific knowledge, and better awareness of the higher good. Taylor does not agree with such a justification of modern liberal society and its claims that the end of the fully rational pattern in history is now more visible to speculative philosophy. For Taylor, we have no such confidence, nor can we have it. What we can have is an awareness of having made positive steps, which we can rationally ground, and that is no small achievement. (Taylor, "Comment on Jürgen Habermas: 'From Kant to Hegel and Back Again'", 1999a: p158-63).

3.2.1 Three Examples of the Naturalist Approach to Human Existence:

Behaviorism

Taylor published *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964) almost fifty years ago. It is noteworthy that mechanistic interpretations of the human mind, and in particular of human behavior, are some of the earliest theories that Taylor challenged, finding them limited and of questionable value. He recurs to these same topics even later in several of his works.²⁸

The first chapter of *The Explanation of Behaviour* delineates the problematic Taylor wants to deal with (1964, 3-5). Human behaviour, and in some cases animal behaviour, is fundamentally different from the processes that take place in inanimate nature and which are the objects of study for natural scientists. The behaviour of humans reveals a purposiveness not found in inanimate nature. Human beings and some animals are conscious of their behaviour; they can change and direct their behaviour in a way that finds no counterpart in inanimate nature. Taylor takes this as a crucial point for addressing ethics, and humanism, or the search for higher forms of human life. For these purposes, teleology must become an essential part of the discussion.

To the teleological approach to human existence, Taylor wants to contrast the widespread school of thought in psychology known as *behaviourist*, which claims that basically there is no difference between the behaviour of animate organisms and inanimate processes in nature; laws that explain physical events can explain the behaviour of animate organisms as well. Notions such as “purpose,” “goal,” “mind,” the

²⁸ “Psychological Behaviorism” (1967), “The Explanation of Purposive Behaviour” (1970a); “Formal Theory in Social Science” (1980); “Understanding in Human Sciences” (1980a); “Consciousness” (1982a); “How is Mechanism Conceivable?” (1985).

“meaning” of human existence are unnecessary. Humans and animals are both essential elements of nature; therefore, mechanistic principles should be sufficient to explain all aspects of human existence.

Taylor argues that the difference between the teleological and behaviourist approach to human existence often remains unclear, even though this is one of the crucial issues for philosophical anthropology and the study of ethics. The lack of clarity results from scholarly disagreement about the meaning of the claim that human behaviour is purposive.

As a matter of fact, it is not even generally agreed that it is a matter of finding evidence in the first place, for some thinkers hold that the issue is not in any sense an empirical one, but rather that it can be decided simply by logical argument (1964, 5).

Taylor does not want to tackle this problematic matter frontally. To provide a deeper understanding of why behaviourism is unacceptable, Taylor rather enlarges his reflection and approaches behaviourism from a hermeneutical perspective. From this perspective he writes the article “The Explanation of Purposive Behaviour” (1970a), in which he argues against the coherence of behaviorism.

He starts his argument with the question of the meaning of “explanation” of a certain phenomenon, either in nature or in humans. Taylor assumes that once having grasped the meaning of the word “explanation,” we will understand better the matter under discussion and avoid possible misconceptions. Taylor’s first conclusion is that “explanation” has a different meaning in an ordinary context from the scientific usage (1970a, 49). In an ordinary context, “to explain something” means to make understandable what appears strange or outlandish; it means to bring the strange back to a

place in the normal course of events. Usually we do this by describing the context in which something happens, what makes the action in question understandable.

What about in the scientific field? “Explanation” in this case means that the scientist tries to connect the event in question with its antecedent from which the event follows. Of course, not every antecedent need be taken into consideration, but only those that present the standing conditions for the event. The solidity of the relationship between the standing conditions and their outcome determines the exactitude of the scientific explanation. Taylor concludes that the stronger the connection between these two parts, the stronger the exactness of interpretation and, consequently, the wider the range of usefulness of the explanatory theory (1970a, 50). For example, a solid understanding of the molecular structure of iron allows for better construction of bridges. The progress of science comes then to a correlation between theoretical accounts and practical accounts.

In short, any scientific explanation has two important properties: first, it provides us the antecedent conditions of the explicandum, i.e. the factors which make evident the connection of the explicandum with others; second, scientific explanation at one level helps us to understand something else at another level; it allows us a deeper understanding based on links between phenomena.

Taylor specifies additionally that “norms” and “factors” in which the events will be explained are in the case of scientific explanations not given or immediately evident; they have to be first discovered. This is the central fact about scientific endeavor. Once discovered, they will give us a conceptual framework, which is necessary for the definition of “normalcy” of the specific event, or other similar events, or the connection between events (1970a, 53).

At this point Taylor distinguishes between sufficient and necessary conditions for the explanation of an event. The sufficient conditions are the ones singled out as the “cause” or explanation of an event (a bridge falls down because of its weak support). In their absence, the event would not happen. All other conditions form part of the same event and are considered as necessary ones (i.e., the bridge falls because a vehicle is too heavy for the structure; however, they are part of the *normal* conditions of the bridge, and count as a necessary condition). Saying this, it becomes evident that in scientific explanation, we have to take into consideration a set of factors which are interconnected and form one or more different systems in which an event takes place (i.e., atmospheric, climatic, tectonic, or gravitational forces which determine the fall of the bridge). These factors and systems form the boundary conditions that connect the event in question with other similar antecedent events. In short, a scientific explanation in the physical sciences is a very complex structure, a compound of different factors and systems, all of them necessary for a contingent explanation.

Having explained the meaning of “explanation” in the natural sciences, Taylor focuses again on the human sciences (1970a, 54). While there is general agreement about the importance of a conceptual framework and its complexity in the field of natural sciences, even in the field of human sciences the necessity of conceptual framework is accepted. However, scientists disagree about what kind of conceptual frameworks are more appropriate in the field of human sciences. Different conceptual frameworks open the door to different rival approaches, and no one approach seems to be able to establish itself to the satisfaction of every investigator. For example, psychoanalysts can explain human behaviour in terms of *purpose*, *goal*, and *meaning*. The explanation of the same

event when based on the principles of behaviourism excludes these terms. Nature as such does not know purposes, goals and meanings, thus, why should we include these factors in our explanation?

Taylor gives a very clear answer to this question: our ordinary forms of explanation of behaviour as action are teleological in form. By teleological form Taylor means the following: “where the behaviour is explained by the goal to which it is aimed, in other words, where it is explained by that ‘for the sake of which’ it occurs” (1970a, 55).

This appears to many researchers an unacceptable claim because it is based on a non-empirical and untestable approach. How can we explain an event by another one subsequent to it? How can we verify and analyze the goal to which our behaviour is aimed? Taylor justifies his position with a logical explanation as follows:

If G is the goal ‘for the sake of which’ events are said to occur, B the event to be explained, and S the state of affairs obtaining prior to B, then B is explained by the fact that S was such that it required B for G to come about. In other words, a teleological explanation is defined as such by the form of the antecedent, a form in which the occurrence of the event to be explained is made contingent on the situation’s being such that this event would bring about the end in question (1970a, 55).

Thus characterization of the antecedent is the necessary condition for a contingent teleological explanation. This condition is observable and makes reference to the end which will occur later; it refers us to the explicandum. Here Taylor emphasizes that this does not mean that the antecedent has to become the end of the event, or that we have to define the antecedent in terms of the consequent, or that the situation is such that B is required for G can be established independently of discovering whether B has occurred; it can be also described in other terms, which make less clear or no reference at all to the

event explained or to the end. We can recognize those features of the situation which are causally irrelevant and construct a different explanation.

Hence, Taylor suggests that we take into consideration those characterizations or features that are causally relevant for the occurring of the event. This however, opens the door to confusion because different characterizations differ in their degrees of relevance. An accurate explanation takes into account only those characterizations that are causally relevant because they will give us a basic explanation of the event. However, even the less causally relevant characterizations have to be taken into account because of their importance and influence on the event, even though the explanation they give us is less “basic.” Having different kinds of explanations and descriptions, all of which say something important about the event in question, we cannot interchange them, or slip into generalizations or a kind of *a priori* knowledge. One basic explanation will match well with certain events, while a slightly different explanation, i.e. a less basic explanation, will match better with some other events.

With all this in mind, Taylor returns to his initial concern about the possibility of a teleological explanation in behaviorism and arrives at certain conclusions. He sees no reason why we should not use a framework based on explanation by purpose, and allow ourselves that the most basic explanation is teleological. He justifies his position in the following way: the fact that every explanation is always an expression of an agent should be a sufficient reason to sustain the possibility of a teleological approach.

Plainly, explanations of human behaviour, for instance, can only be teleological if we interpret ‘requiring B for G’ as ‘requiring B for G in the view of the agent’. That an action is required in fact for a given goal will not bring it about unless it is seen to be such; and many actions can be accounted for in terms of the goals of the agents concerned which in no wise really serve these goals (1970a, 59).

It is true that human behaviour follows certain patterns and regularities, which we can explain well with non-teleological laws, exposing the intrinsic connections in human behaviour. It is also true that human and animal behaviour are limited, shaped by their nature, and follow certain patterns, which opens the door to the possibility of mechanical explanations. Taylor's claim at this point is that we have to take seriously into consideration the agent who is doing research and who is trying to explain certain events; the agent as such is the crucial part of every explanation. The point is that before providing an explanation, the agent has to be aware of his seeing the event; he has to make his actions intelligible, by showing how he sees the situation and what meaning it has for him. Consequently, the act of the agent's explanation of behaviour cannot be considered as a mechanical or automatic event in nature, or be put on the same level of simple behaviour as that of animals. The agent's explanations of behaviour are always expressions of his search for something beyond the simple behaviour, i.e. its meaning. Even though Taylor does not develop here this point extensively, his message is clear: every explanation is always an expression of the agent's search for meaning.

Previously we saw Taylor's claim that our ordinary form of explanation of behaviour in terms of action is teleological in form. To that claim we can now add a second element, i.e. that all explanations imply that acting for the sake of an end is a fundamental feature of human behaviour (1970a, 55). With this claim Taylor reaches the aim of his argumentation -- establishing the legitimacy of the teleological explanation.

In justification of his argument, Taylor states that the real question is not whether we can explain human behaviour, or how valid our explanations of human behaviour prove to be (1970a, 60). The real question is why are we doing this? The most obvious

answer is we are doing this because we believe in the validity and meaningfulness of the behaviorist explanation. If this is the case, we reconfirm indirectly the legitimacy of the teleological explanation.

Having justified the teleological approach, Taylor turns to the problems that this approach involves (1970a, 59). How can we define and understand human goals, which have various meanings in different cultures? For example, the terms *honour*, *integrity*, and *sainthood* change their meanings in different contexts. The correct understanding of these terms presupposes knowledge of the framework in which the agent acts. Again this includes the agent's self-perception, his conscious and unconscious motivations, including those repressed, his perception of symbols, beliefs, and other conceptual forms through which he understands and comes to grips with the world (see the second chapter: "Human Agents as Self-Interpreting Animals"). The structures of which the agent is part are so complex and difficult to comprehend that it becomes understandable why any kind of outright explanation, claiming absolute truth, results in a problematic solution. A blind perseverance in holding to the exclusive validity of the teleological explanation as the only possible explanation is no exception to that.

The real question is no longer whether we should accept the teleological explanation -- the answer is obvious -- but whether the teleological regularities can be explained by non-teleological laws. Taylor reformulates his concern as to how we can predict similar outcomes even when the normal teleological antecedent is not present, or how we can elaborate systems permitting us greater powers of prediction and control (1970a, 58). These questions do not undermine the teleological approach as such because

now we have a completely different situation. Nonetheless, Taylor wants to deal with them to comprehend better the origin and motivations behind behaviourist explanations.

Earlier we mentioned that the theorists of behaviourism base their approach on the logic of Galileo and Newton, of empiricism and positivism, avoiding any kind of teleological explanation. Since the behaviourists cannot observe mental movements in the scientist's mind, they observe corresponding bodily movements, i.e. physical external behaviour, which is observable. From this very general observation, Taylor concludes that such a dichotomy is the starting point of behaviourism. Once we have a dualist body-mind interaction, we only need to suppress one term and we have behaviourism (1970a, 61).

The account of intentional properties has to be suppressed because these properties are unobservable entities. Such suppression is, however, unacceptable to Taylor. How can inobservability become a sufficient reason for suppression, if we already know from the natural sciences that the scientists grasp only some and not all aspects of the observed event and nonetheless still carry on scientific research? Once we exclude, i.e. suppress, the intentional properties in the behaviourist approach, it becomes logical that the teleological explanations do not make any sense. Behaviorists ground their explanations on efficient causality, which is observable and verifiable. This is a problematic procedure because we never have perfectly objective data, and data collected about human behaviour are never perfectly verifiable. Even if it were possible to have all of them, we would still not have the answer to the question of why scientists do their research.

Taylor concludes that “the behaviourist view of science is a kind of closed circle, a self-induced illusion of necessity” (1970a, 61). Behaviorists try to explain an event without having efficient grounds for doing it. Their explanations are based on selected data, without a clear justification for their selection. Their premise that we can first explain simple behaviour and then build up from there to higher and more complex behaviour is far from being self-evident. This premise would hold if we assume that there is no difference in the level of behaviour. If we really want to explain behaviorism, Taylor concludes at the end of his article, we need to see first what we mean by explaining behaviorism. But to do this, the science of behaviour has to knock down the walls of the maze and look afresh at the real world (1970a, 78).

We can repeat with Taylor that the behaviourist explanation presents another example of the dichotomy between the inner/outer reality, in which the advocates of this dichotomy uncritically adopt it, without providing a sufficient justification for their choice.

Mechanist Psychology

Mechanist psychology is presented in Taylor’s writings as another specific example of a reductionist approach to human existence. The historical roots of this view go back again to the scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries (Galileo, Newton). In their view, the human organism is considered to be a machine, a small part of a larger machine, i.e., nature. Both of them, the human organism and nature, follow the same kind of mechanical principles and laws.

Such a view of the human agency became popular among certain academic psychoanalysts and psychologists in the Anglo-Saxon countries in the 20th century. Taylor calls their approach the *mechanist* orientation of psychology (1970a, 62). Assuming that the human organism is like a machine, mechanist psychology tries to trace out the connections between the human brain and nervous system on the one side and on the other side the corresponding human behaviour. Knowing these connections, we should be able to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for our understanding of human behaviour. Without too many details, Taylor gives us some examples of mechanistic approaches to human behaviour and cites some scientists who defend mechanistic theories of human behaviour. The common ground of their approaches is an extraordinary conviction that a mechanistic science of human behaviour is possible. Taylor argues that the beliefs in the mechanist laws and their application to human behaviour are many times taken for granted, grounded more on faith than on scientific research (1970a, 63). As such, they cannot be accepted uncritically, and their explications provide us with an incomplete understanding of human existence.

As in the case of behaviourism, even now Taylor opposes those who claim that any valid explanations of human behaviour must be based on the scientific method and observation, according to which only the explanations by efficient causes can be accepted, without any reference to the explanations based on the intentional properties, i.e. the properties of the reality as they are seen by the subject. Taylor rejects this view, arguing that mechanist psychology cannot base its claim to validity on mechanistic laws or principles (1970a, 63-69). To support his statement, Taylor gives us some examples. From recent discoveries we know that the human brain and nervous system operate in a

very complex way, beyond a set of mechanistic laws applied on a physiological level of human existence. Not only the human body, but its environment, its movements and its social context have to be taken into consideration as well, and that is what makes the whole picture very intriguing. It is difficult to contingently incorporate the following factors into a mechanist explanation of human behaviour without falling into contradictions: the phenomena of *insight* and *improvisation*, which can unexpectedly change human behaviour; the complexity of the notion *stimulus* with so many possible ingredients; the variations of possible responses of an agent; and the question of human motivations vs. human drives.

As an additional complicating issue, Taylor mentions the use of language that mechanist psychology applies in its research (1970a, 66-67). From the second chapter we know that Taylor comprehends human language as a very complex system, far from being something like a neutral and objective tool for our disposition. When a person thinks, suffers, or intends, he uses a certain language that goes beyond his understanding and control. With his language, he expresses much more than he intends with his words. Something similar also happens in the case of scientific research. The neutrality and objectivity of a scientific language is a wish rather than a reality. Even in the case of a symbolic language, we still have the question why somebody uses this kind of language.

Returning to mechanist psychology, Taylor concludes that isolation and identification of human mental states and the mechanical correlation of them to certain neural expressions becomes a very intriguing if not impossible task. For validation of this thesis, we would need disembodied thoughts, existing independently from the subject

producing these thoughts. Something like this is not possible of course because thoughts exist only in embodied subjects.

As he did in the case of behaviourism, Taylor raises again the challenge of how to observe and collect necessary data for our scientific research in the field of mechanist psychology. How can we argue in favor of a mechanist psychology without talking about the purposive movements directing us to certain goals? These movements and goals are an essential part of human behaviour. Dismissing or overlooking these goals and purposes becomes a form of teleological explanation in itself. No wonder that Taylor claims, regarding mechanist explanation, that we can derive the thesis only if we assume it beforehand (1970a, 69).

Having thus criticized mechanist psychologists, Taylor does not conclude that we should completely reject their results. He has no problem accepting that certain conceptual frameworks offer us a better explanation of a particular event on a psychological or neural level than some other similar frameworks do; hence mechanistic explanations need not be automatically dismissed. What Taylor does not agree with is the assumption that mechanist psychology or neuroscience can provide us the only possible explanation.

We cannot say *a priori*, therefore, what concept will prove adequate for the most basic explanation of human behaviour; and there is no greater implausibility in the thesis that we shall have to account for the sequence of certain neural events by appeal to psychological laws governing intentional properties and purposes, than there is in its converse (1970a, 72-73).

The human neural system is much more than an entity compounded out of chemicals, nerves, and neurophysiological interactions. We cannot take for granted that human behaviour and neural functions are perfectly correlated, with one completely

caused by the other. Human behaviour is too complex to be explained only as the result of neural functions and mechanical interactions. To adequately explain mechanical interaction in the human neural system, we also have to take into consideration, for example, the agent's goals or intentions springing from his mental, psychological, or spiritual experiences. These factors cannot be considered as disembodied and separated from their physical nature, and having no influence on the neural system.

In arguing this, Taylor is not holding that the only obvious solution is to explain human behaviour by purposiveness (1970a, 75). What Taylor argues for is that human behaviour is more complex than mechanist psychology allows for. For example, that there are different levels of human behaviour has to be recognized. From so-called higher behaviors, which take place only when certain conditions are met (involving human intelligence, deliberation, judgment, speech, emotions), we go to the more *automatic* behaviors, where human behaviour seems to closely resemble mechanical behavior. Different behaviourist theories and mechanistic psychologies embrace different aspects but share more or less rigid, inflexible, automatic, and adaptive principles, that fail to take into account different levels of human behaviour. Independent of where and how we start our observation of human behaviour, Taylor says:

What it needed is a reflection on behaviour in its own terms and a classification of its different varieties, a study of its structure, which will reveal the full range and limits of flexibility and intelligence. We need to see what has to be explained to get an idea of what it would mean to explain behaviour. We can no longer go on the behaviourist assumption that we can grasp the simple lower behaviors first, and then build from there to the higher ones (1970a, 78).

Thus Taylor's idea is that we must avoid narrow explanations and limited interpretations of human existence, as well as either-or positions (either mechanistic or

purposive interpretation). There is enough room for both mechanistic and purposive accounts; they can work as potential rivals in offering us a better explanation of a certain event. It does not follow necessarily that one of the accounts has to be beyond consideration; it means that neither can be taken *a priori* as true. Both accounts can provide us a more or less basic explanation.²⁹ Thus Taylor suggests that

...we should be able to derive from an eventual true mechanistic neurophysiological account of behaviour those purposive explanations which we have established as valid (1970a, 94).

Mechanistic accounts can help us to explore further the nature of human behaviour and to expand our repertory of explanations. Such an approach can lead us toward more complex and global theories and knowledge about human behaviour. In the opposite case, if psychology persists in claiming the exclusive validity of the mechanistic approach, this presents an ideological question, originating from the traditional Cartesianism and empiricism, here reinforced with a certain number of what Taylor calls automatisms. If this is the case, Taylor says, we deal with intellectual sterility in the sciences of man (1970a, 95).

Atomistic Theories

Atomism is, in Taylor's view, another example of the human sciences, in this particular case political philosophy, adopting naturalism as the most appropriate theory for interpreting human behaviour. In his chapter "Political Theory and Practice," Taylor explores atomism and its attractiveness for modernity. Atomism, based as it is on the

²⁹ In his article "Force et sens, les deux dimensions irréductibles d'une science de l'homme" (1975a), Taylor comes to a similar conclusion about psychoanalysis. It should not develop an independent and self-sufficient image about the human agent, based on an empiricist approach.

principles of naturalism, claims to be able to explain underlying processes and mechanisms of political society and to provide us the basis of a more effective planning of political system (1983b, 61).

In the second part of his book *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, in the chapter on “Atomism,” Taylor argues that a political philosophy based on atomism is not an acceptable option. He shows us the incoherence of atomistic theories. Initially, Taylor uses the term *atomism* very loosely to characterize the social-contract theory which arose in the 17th century, as well as successive doctrines that while they may not have explicitly used the notion of social contract, nevertheless adopted the vision of society as in some sense constituted by individuals primarily for the fulfilment of their own individual ends (1985b, 187). Taylor becomes more specific when by *atomism* he means the kind of political thinking that asserts the primacy of certain rights for individuals as a fundamental principle of political theory (1985b, 188-192). Taylor alludes to Locke and Hobbes who originated this theory. This theory finds in modernity new expressions of modern social-contract theories that are based on atomism and on the primacy of individual rights. Individual rights become the central issue in political structures that view society as purely instrumental. Primacy-of-rights theories argue almost exclusively for the rights of man, disregarding the principles of belonging, serving, and sustaining the society of which the individual is a part. They comprehend man as an atom whose nature is self-sufficiency. Taylor points to Robert Nozick as representative of the contemporary primacy-of-rights theories.

At this point, Taylor’s primary concern is not the relevance of an individual’s rights in society or the place of the individual in society; he focuses on the claim that the

primacy-of-rights theories have an indisputable status. This claim is unacceptable because the truth is that man cannot live outside society. For Taylor this means much more than the mere physical survival of an individual living outside society. Living in society is a necessary condition for the development of human rationality, and for becoming a moral agent in the full sense of the term, i.e., a fully responsible and autonomous being. Human development can take place only in a social context. Any vision of a-historical states of nature (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau), in which man lives without social relationships, is a kind of fiction.

As a way of accounting for why the atomistic theory seems for some political philosophers so reasonable and acceptable,³⁰ Taylor proposes first an analysis of their way of presenting and sustaining their position. Why some political philosophers simply ignore the necessary conditions for the development of human potential, and hold atomism as a coherent political theory, focused exclusively on individual rights, appears to Taylor a puzzling question. To answer it, Taylor tries to reconstruct their way of thinking. The starting point of the atomist view seems to be the following: We do not usually deny rights to beings who have not reached their fully developed human potential. In the same way, we do not deny rights to people who are in a coma, lunatics, handicap, or those who are senile. They are human beings and we accept them as such, whether or not they have developed their potentials. If in every case humans have certain rights, then it follows there is no reason to hold the full development of human potential to be a necessity for the argumentation for human rights.

³⁰ In his article "Political Theory and Practice" (1983b), Taylor explores delusions and satisfactions which originate from the atomist theory. These satisfactions are based on a sense of dignity of the self-reliant individual, capable of exercising responsibility for his own fate. For Taylor, these satisfactions are and will remain very powerful delusions, if they do not lead us towards transformation and improvement of our self-understanding.

Once we say that all human beings have rights, we implicitly maintain that these beings exhibit a capacity which commands our respect, meaning that we ought to foster this capacity and are forbidden to impair it. Our respect helps us to determine the shape of the rights in question. Once we accept that some beings, i.e. humans, with certain capacities command our respect, this becomes a sufficient reason to identify these beings as bearers of rights, i.e. the right to life, to freedom, and the right to their own convictions, from choice of their life-style, to the practice of their own religion. We accept and respect these capacities because they have a special significance. We acknowledge the commitment to further and foster these capacities because they are a good in themselves. Even more, these capacities become the essential part of our concept of what is specifically human.

Such an argumentation is in Taylor's view incoherent and incomprehensible (1985b, 193-194). It is true that we have to respect people's rights to life, and freedom to choose. It is true as well that the human being has the capacity to exercise these activities. Taylor argues, however, that we cannot start our argumentation with having certain rights; the starting point has to be the fact that we are human beings, and as human beings, we have certain rights. Our ascription of rights depends on our concept of the human being. From our understanding of what is specifically human, we foster or avoid certain activities through which we actualize what is specific to us. In other words, Taylor bases his argumentation on being human and having certain capacities, that are worthy in themselves and require from us respect. He derives human rights out of human nature, i.e. he bases human rights on human nature. This view of human rights is significantly different from the atomist view; having rights is in Taylor's case much more than

assignment of rights to humans. Human rights reflect human nature. If we violate the principle of human rights or fail to acknowledge it, we fail to understand what is properly human. If this is the case, then we have a moral dilemma. In short, Taylor says that human rights are much more than an issue of assignment of rights to humans, as the theorists of atomism suggest.

With this argument Taylor opposes the ultra-liberal thinkers, i.e. those who confer a central importance on the freedom to choose one's own mode of life. Taylor is not very explicit in what he means by this kind of *freedom*, nor does he refer to specific names, with the exception of Robert Nozick. However, he clearly sees ultra-liberal thinkers as those who base their arguments about freedom on the atomist thesis of human self-sufficiency and independency. In their view, any obligations imposed on the individual would offer a pretext to restrict human freedom. Ultra-liberal thinkers simply claim that we have the right to be free to choose our life-mode. As a result it follows that all choices are equally compatible with the principle of freedom and that no choice can be judged morally better or worse by this principle (1985b, 196).

Taylor illustrates this way of thinking of ultra-liberals with an example of the right to private property. Everyone should have the right to dispose freely of his property, with no moral obligation to help those in need. More important than any moral obligation towards others in need is one's own freedom of choice, that is absolute. Any imposition of moral obligations can undermine the human capacity for choice.

For Taylor (1985b, 196-206), it is unacceptable to make the right of freedom an absolute principle, or to place the right of choice on the same level as any other human capacity. Taylor agrees with the statement that humans have the right to freely make

choices in their lives, but this cannot become an absolute principle, as the ultra-liberals claim to be the case.

Their conclusion is in Taylor's view incoherent because the human capacity for making choices presupposes the human capacity for being free, as part of human nature. The ultra-liberal thinkers forget that being able to exercise the capacity for making choices also presupposes a certain environment in which we can learn how to exercise this capacity in our relationship to ourselves and the people around us. Taylor's position is clear: outside social structures humans cannot exercise their freedom or develop their self-sufficiency or any other characteristically human potentiality. If we want to exercise freedom or develop our self-sufficiency, we have to be part of a society that allows us to do that. Such a social context comes before any political theory. For example, as children we must be nurtured by others, otherwise we will not survive. As adults we flourish in relationships with our friends and families. We have also certain obligations to our children and parents. There are also certain capacities that cannot be developed within a singular family but only within an entire culture (art, philosophy, theology, science, and social and political organizations). Every society debates what the proper social and political forms are for the advancement of that society. Only if we take all these together, can we talk about a free individual, and correspondingly about his right to freely make his life-choices.

Taylor reinforces his anti-atomist position with further examples. To accept that our society should be based on the right to independent moral convictions is a very problematic statement. How can we assure that this right will be available to others in society, without introducing necessary restrictions our independence? In the case of

conflicting rights, accepting the primacy of right can lead toward the weakening of society. If I neglect my social structures, I undermine my own capacity for realizing of my human potential; therefore, I have to follow some common rules and accept restrictions on my action, in order to uphold the principle of freedom.

Let us take the example of a person in a coma. Someone else has to make choices for this person's care. The person is still a human being, but the choices made for him are not necessarily the ones he would make for himself. Individual rights here necessarily face restrictions and curtailment.

In short, arguments based on the principles of atomism do not hold up to a critical examination, and a theory based on the primacy of rights lacks coherence. They fail to address what is properly human nature.³¹

The inconsistency of atomist theories is thus more than evident. In showing this, Taylor is opposing modern liberals who support the primacy-of-rights theories (e.g., Nozick), and furthermore, he is showing clearly that the same rights-theories have to

³¹ Following the same line, let us mention Taylor's participation in the debate between liberalism and communitarianism. The last term includes a variety of meanings. In general, it places the importance of community before individuals. As such, communitarianism represents a critique of and an opposition to liberalism, claiming the priority of the individual.

In an interview with Ruth Abbey, Taylor explains his position regarding communitarianism and his understanding of this theory (1996a). Taylor distinguishes between ontological issues and advocacy issues of communitarianism. By ontological issues, Taylor refers to how we can explain social life in terms of shared goods, of language and other factors that cannot be accounted for by the individuals nor reduced to individuals. By advocacy issues, Taylor encompasses things that are valued, held to be good and worth promoting. Personally, Taylor counts himself to be communitarian on both levels: on the ontological level, because this is the correct way to explain social life; and on the advocacy level, because it is good and important to acknowledge and affirm some of the irreducible social goods.

With this distinction, Taylor goes beyond the narrow debate between liberalism-communitarianism positions. The liberalism of John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, and Bruce Ackerman, who promulgate the neutrality of the liberal state and argue in favor of individuals' goods, is unacceptable. Referring to the principles of communitarianism, Taylor proposes a richer definition of liberalism (or communitarianism Taylor-made): liberalism has to be able to recognize both the diversity of good, and the importance of community. The independence of individuals should be highly rated, but not at the expense of the individual's participation in and love for the wider society.

include a certain social context; otherwise, the discussion of rights has no place of foundation. Rights in themselves ontologically involve our acknowledgment of obligations which rise from our belonging to society.³² An individual who affirms himself to be free already has an obligation to complete, restore, or sustain society within which his identity as a free individual is possible.

I [Taylor] am arguing that the free individual of the West is only what he is by virtue of the whole society and civilization which brought him to be and which nourishes him; that our families can only form us up to this capacity and these aspirations because they are set in this civilization; and that a family alone outside of this context – the real old patriarchal family – was a quite different animal which never tended these horizons. And I want to claim finally that all this creates a significant obligation to belong for whoever would affirm the value of this freedom; this includes all those who want to assert rights either to this freedom or for its sake (1985b, 206).

Since the free individual can maintain his identity only within a society of a certain kind, the same individual has to be concerned about the shape of this society as a whole. In Taylor's words, our challenge is to create a *modern* society, that is, "one in which men are maximally free agents, capable of choosing their own ends and acting effectively towards them, while preserving what are more and more seen to be man's essential relations to other men, to the past, and to nature" (1974, 33)

³² In his article "The Philosophy of the Social Sciences" (1980b), Taylor reflects about different political theories in Modernity and analyses of atomism from the point of view of epistemology and ontology. Consequently, Taylor distinguishes two schools in modern political philosophy. The first one adopts the philosophy of science and claims that epistemological considerations give us sufficient grounds for political theories, which consequently means that epistemology dictates ontology. This tradition of political thought is based on an inarticulate belief that we can only speak of knowledge where we have replicable results in the empiricist sense of the world. In this school we have atomism and instrumentalism, both deeply influenced by the empiricist tradition and favoring epistemology.

Against this school of modern political philosophy, based on the primacy of epistemology, Taylor argues in favor of a political discussion based on ontology. With this, he refers to common experiences, actions, emotions, dispositions of spirits, cultural and ethnic tradition, different institutions and common practices, language, and similar elements. Every political discussion has to include all these elements, as well as the question of evaluation, criteria for evaluation, the question of good, the question of self-understanding, and other similar topics. These topics cannot be easily measured by the empiricist approach.

The way towards such a society is wide open. Whether or not one wants to accept and to help realize such a society is a different question, and here Taylor does not go further in his reflection. All in all in this subdivision we followed Taylor's opposition to atomism and to other similar political theories like individualism and ultra-liberalism. These theories when based on the naturalist approach to human existence cannot provide us sufficient grounds for creation of a free society. Nonetheless, they might become bricks for construction of a new society. From this perspective, Taylor looks for elements in them that might prove constructive.

3.2.2 Some Common Characteristics of the Naturalist Approach to Human Existence

All three examples -- behaviorism, mechanist psychology and atomist theory -- have in Taylor's perspective some common characteristics. All three of them approach human existence following the principles of natural sciences, use the language of natural sciences to explain human existence, and are expressions of the agent's search for freedom. We can illustrate these characteristics briefly, having already looked at them in some detail in my second chapter, which is about Taylor's understanding of human agency and human language.

The most evident shared characteristic of behaviorism, mechanistic psychology, and atomism, is their ambition to study and comprehend human existence with principles taken from the natural sciences. As we saw previously in each of three examples, Taylor is explicitly against application of the natural science approach to human existence because naturalism cannot adequately explain the nature of human agency. In the introduction to his book *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, he states:

They [natural sciences] lead to very bad science: either they end up in wordy elaborations of the obvious, or they fail altogether to address the interesting questions, or their practitioners end up squandering their talents and ingenuity in the attempt to show that they can after all recapture the insights of ordinary life in their manifestly reductive explanatory languages (1985b, 1).

Instead of dealing with significant questions about human lives, Taylor argues, the naturalist approach defends itself against the charge of inconsistency, but avoids giving sufficient answers to the “how” and “why” of this approach, and what the unchallenged presuppositions of this approach are, e.g. the question of purpose and intentionality in human behavior. Atomist theory avoids the issues of common meanings and values, embedded in human institutions and practices. No wonder, then, that Taylor opposes the naturalist approach: it is selective in methodology, avoids important questions about human existence, and offers reductive explanations. In the article “Use and Abuse of Theory” (1983a, 40), Taylor goes straight to the point, claiming that the underlying error in the application of natural science theories to human affairs is the failure to see that the same theories, once applied, also modify agent’s perception. In our earlier discussion of “Human Agents as Self-Interpreting Animals,” we saw that the human sciences are narrowly tied to the agent’s self-interpretation and his self-understanding, which is not the case in natural sciences. Self-interpretation and self-understanding is the point that the advocates of the naturalist approach struggle to accept.³³

³³ Regarding the distinction between the natural and human sciences, Taylor writes in the article “Understanding in Human Science” (1980a) that natural sciences give us an account of the world as it is independent of the meanings it might have for human subjects, or of how it figures in their experiences. An adequate scientific account should eschew so called subject-related properties; for this reason, Taylor calls the scientific account an absolute one.

In contrast to natural sciences, Taylor continues, human sciences cannot provide us an absolute account because they are based on the subject related properties. To understand someone, we have to understand his emotions, his aspirations, what he finds admirable, what he yearns for. We have to

How can we justify Taylor's critical opposition to the naturalist reductive reading of human existence, when Taylor again and again refers to naturalist expressions in his writings? He opposes naturalism whenever it pretends to offer us a complete picture about human existence and prevents us from seeing alternative interpretations, likely to be more comprehensive about human nature. Taylor does not, however, oppose naturalism a priori. The naturalist comprehension of human nature is acceptable as long as it remains in its own domain. It can, for example, help us to understand better the nature of our body and human behaviour. Naturalism becomes unacceptable only when it insists on the primacy of its explanations. Taylor rejects that position, as well as the presupposition that there is no qualitative difference between material, psychological and transcendental realities. From the presupposition that there is only one reality, naturalism assumes that this reality has to be always approached in the same way. Some behaviorists, for example, claim that the behavior of animals (e.g. rats) provides a sufficient foundation to explain human behavior. But our three examples of naturalism, as Taylor interprets them, offer only a limited reading of humans, reducing human existence to its material components. Taylor's critical examination of naturalism and its different expressions points us to the need to transcend naturalistic reductive descriptions of human existence, and moves us toward a true comprehension.

Approaching the same characteristic of behaviorism, mechanist psychology and atomist theories from the point of view of the foundational enterprise of epistemology, as discussed in the first subsection of this chapter, Taylor's writings become even more eloquent. Behaviorism and mechanist psychology are two examples of the foundational

understand his world and to grasp the significance of things for him. All these can be articulated only in subject-related terms, i.e. self-interpretation and self-understanding. This is the basis on which Taylor draws his distinction between natural and human sciences.

enterprise, i.e. creation of a rigorous discipline that checks the credentials of other philosophical claims about human nature and society. Advocates of the foundational enterprise imagine human existence as a neutral external reality, or as a disenchanting inanimate nature subject to the laws of inanimate nature. Their descriptions of this external reality are expressed in a neutral scientific language, which is purportedly value free. In Taylor's perspective, behaviorism and mechanist psychology are examples of the Inner/Outer version of reality, in which there is a gap between the human agency doing research on the one side, and on the other side the object being discussed. The human agent apparently elaborates collected data about human behaviour in the same way as a computer processes information provided it.

In speaking of scientific language, we are dealing with the second shared characteristic of the naturalist approach. Reductive readings of human existence are so tied to scientific language that they are in effect identical. In order to illuminate Taylor's position, however, it seems best to look at them separately, to better illustrate the scope of Taylor's opposition to naturalism.

Our three examples of naturalism presuppose that scientific language is universal, neutral, objective, self-sustaining, and as such, independent of the scientist's position. Consequently the language of science seems to be the best possible tool for comprehension of human existence; it allows us a universally valid, neutral, objective reading about human nature. As a result, we have scientists observing animal behaviour on the one hand and complex chemical reactions in the human nervous system on the other hand, and applying the same terminology to the lower form as to the higher, involving the human decision-making process governing humans acting in particular

circumstances. Thus we have mechanist psychology describing connections between the human brain, the nervous system and human behaviour with the same mechanical terminology, under the assumption that since there is only one nature, subject to one set of natural laws, such similar terminology is adequate and appropriate for both levels.

Keeping in mind Taylor's understanding of human language as we have seen it, it becomes obvious why he rejects the language of science as the most appropriate tool for explaining human behaviour. A coherent understanding of language is possible only within a larger context of human existence, which has to include both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Taylor states that human language as such does not exist independently of humans using this language. In the same way, scientific explanations of human behavior cannot exist independently of the scientists promulgating these explanations. The objectivity, neutrality, and universality of the language of science depend on the scientists' way of applying this language. It is true that in scientific language every term refers concisely to a certain object and its features; however, it is also true that the meaning of the same term depends on the milieu in which this term is defined, the way the scientist uses this term, and on many other linguistic and non-linguistic factors. In short, the *neutrality* and *objectivity* of the language of science is a presupposition that does not stand up to scrutiny.

As the third shared characteristic of the three examples of naturalism, Taylor names the drive toward freedom. It is the most important characteristic, and explains why

Taylor gives so much attention to the naturalist approach. In short, he holds that these examples of naturalism are all expressions of the human agent's desire to be free.³⁴

According to the naturalist interpretations, if humans are part of nature, then natural sciences can offer the best understanding of what is the best and most appropriate function for humans. Since naturalism struggles with trying to explain *higher* ways of being, acting, and feeling, it simply puts them aside and tends towards an ethics of obligatory action. In this ethics, there is not much space for what is good for humans, or for a concept such as the good life, or the Good as the object of human love or allegiance. These concepts are intrinsically connected with principles of evaluation, making distinctions between comparisons of goods, articulating reasons for proper choice of action, taking certain stands, making judgments, and accepting obligations. Naturalism, confined as it is to external observations of human nature, cannot explain these principles. Therefore, it puts them aside and turns to the ethics of obligation in a specifically utilitarian form, focusing on general happiness and *material* welfare. Each man becomes the best judge of his own happiness. Human good is grounded not in some natural order but on epistemological-metaphysical grounds, such as the need for survival, social equilibrium, social cohesion, and freedom. Following this logic, we should have solid grounds for justification of different forms of ethics based on individualism and utilitarianism. Taylor wants to show us how this idea of freedom, and the belief that the individual can freely determine the goals of his own life and his own definition of happiness, finds its scientific validation (1995, 144).

³⁴ In his essay "A Most Peculiar Institution" (1995), Taylor describes the common metaphysical motivations behind the naturalist approach and understands freedom as the highest principle triggering a naturalist approach in human sciences.

In other words, the principles for justification of validity of the naturalist approach in human sciences become a sort of absolute requirement, necessary to justify the same naturalist approach in human sciences and to justify the agent's freedom. In the article "Understanding in Human Sciences" (1980a), Taylor argues that there are at least two reasons why the naturalist approach in human sciences needs these requirements. First, in having absolute requirements the human sciences can claim to have equal prestige to the natural sciences. The human sciences can avoid subject-related terms, which cast doubt on the neutrality of their claims, and are instead able to give an account of the world as it is, independent of meanings it might have for human subjects (1980a, 31). Second, with descriptions in absolute terms we seem to have hope for intersubjective agreement, free from interpretive dispute, as is to a certain extent the case in natural sciences (1980a, 36).³⁵ Once having established the validity of the naturalist approach to human sciences, new dimensions for realization of individual freedom are open, as we will see.

To more easily understand this last claim, we should call to our mind Taylor's interpretation of human agency, as discussed in the second chapter. Taylor emphasizes that there is a tight connection between human agency and the agent's interpretation of reality. Every interpretation of reality always reflects in itself a clear picture of the human agent and his self-understanding. When the human agent favors behaviorism and mechanist psychology, he believes firstly that these theories will provide him the best and most suitable explanations of reality, and secondly, the best explanations for

³⁵ We already know that in Taylor's writings these absolute requirements and values in the naturalist approach in the human sciences present a series of contradictions. From the one side, the naturalist approach in the name of scientific objectivity rejects value-laden terms, and from the other side, the same approach introduces other values and qualitative principles (e.g. the highest principle becomes the principle of a value-free position) on which it bases the necessity of absolute requirements.

understanding better his position in this reality and correspondingly for his possibility of self-realization. This belief is based on the principles of objectification of the world and the agent's disengagement from the world. Objectification and disengagement are ways through which the agent expresses his desire to be free from his embodied experiences, to control and manage his experiences, and correspondingly to reach a higher level of freedom. If this is the case, then behaviourism, mechanist psychology, and atomism, as well as other theories based on naturalism, apparently allow the agent to deal with his experiences in an independent and objective way as something in the face of which he makes his choices based on his preferences. All this is possible if, and only if, the human agent is free. To put it differently, explanations of human existence based on a naturalist approach are expressions of the agent's desire and search for freedom.

In short, all three examples claim to be, in their interpretations of human existence, as objective and neutral as natural sciences are. This is not, however, the case because all these interpret human existence in a reductive way that avoids answering questions of major importance.

Short Summary and Transition

Before we move to other areas in which the human agency living in modernity searches for freedom, let us summarize our exposition of Taylor's writings so far.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I analyzed Taylor's interpretation of Hegel's opposition to the Enlightenment. In search for a new union of radical freedom and expressive fullness, and looking for new dimensions of the agent's fulfilment, Hegel opposed the Enlightenment's utilitarian understanding of ethical life, atomistic principles

in social philosophy, and instrumental comprehension of nature and society. In a similar way, Taylor opposes Enlightenment thought in modernity. Through the analysis of modern epistemology, the foundational enterprise, naturalism, and different expressions of naturalism, Taylor delineates the domain of Enlightenment principles in modernity. Even more important is his description of the human agent, who claims to be able to define his own nature as being independent of the world and possessing, first intellectually and then technologically, control over the world. Taylor argues that such a definition of human agency is partial, based on uncritically accepted presuppositions. Inspired by Hegel's reflection, this definition matters in Taylor's reflection because it is the expression of agent's longing for freedom.

At the beginning of this chapter I wrote that in the "making of modern identity" Taylor looks for an answer to Hegel's concern about uniting the radical freedom and the expressive fullness. The main thesis of this dissertation is that Taylor's philosophical opus represents an attempt to find from the point of view of modernity an answer to Hegel's concern. So far we have seen how Taylor opposes Descartes' colossal intuition about the possibility of the "inner/outer" distinction of reality. Naturalism with all its expressions represents in Taylor's view variations of Descartes' view of reality. Both views, Descartes' intuition and naturalism, are in Taylor's reflection insufficient, too rigid and uncritical in their assumptions, and as such, too narrow in their statements about human existence. Inspired by Hegel's philosophy, Taylor searches for more original and

qualitatively better ways of perceiving human existence with all its complexity.³⁶ He says:

I am trying to see reality afresh and form more adequate categories to describe it. To do this, I am trying to open myself, use all of my deepest, unstructured sense of things in order to come to a new clarity (1976, 298).

Being *open* and willing to describe *reality afresh* capture the heart of this thesis, i.e. the importance of Taylor's search for an answer to Hegel's concern from the point of view of modernity. Taylor's critiques of modern epistemology and naturalism represent steps towards his account about human agency in the search for freedom.

Does Taylor clearly set up his project? Can we support our thesis with explicit words from Taylor's reflection about naturalism and modern epistemology? So far I have not found a single page or chapter in which Taylor sets forth his project as specifically as I maintain to be the case. Nonetheless, support for my thesis can be inferred from Taylor's words in his various writings. At the end of the introduction to his book *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, after Taylor admits that his reflective argumentation in this book is not as conclusive or persuasive as it might be (1985b, 12), he continues that one point is clear, that "the ultimate basis of naturalism turns out to be a certain definition of agency and the background of worth." For Taylor, the defining of the nature of the human agent and his search for fulfilment is a key point. As a solution to the agent's fulfilment, Hegel had proposed a system with *Geist* as its main principle. Taylor, however, does not try to elaborate a system as Hegel did; he focuses rather on the human

³⁶ In the article "Responsibility for Self" (1976), Taylor distinguishes between qualitative and non-qualitative reflection. Each involves a different kind of self, with different desires and inclinations as worthier, or nobler, or more integrated. Taylor does not elaborate in a specific answer what the best qualitative reflection is. However, with his theoretical distinction between two different reflections, Taylor formulates some criteria (strong evaluation, theory of radical choice), through which we can formulate what is initially inchoate, confused, or badly formulated. In this sense, we can better formulate our desires, what we hold important, what is essential to our identity.

agency living in modernity and searching for new ways for fulfilment. It appears that for him this search cannot be confined to any one system.

We can support our interpretation with another of Taylor's claims. In the same introduction to *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, he writes that naturalism in its different forms intentionally or non-intentionally avoids some anthropocentric properties of reflection. By anthropocentric properties, Taylor means those properties which things have only within the experience of agents of a certain kind (1985b, 2). To be more specific, when Taylor analyzes naturalism in its different expressions, he is primarily interested in a human agent who advocates behaviorism, mechanist psychology, atomism, or other similar forms of naturalism. Taylor is concerned with the reason why the human agent promulgates these forms; why are they so attractive, what is in the agent's mind when he interprets his own existence as an inanimate nature? The answer is that these forms of naturalism are basically expressions of the agent's search for freedom and fulfilment. To put it differently, Taylor's primary focus in his reflection about naturalism is anthropological, i.e., the human agent that adopts and promulgates naturalism.

An additional argument in favor of my interpretation of Taylor's project can be seen in my subchapter "Human Agency as Self-Interpreting Animals." There I discuss Taylor's claim that hermeneutics represents one of the constitutive factors in the process of constructing an agent's identity. Applying Taylor's claim about the importance of hermeneutics to naturalism, or more precisely, to human agency when advocating naturalism, we can ascertain the theoretical background which can explain Taylor's interest in naturalism. Those who support naturalism, through their interpretations of human existence, indirectly express how they perceive themselves. Their claims about

the neutrality and objectivity of their scientific interpretations about human existence reveal their belief that human existence is as real as any other object of reality. They believe they can manage and control the world before them, and correspondingly construct themselves and find their place in this world. In effect, the way they interpret reality reflects the way they understand themselves.

No wonder that Taylor reads naturalism and Descartes' hermeneutics as being attractive to modernity. Their attraction is an expression of the agent's desire to objectify the world he sees and at the same time to remain disengaged from this same world. Objectification and disengagement operate as two ways by which a human relates to the world, and by using these two ways, he actualizes his freedom and seeks to better understand his identity. In short, naturalism and modern epistemology as Taylor interprets them reveal the agent's search for self-fulfilment, self-definition, and freedom. The agent's search for freedom, operating within the process of his self-construction, is the metaphysical motivation behind his acceptance of naturalist theories, inspiring his *scientific* research.

Let us emphasize again that Taylor does not want to oppose, exclude, or reject, modern epistemology and naturalism in any of their expressions from his account of human agency living in modernity. Taylor's intention is to integrate them into a larger account that includes even those aspects of human reality too easily neglected in their account. Such integration is the only way through which we can grasp modernity more completely and correspondingly, find a better answer to Hegel's concern about the union of radical freedom and expressive fullness. Taylor understands this as a critical challenge and describes it as one of the most important intellectual tasks of modernity: to find an

adequate conception of situated freedom (1980, 144). Once we explore our present situation, i.e. the place of our embodiment, we will be able to better understand ourselves and to find more effective ways of self-realization. Doing this should lead us towards being more fully ourselves as persons. In short, a modern understanding of the role of human agency requires critical examination.

Finally, let us anticipate one criticism of Taylor's project. How can we justify our statements if we know that Taylor's philosophical approach is primarily descriptive rather than normative? Generally, we can agree that Taylor's reflection is not always as precise and clear as it should be. Taylor himself is aware of that and frankly confesses, for example, that his papers collected in *Philosophy and the Human Science* represent fragmentary and provisional explorations (1985b, 12). His writing-style is at times impressionistic, giving the sense of excessive generalization and simplification. As I point out with my fourth chapter, Taylor tends not only in his thoughts on modernity to be more descriptive and less normative; one can see the same tendency in his descriptions of naturalism and modern epistemology. If we take Taylor's papers or books not by themselves but rather as part of a philosophical project, his generalizations and imprecise writing-style do not detract from our appreciation of his major significance.

When Taylor interprets Hegel's writings, his primary interests are Hegel's intuitions and the aspirations underlying his writings; and as we saw earlier, Taylor's exploring how to learn and adopt Hegel's ideas. Following Taylor's example, my preferential interests are the intuition and aspirations that underlie his philosophical theories. Understanding these aspirations and intuitions, we can move beyond Taylor's

particular critiques toward a grasp of the unity and coherence of Taylor's immense philosophical capital.

I claim that Taylor's primary intent is to elaborate a new account of human agency living in modernity. This account can allow us a deeper and more meaningful understanding of who we are, provide us a better comprehension of our nature, and indicate to us new ways of relating to others. To this end, Taylor continuously recurs in his writings to the *ad hominem* argument, that which represents the normative aspect of his writings. Understanding this, we can more easily accept Taylor's descriptive writing-style with all its generalizations.

Keeping in mind Taylor's intuitions and aspirations behind his writings, we can with a certain amount of ease shift our focus from his analysis of human sciences in modernity to another large area of his reflection about modernity: multiculturalism. This area is important in Taylor's opus because it represents another feature of the agent's embodiment in modernity. The way we are and how we actualize our search for freedom depends on our relationships to other agents, who desire to be free in a way analogous to ours. Human beings have a natural desire to follow their own deepest personal convictions, as discussed.

How do we argue for this shift of focus in our interpretation of Taylor's project? In Taylor's view, modern human sciences, if based on the above mentioned modern epistemology or naturalism, do not provide us with satisfactory explanations of human existence and leave modern philosophy with a certain void. Reductive views about human agency are insufficient grounds for a meaningful comprehension of human

existence. By seeing modernity in terms of multiculturalism and his theory of recognition, Taylor tries to fill up to a certain extent this void in modern philosophy. Before suggesting to us more specific guidelines for the agent's fulfilment or for the best modes of expressing freedom, Taylor starts from afar. Every human being or nation, independent of whether they belong or not to a particular cultural context, longs for the same kind of fulfilment and freedom. Taylor calls for recognizing the fact of differences among humans and nations. Recognition is a necessary condition for a peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society, such as ours.

Once having established a kind of universal and global framework, that at least theoretically enables individuals and nations to actualize their deepest convictions, we come to Taylor's theory of authenticity. The modern agent seeks authenticity, that is, a way of following his deepest inspirations and convictions. In Taylor's view, this search is something extremely important because it indicates the agent's willingness to be open to achieving his inner potential.

Anticipating our fourth and last chapter, we will continue in the same direction and follow Taylor's gradual construction of his new and better account, inspired by Hegel's concern to find new unity of radical freedom and expressive fullness. Taylor sees the agent's search for fulfilment and his longing for freedom as involving spiritual and religious dimensions of his existence as well, in order for him to reach his full human potential. As he does so often, Taylor first eliminates the insufficient solutions before pointing to the positive direction to be undertaken.

3.3 Taylor Proposes the Politics of Recognition as the Principle of Coexistence in a Multicultural Society

One of the facts in modernity is that our societies are increasingly becoming more multicultural and multireligious, permeated with characteristics that are meaningful to individuals, groups, and to nations who must coexist both in society and in a globalized world. The challenge is to find a new set of principles that will provide a basis for the peaceful coexistence of such different characteristics. Taylor suggests some steps towards a new understanding of coexistence, in which otherness is recognized, and accepted as well as respected.

Taylor's "The Politics of Recognition" (1994d) was recognized as introducing some original ideas into the debate of modern political and social philosophy. The numerous commentaries, and a number of translations of this paper into different languages (17), show its relevance. Here Taylor points up the inadequacy of liberal and utilitarian proposals for peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society. In any multicultural society, meaningful differences among people and nations demand recognition. If this recognition is lacking, the common basis of the multicultural society is undermined. This is the main point of his paper. Taylor's original insight here stimulates discussion; however, because he offers only an intuitive and arresting vision, we must look elsewhere for concrete examples of how to actualize this vision.

What we see in this paper as well as in other of Taylor's writings, is his attempt to answer Hegel's concerns. If an increasingly multicultural and multireligious society is the site of the agent's embodiment, Taylor has to take this element of modernity seriously into consideration, at least suggesting that new social and political guidelines are needed

for a qualitatively better form of coexistence. This being the case, he takes us back to our initial question and the main thesis: Hegel's concern with how to unite the two ideals of radical freedom and expressive fullness.

Taylor poses the question about how peaceful coexistence can be achieved in a multicultural society in several places (1985b, 116-117; 1994d, 25-29). Social and political scientists have of course different, sometimes even incompatible, views about an agent's behaviour or social practices. Taylor wonders how it can happen that someone in the name of a scientific view set labels as erroneous for someone else's world-view? How can we understand and accept someone's actions as moral, his choices as ethical, when they are based on values different from our own, or his religious practices in a culture foreign to our own? How can we understand and apply our concept of *unconditioned worth* to a value system that is different from ours in language, history, religious background, social structures, and political organization? These kinds of questions bring into a scientific investigation complexity and even some perplexity, as we search for a common element needed for peaceful coexistence.

At the same time, misunderstandings and contradictions in interpretations have always been part of the social sciences, and consequently part of the agent's effort at self-definition and self-understanding. Wondering, curiosity, confusion, misapprehension, and contradiction constitute the starting points of social research. The *why* of a certain social phenomenon calls for a better explanation, providing us with a new account within a broader meaning. But if the starting point is perplexing and not grasping (for example, a certain phenomenon in a primitive society), how can we properly access it through our categories of understanding and unwrap it in a scientific way? How can we qualify and

integrate *foreign* elements related to worth, values, moral principles of a culture foreign to us into our scientific interpretation?

These are some of the challenging issues Taylor reflects on in confronting other civilizations, cultures and societies. Facing these issues is not an option but a necessity for living in a multicultural, multireligious and globalizing modernity. If we want to be really free and freely express ourselves, we have to deal with these issues.

Such an introduction is quite abstract in its setting up the dilemma; nonetheless, it represents a very concrete question in Taylor's mind. Modern society and modern political debate, when based on the principles of liberalism and utilitarianism, do not provide adequate solutions for achieving a peaceful coexistence. In Taylor's reflection, they narrow down the spectrum of possibilities of how to live with differences in a multicultural society or in our globalized world. As a solution, he proposes instead *the politics of recognition* as a new way towards greater integration of individuals and groups, a way that at the same time will allow the modern agent to express himself and his desire to be free in a more genuine fashion.

3.3.1 Understanding Someone as He Understands Himself

In order to comprehend adequately someone's position and his identity, we need to understand first how he understands himself. We take this as the first of Taylor's conditions for a peaceful coexistence. Social sciences have to take this condition into consideration when they theorize about the human agent and his social life. From my second chapter, on Taylor's understanding of human agency, we already know that the agent's self-definition and self-comprehension shape his behaviour and practices. Taylor

concludes from this fact that “interpretative social science requires that we master the agent’s self-description in order to identify our *explananda*” (1985b, 118). It does not mean that we have to express our *explanantia* in the same language as the agent uses to express or define himself; it means that we have to take into serious consideration the agent’s self-description and do our best to understand it and make sense of it. If we do not understand his self-description, we will not be able to understand his behaviour either. Taylor calls this kind of understanding *human understanding*, which means understanding someone as he understands himself (1985b, 118).

The central concept of *human understanding* is what Taylor calls *desirability characterization*. Taylor finds this concept, which he borrows from Elizabeth Anscombe, very useful on the way to an adequate understanding of other agents. He explains it as follows:

I come to understand someone when I understand his emotions, his aspirations, what he finds admirable and contemptible in himself and others, what he yearns for, what he loathes, and so on. Being able to formulate this understanding is being able to apply correctly the desirability characterizations which he applies in the way he applies them. For instance, if he admires sophisticated people, then understanding him requires that I be able to apply this concept ‘sophisticated’ in the sense it has for him (1985b, 119).

Desirability characterization reflects the reality that the acting agent perceives and follows in his actions in a conscious -- i.e., a reflective -- or unconscious way. Taylor additionally clarifies this term:

...the explicit formulation of what I understand when I understand you requires my grasping the desirability characterizations that you yourself clairvoyantly use, or else those which you would use if you had arrived at a more reflective formulation of our loves, hates, aspirations, admirabilia, etc (1985b, 119).

He goes on to deduce that human understanding and the desirability characterization present an enormous difficulty for accurate scientific discourse. How can we properly understand desirability characterizations such as *just, charitable, generous, integrated, fulfilled, dedicated, free from illusion, fragmented, false, and hollow*? These and similar terms are vulnerable to misinterpretation; they cannot be intersubjectively validated in an unproblematic way; many times they are specific and incommensurably linked to a specific culture, rather than to a universal scientific language. For example, let us imagine trying to properly understand religious and magical practices of a primitive society. We might explain these practices from different points of view: with a functionalist theory, or with a religious explanation, as an act of social integration, or from the perspective of historical materialism, or from another perspective. But if the same magical practice escapes even the understanding of a people who are involved in it, how can we as outsiders grasp it properly? Claiming to possess a total understanding and interpretation of these practices means, in Taylor's view, actually having either fragmentary or distorted or putatively scientific or *ideological* views (1985b, 121).

In the face of the many barriers to proper understanding of humans, Taylor proposes a solution that he calls the interpretative view, or the *verstehen* view, the thesis that social theories are about practices (1985b, 123).³⁷ This view is far from claiming the impossibility of adopting the agent's point of view, as well as far from claiming the possibility of attaining an understanding of the human agent in a final and definitive way.

³⁷ It is interesting to note Taylor's use of the German verb *verstehen* at this point. Its meaning seems to be stronger and more appropriate than the English verb *to interpret*. The German meaning includes to get, to catch, to see, to recognize, to understand, to grasp, to conceive, to comprehend, to apprehend, to "savvy." All these verbs relate to somebody else's position and to our endeavor to grasp his position, where both the relation with the subject and our understanding are equally important. The relational component seems to be missing in the English verb *to interpret*.

It is also foreign to using a neutral *scientific* language, claiming to be able to transcend all cultural and other specific differences among human agents.³⁸

With the interpretative view, Taylor wants to go beyond the distinction of our/their language. Such a distinction is not helpful to someone trying to properly grasp somebody else's position. More important than the distinction of our/their language is that the language we use be open and nuanced enough to catch differences, contrasts, even enigmas. These cannot be completely grasped from other people's language or properly expressed in our own language. Only with a sense of the subtleties of language can we formulate both their mode of life and ours as two valid alternative possibilities. We should be able to show that while other people's understanding is sometimes distorted, inadequate, and inconsistent, the same can be said of our understanding as well. In this sense Taylor designates this language as the *language of perspicuous contrast* and sees it as akin to Gadamer's conception of the "fusion of horizons" (1985b, 125-6). Using the language of perspicuous contrast, we should be able to perceive, formulate, and distinguish what is of worth in our or another's understanding and behavior, or what are the common and contrasting elements in the two positions. Through the articulation of perspicuous contrasts we can illuminate other's practices in relation to our own. The process of confrontation and opposition can bring us to the point at which we realize that there is no adequate concept in our language for a proper understanding of their actions. Consequently, we will have to change our self-understanding in order to grasp their self-

³⁸ "The road to understanding others passes through the patient identification and undoing of those facets of our implicit understanding that distort the reality of the other... This will happen when we allow ourselves to be challenged, interpellated by what is different in their lives, and this challenge will bring about two connected changes: we will see our peculiarity for the first time, as a formulated fact about us and not simply a taken-for-granted feature of the human condition as such; and at the same time, we will perceive the corresponding feature of their life-form undistorted. These two changes are indissolubly linked; you cannot have one without the other" (2002c, 132).

understanding. This process of opposing, confronting, and contrasting, will force us to expand our understanding and to describe anew who we are. Saying this, Taylor rejects the incorrigibility thesis, i.e. the conviction that we can never correctly understand another's position, and what he calls the incommensurability thesis, i.e. that we cannot understand other cultures because they are incommensurable or impossible to measure. Taylor opposes as well the ethnocentric interpretation, which claims that our way of acting and thinking is the only conceivable one.

Therefore, the real question for Taylor is not whether or not we can understand other people and cultures. The real question is the moral one, i.e., are we willing to recognize and respect other people's languages, customs, practices, beliefs, organizations, art, and the like? (1985b, 130-133). Let us say that concepts of *human understanding* and the *language of perspicuous contrast* reflect Taylor's constructive critique of those social theories which still claim the universality of social sciences and the possibility of a culture-free and value-free interpretation of human behaviour. Both claims originate in the presupposition that Western civilization with all its scientific, political, cultural, artistic inventions and creations represents a superior civilization, qualified to instruct the rest of the world. If this were true, then we would have again a moral question: do we really want to respect and accept other people's values, and are we willing to change our self-understanding as result?

This is, in Taylor's view, the crucial question in our globalizing world.

3.3.2 In Search of Rationality Affecting Human Acting

Having as a goal to achieve a genuine contact with an unfamiliar individual or culture, Taylor opens the question about what criteria measures how to reach this goal in our multicultural globalized societies. In his paper “Rationality,” he formulates some questions in this regard:

Are there standards of rationality which are valid across cultures? Can we claim that, for instance, people of pre-scientific culture who believe, let us say, in witchcraft or magic are less rational than we are? (1985b, 135)

These are essential questions, in which Taylor looks at rationality; that is, the motives, orders, and principles influencing human behavior. Why is the question of rationality so important in Taylor’s reflection? It is important because Taylor believes that once we are in touch with rationality, we will be familiar with those features of human nature that are common to all of us independent of our cultural, temporal, or spatial position. If rationality has some universal characteristics and we perceive them, then we will be able to recognize them in every culture. Recognizing the rationality of others, we will be able to better comprehend their understanding, their actions, viewpoints, closing the gap between us and them.

Though Taylor does not hesitate to emphasize the importance of rationality, he hesitates to provide a clear answer as to what are the standards for the sought for rationality. As in the case of explanation of human understanding and ethnocentricity, even here Taylor prefers to expose the larger framework within which we can search for the standards of rationality, rather than supply the particularities. To do this, he introduces the term *theoretical understanding* (1985b, 136).

Theoretical understanding in Greek terminology refers us to contemplation (*theōria*), or a disengaged view of reality, in which we try to grasp things as they are, outside of our immediate goals, desires, and actions. Taylor means the same thing by theoretical understanding, i.e. the perceiving of things in a disengaged, broad perspective, beyond our individual immediate goals. He maintains that Greek contemplation and the modern disengaged perspective require from the human agent the same intention: to distinguish the disengaged perspective from our ordinary stances of engagement, and to value this process as offering a higher view of reality.

In Plato's *Republic*, Taylor continues, to have real knowledge of something, i.e. to have theoretical understanding, means to "give an account," or to be able to say or articulate clearly what the matter in question is. The quality of articulation depends on the quality of the perspicuous order, in which the discussed matter finds its explanation. The most perspicuous order, and correspondingly the most clear and precise presentation is the one from the disengaged perspective: it offers a broader, more comprehensive grasp of things, outside of the immediate perspective of an agent's goals and desires. However, not every experience might be amenable to a clear articulation. In opposition to Plato, Aristotle claimed, for example, that in the domain of morality often we deal with matters that are more or less rational, and consequently we are not able to elaborate a clear account of what is the best solution.

From here Taylor moves to the question of how we can reach *theoretical understanding* or perceive things in a disengaged perspective. The disengaged perspective helps us to perceive and understand the order of the things in the best

possible way; we do not know yet how to achieve this perspective. As the missing element, Taylor introduces our attunement with the order.

We do not understand the order of things without understanding our place in it, because we are part of this order. And we cannot understand the order and our place in it without loving it, without seeing its goodness, which is what I want to call being in attunement with it (1985b, 142).

Taylor deduces that our view of the universe as a meaningful order is possible only if we are closely linked to and attuned with this order. Attunement with and understanding of the universal order is not possible if we do not *contemplate* it and love it. Without contemplation and love, we are unable to perceive the meaning of this order.

To reinforce his idea of attunement, Taylor refers again to Plato, who comprehends the human being as a rational animal. To be rational is the highest goal we humans strive for by nature. Consequently, it is obvious and logical that humans strive for rationality and exercise their capacity of being rational; this is the *condition sine qua non* for their happiness and well-being. Among different levels of understanding, the best one is the one which also includes love for the understood object. When we understand something out of pure love of understanding and not in view of other possible uses, we have reached the highest possible form of understanding.

The concept of the universe as a meaningful order with which we humans should be attuned offers to Taylor the starting point for his continuing critique of the 17th century controversy about the proper place of modern science. Taylor describes the change in human perception of the universe:

The conception of the universe as meaningful order, as a possible object of attunement, was seen as a projection, a comforting illusion which stood in the way of scientific knowledge. Science could only be carried on by a kind of asceticism, where we discipline ourselves to register the way things are without regard to the meanings they might have for us (1985b, 143).

Modern science admonishes us to avoid any projection of the order of things onto the world. We can take these projections either as satisfying and meaningful for our lives, or as flattering and narrowing our intellect, or as a critique of those who follow a certain order, or as self-congratulation because we do not have a vision of the world based on an order. In Taylor's reflection, modern scientific understanding is far from what he understands by attunement and love of order, and far from the *human understanding* previously discussed. No wonder that he continuously opposes utilitarian and functional views of reality, which perceive things not as they are but as aspects of human agency.

Taylor interprets the scientific approach in modernity as an enormous obstacle to our grasping other people's rationality. It prevents us from entering into the order of things as these people understand it. For example, how can we explain and grasp the meaning of magic and ritual practices of a certain group, if we do not fall into attunement with them and love their order? Most probably we will come to the conclusion that they are inferior to us or perhaps simply irrational. Once again we see why Taylor considers the scientific approach based on naturalism to not be a standard of comparison for our challenge in modernity.

As a solution, Taylor first introduces the term *incommensurability*. The ritual magic practices in primitive society are neither identical with any of our practices nor simply different. Their and our practices are incommensurable. What they have in common is the fact that they occupy the same space: the agent's life. Comparisons or distinctions are possible only within members of the same species, where members despite their differences exhibit some common characteristics. This is not always the case

when we compare activities in our society with activities of a primitive society.

Therefore, Taylor concludes:

The real challenge is to see the incommensurability, to come to understand how their range of possible activities, that is, the way in which they identify and distinguish activities, differs from ours (1985b, 145).

Taylor is aware that the principle of incommensurability allows us to take some cases and to find some ground of communality, assuming that comparison is possible. Even so, Taylor does not conclude that relativism presents the best possible alternative solution, what might seem to be the easiest solution. Despite strangeness and our unease in the face of unfamiliarity, Taylor searches for the common ground on which we can make qualitative and comparative judgments about our and their activities. In his view, such a common ground is the set of principles underlying human action and practices (1985b, 148-151). Hypothetically, for example, if we know such a common ground underlying primitive magic and modern science, we can articulate different features of the world and explain human actions within a perspicuous order, either that of the primitive society or of modernity. We will be able to better understand different human activities and practices as expressions of a rationality imbedded in human activities.

Taylor defines the set of beliefs as stimulating forces, or the reasons behind human acting, or what humans believe they can accomplish by their actions. This might be their desire to control the universe, or the search to find a better place for their life, or their fear confronting the universe. Once familiar with this set of beliefs, we have a common ground between the magical practices of a primitive society and scientific action in modernity. This would allow us to understand better their life and compare it with ours.

Even though Taylor in his article “Rationality” does not mention explicitly the role of *worth* as one of the motivating forces behind human acting and as a criterion for evaluation of human practices, we can include this factor as well. As we know from our second chapter, *worth, qualitative distinction, good, constitutive goods*, are crucial factors in the process of our identification of what is important for our lives and for who we want to be. Now we can say that the *worth* and the rationality behind human practices are two crucial factors we need to take into consideration if we want to understand properly other people’s actions. Humans always look for something that presents worth and meaning in their life. This happens both in a primitive society with its magical practices and in our modern society with its technological advances.

Even here, Taylor does not conclude that all cultures or civilizations are equal, or that there are no differences among them. Our Western civilization with its technical knowledge and ability to apply this knowledge to the surrounding objects may make us feel superior to many other civilizations. No one would deny that our understanding of the universe, at least of the physical universe, is far larger now than it was centuries ago. Taylor’s point is that our living in a society of advanced technology does not automatically make our society superior to earlier ones. He also notes that technology and science should not be the criteria for qualitative judgments or guidelines for our coexistence.

Instead, Taylor challenges us to look for new common grounds or sets of beliefs for our globalizing world and multi-cultural societies. We will find them if we look for what is worthy, rational, and meaningful to a people’s life. The search for and recognition

of these factors open the door to another challenge Taylor faces in his reflection on modernity: respect and recognition of other people.

3.3.3 Living in a Multicultural Society or Globalizing World Requires Respect and Recognition of Other People

Knowing the general guidelines of Taylor's proposals for coexistence, we can shift now to more detailed aspects of this proposal. Recognition of and respect for identity, two of his key concepts for forging a coexistence of cultural, ethnical, racial, sexual, and religious elements different from our own. Individuals, minorities or subordinate groups within our society, as well as those outside our society, urgently claim recognition. Their identity and the quality of their existence depend on receiving this. Taylor stresses the importance of this aspect of modernity, especially in regard to North-Atlantic societies.

Recognition Means Acceptance and Respect of Differences as well as Mutual Enrichment

Taylor submits to us a descriptive definition of recognition in the pages of his paper, "The Politics of Recognition" (1994d). Recognition means accepting and respecting the cultural, ethnic, racial, gender and religious differences of the people and groups with which we are in contact. It means accepting the differences that make us and them unique; it means respecting what is distinctive and different in our nature. The act

of recognition or even better, the process of recognition, is an essential factor in the construction of our human identity.³⁹

Such a definition of recognition opens a series of problems about the usefulness of Taylor's proposal. The theory of recognition might be applied differently in the process of recognition of one person, or of a specific group living within society, or of a foreign civilization. In these cases, the same definition may hold different meanings. One might agree on the application of the theory of recognition in a particular aspect, e.g. recognition of a specific person, but disagree with applying it to a specific group. Taylor's intention is not to provide us pragmatic solutions for a variety of problems, but to elaborate more general principles or guidelines for our search for concrete solutions. Our intention at this point is not to provide a detailed analysis of Taylor's reflection on recognition, or to expose its weaknesses. In view of my main thesis, it is sufficient to stress one point: recognition of a person is a crucial factor for individual development and the growth of the whole society.

Taylor's starting point is that every individual wants to be recognized for who he is, which also includes respect for his identity, that is, his defining characteristics as a human being (1994d, 25). An individual's identity is partly shaped by recognition from

³⁹ In the face of such a descriptive interpretation of *recognition*, one might critically raise the question about the necessity of recognition in a multi-cultural society based on human rights. If we apply human rights consistently, do we still need the theory of recognition? Does it mean that the principle of human rights is not sufficient?

In "Human Rights: the Legal Culture" (1986a), Taylor argues that human rights cannot be taken as the starting point for our foundation of a multi-cultural society. The reason is the fact that different cultures do not share the same understanding about the human person, priorities, well-being, rights, and the individual's relationship with society. The language of personal rights is something specific to the Western society whose economic, scientific and military achievements enabled it to dominate the world. This language is based on the atomistic premise that the individual is self-sufficient.

Taylor suggests, therefore, that we have to take into consideration the right of peoples to self-determination, which includes also the respect for different cultures, languages, political traditions, and other collective dimensions of people's lives. Once we respect all these factors, we will find a common ground on which we can base our discussion of human rights.

other people. In the same way as the act of recognition, the absence of recognition or misrecognition⁴⁰ shapes an individual's identity as well. Lack of recognition can harm someone's identity; it can represent a form of oppression, which imprisons someone in a false, distorted, or reduced mode of being. Such oppression shows not only lack of due respect but can also inflict grievous wounds, resulting in self-hatred or a distorted sense of growth. Taylor summarizes the importance of recognition: "Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (1994d, 26).

Even though it might appear that Taylor confines the meaning of identity to what a person thinks about himself, this is not the case. It is true that every person knows best who he is, and that self-understanding is a never completed process of formulation. From our reflection about Taylor's critique of atomist theories we already know that he continuously asserts that before the individual starts perceiving himself, he already inhabits certain characteristics that not only influence his self-understanding but allow him to survive. His belonging to a larger group (family, village, or nation) is a crucial factor for his survival. In short, personal self-understanding can never be defined exclusively by the individual's characteristics; his self-understanding and identity always have dialogical dimensions.

In a similar way, dialogical dimensions modify the identity of a particular society. Living in the globalizing world, a society is continuously in touch with other societies and civilizations. These relationships are often based on economy or trade, and exhibit some remnants from imperial or colonial times. For Taylor, this kind of relationship

⁴⁰ Taylor is not very explicit in what he means by "misrecognition". We interpret it as a kind of recognition that is not complete. For example, even though we know that a particular individual does not originate from our culture and belongs to a different tradition, we do not accept his diversity. We are aware of differences and misread them.

cannot be a sufficient ground for our peaceful coexisting. Limited to the principles of economy and trade we will have difficulties comprehending the richness of other cultures, or finding sufficient common grounds with them to offer their due respect.

Taylor reinforces his claim about the indispensable importance of recognition of other cultures with the following statement: “All human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings” (1994d, 66). People of a specific foreign culture or civilization have generation after generation followed and cultivated certain meaningful principles that produced for them social, material, cultural, artistic, religious and spiritual treasures. These treasures are an expression of their search for meaning, in the same way as our cultural and religious treasures are expressions of our search of meaning. As such, they deserve our recognition, respect, and admiration.

... it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time – that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable – are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject (1994d, 72).

The treasure of a particular civilization has as such a universal character, i.e. it shows us in a particular way something that is common to human nature and to all civilizations: the human search for meaning. In this sense, Taylor asserts that every civilization “has something important to say to all human beings”; every civilization finds its own way of expressing what is meaningful for it. There are so many things we can learn from other individuals, cultures, and civilizations, if we respect them and stay in a dialogical relation with them. Recognition, therefore, is much more than acceptance and recognition of differences on a rational level, or satisfaction of our intellectual curiosity

about others. Recognition is the process of personal enrichment and of mutual sharing of our cultural and spiritual treasures. In other words, recognition of others based on sharing with them our treasures represents an excellent help in our common search for meaning in modernity. The importance of Taylor's argument for recognition lies in his insistence on the moral sources for construction of the modern identity, where the moral, spiritual, and cultural treasure of others represent a valid source for our moral, spiritual, or cultural growth as well.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, we analyzed Taylor's reflection about how *worth*, *goods*, and other moral, spiritual and religious principles mold people's lives and shape the practices and structure of their society. Here we can see how our recognition and acceptance of this reality represent something crucial for a correct understanding of others and of ourselves as well. If we really want to understand other people or cultures, we have to understand the rationality behind their actions. Worth, goods, moral, spiritual and religious principles of a culture reflect the rationality that guides the actions of people living in that culture. Our recognition of their rationality will enrich us first, and then help us to understand others more accurately, illuminating for us the condition necessary to peacefully coexist with them.

An Individual's Identity Depends on Recognition from Others

Taylor is very explicit, as we have seen, about the importance of recognition in the process of the building of identity.⁴¹ We become full human agents, capable of

⁴¹ In his paper "Identidad y Reconocimiento" (1996b), Taylor distinguishes between individual and collective identity. Both types include a very complex process of realization. Both individuals and

understanding ourselves and defining our identity, only in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things others want to see in us (1994d, 33). The dialogical negotiation with others, not in isolation, is the place where I can discover my own identity and uniqueness. In Taylor's words, "My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others" (1994d, 34). As a result it follows that recognition and identity are interconnected; we cannot comprehend another's identity if we do not recognize it first.

Taylor's idea that our identity depends on recognition from others is not completely new with him. Even pre-modern societies were based on certain principles of recognition which determined the individual's place within his particular society. In this case Taylor uses the descriptive method through which he justifies the relevance of recognition in modernity through a short historical overview (1994d, 25-36). In pre-modern societies, people didn't speak much about *identity* and *recognition*, not because they were without identity or because they didn't depend on recognition, but rather because these questions seemed to them not to be problematic. The structures of a certain society, and within it differentiation of roles, were apparently taken for granted. People felt comfortable with their trying to fit into social structures.

groups of people live in a moral context in which they can make certain choices. Their choices are based on what is important in their lives. Doing this, they delineate their identity.

In both cases, the formation of identity is a process of continuous modification, especially in time of crisis. Both individuals and groups are continuously negotiating with the space they live in, their history and destiny. All these together modify their identity.

In this process of modification, the agent can remain passive, i.e. simply accepting what is happening to him, or active, i.e. collaborating with or integrating what is meaningful to him. It follows that what the agent expresses in his life represents what he considers crucial. Consequently, he expects that his expressions will be recognized and accepted by others, because they represent him.

The necessity of recognition became an explicit issue in the 18th century when people started thinking of human beings as endowed with a moral sense and an intuitive feeling for what is right and wrong. This new kind of moral knowledge was based on human feelings, and not on a dry calculation of the consequences of human action, in which divine reward and punishment were the leading principles. Listening to the inner human voice, people somehow know what the right thing is to do. Being in touch with these inner moral feelings becomes the crucial factor for their acting rightly. An individual has to be in touch with these feelings if he is to be a truly full human being who authentically acts in his life. This does not mean that prior to the 18th century people didn't pay attention to human feelings, only that these feelings were not so crucial to them.

With modernity -- following Taylor's interpretation -- we are witnesses of an additional development in the perception of human inwardness, in which being in contact with our inwardness becomes the crucial factor for one's identity. People conceive themselves as beings with inner depths that lead them toward uniqueness and authenticity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the forerunner of this idea. He spoke of morality in terms of following the voice of nature within us. Having an authentic contact with one's inner life became for Rousseau the crucial factor of morality. Herder took a step further in individualizing the inner world by suggesting that each one of us has an original way of being human with his own *measure*. Everyone is called upon to live his life in an original way, and not in imitation of somebody else. Herder's intuition became a rule in modernity. Taylor describes it in this way:

Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, which is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself (1994d, 31).

In contrast to earlier societies, fitting into pre-established structures and orders and paying attention to different social roles are less important issues in modernity. What members living in a modern society try to do is to express their identity and to be recognized for who they want to be. The highest ideals in modernity become self-sufficiency, self-realization, originality, and authenticity.

In other words, in modernity we are witnesses of a huge shift in the way people become recognized. In the past, people were recognized by their merging and fitting into a pre-established order, where the order assured them their identity. With modernity, the pre-established orders have lost their relevance and influence on forming a source of individual identity; one's identity depends increasingly now on his relationships with others.

Taylor does not conclude that recognition of one's identity is something that in modernity happens automatically. Sometimes it has to be negotiated through the dialogue with others. Even these attempts at recognition can fail. One's identity can be malformed by lack of recognition. One's originality can be easily exposed to external factors and become vulnerable. The withholding of recognition can represent a form of oppression. If the intimate spheres of lives are not recognized, individuals can find themselves unable to form their identity. Likewise in society, a whole segment of public life lacking recognition can lead to deformation of that society, instead of what Taylor describes as a healthy democratic society (1994d, 36).⁴²

⁴² The application of Taylor's general guidelines to concrete cases opens many questions. For example, where are the limits of recognition of those who exclude any kind of dialogue about their deepest

With the Policy of Recognition in the Public Sphere, Taylor Opposes some Principles of Modern Liberal Society

When Taylor writes that every culture has something important to say, he wants to foster our reflection about the importance of the universal human potential or energy that for centuries has been forming and defining our identities as individuals, groups, or civilizations. As we saw previously, there are at least two reasons why we should remain in touch with this potential. First, this human potential can help us in our efforts to construct new frameworks for peaceful coexistence, those that concern our common interest. Second, one part of our human nature is in constant process of changing and modification. This modification depends on our rationality, and correspondingly on our relationship with what is worthy, including our being in touch with this universal human potential.

Taylor argues that the modern liberal society does not always allow individuals or specific groups to express freely enough their identity or to look for alternative ways of expressing their search for meaning. An agent's actualization of his originality and his being in contact with his immense human potential can be limited by conditions in a modern liberal society. The modern liberal society claims to be universal and impartial in regard to an individual's choices, respecting in a neutral way the differences among its citizens and recognizing their dignity. Nonetheless, Taylor continues, individuals or

religious convictions that are unacceptable from our point of view? Therefore, the principle of recognition has to be bound to the principles of tolerance or intolerance as well.

groups living in a modern liberal society often face many obstacles in expressing their identity, inwardness, differences and originality.

To clarify this point, Taylor distinguishes two levels of recognition: first, the recognition, or even better the discovery, of inwardness and identity in an individual. This discovery is something new and original in modernity, presenting an immense expansion of new energy, as we saw in the previous section. The second level is the recognition of inwardness and individual's identity in the public sphere. In Taylor's view, modern liberal society does not provide sufficient grounds and resources for recognition in the public sphere. He, therefore, sets forth an alternative interpretation of the process of recognition in the public sphere (1994d, 37-44).

Taylor is not very specific in his description of modern liberal society. He presents it as a society claiming to be open, impartial to its citizens and neutral regarding different values. Following the principle of universal dignity, every citizen has an identical assortment of rights, immunities and entitlements. All citizens are equal. Division into first-class or second-class citizens is not acceptable. The principles of equal respect require that we treat all citizens in a difference-blind fashion, that is, as a homogeneous group rather than members of different classes. Rules and principles have to be applied to everyone in the same identical way without exception.

Taylor's concern is that this kind of liberal society does not recognize adequately the identity and authenticity of its citizens living within that society. It may be true that the politics of equal dignity accords to all citizens the same rights and immunities, but it may also be true that the uniqueness of individuals or groups, their distinctness and

originality, are too easily ignored by or assimilated into the dominant identity. The politics of recognition of inwardness is not given sufficient place in the public sphere.

How to accommodate these two levels of the politics of recognition, and create a larger space in the public sphere in which the distinctiveness of individuals will be recognized, remains in the modern liberal society an unresolved issue. Taylor sees two groups of advocates who argue in favor of liberal society. The first group claims that the best solution is the liberalism of equal dignity based on the application of universal and difference-blind principles. All citizens should be treated in the same way; otherwise, we again risk having some privileged groups or individuals, who claim to deserve some advantages over others.

The second group claims that the rights of individuals come first and should be placed over the collective goals of society. In Taylor's interpretation, this type of liberalism seems to be more present in our modern society. For example, John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, and Bruce Ackerman advocate for a liberal society that favors individual rights over collective goals.

As an example of this liberalism, Taylor refers our attention to Dworkin's paper "Liberalism," in which the author talks about two kinds of moral commitments (1994d, 56). The first one is called *substantive* commitment. Everyone in society has his view about the ends of life or about what constitutes a good life. Because of the diversity of opinions, citizens cannot find a common language about the right *substance* of their life. At the same time, citizens acknowledge the need to deal fairly and equally with each other, regardless how they conceive the ends of life. As a solution, Dworkin introduces a second kind of moral commitment, which he calls *procedural* commitment.

Liberal society should not adopt any particular substantive view or commitment regarding the ends of life. With substantive moral commitments, citizens inevitably favor one particular view and moral virtue, and consequently introduce a hierarchy of moral values and principles. As a result, if the majority is committed to certain conceptions of virtue, then the minority will be disadvantaged and their rights will be violated. Therefore, the task of society is to foster strong procedural commitments and treat all people with equal respect. These commitments will guarantee the autonomy of individuals and their right to determine for themselves what the ends and goods of life are. No particular notion of the good life should be espoused as better or favored by the society; to do so would violate the procedural norms.

From my second chapter, we are already familiar with Taylor's struggling to accept procedural ethics in modern liberal society if grounded in procedural commitments. This grounding is insufficient because it does not adequately take into consideration the notion of good, human nature, and the moral sources of the agent's identity. In his talk "Was ist Liberalismus?" (1997a), Taylor maintains that procedural liberalism does not help us to recognize other citizens' points of view. Procedural liberalism avoids facing the differences among people and varieties of goals that people would like to achieve. Unable or unwilling to deal with many inconveniences and quarrels arising from these differences, procedural liberalism diminishes these differences as not pertained to its expertise. In the same talk Taylor concludes that such a position is unacceptable because it does not help us to elaborate sufficient common ground and goals for living peacefully in a modern globalizing world.

For the same reason, Taylor disagrees with Dworkin's interpretation, i.e. any kind of collective goal within a particular liberal society should be suppressed because it violates the liberal and neutral principles of that same society. The fact is that modern liberal societies are not monological blocks; there will always be some people who will struggle to recognize the collective goals or common good of society as their own goals and good. There will always be some people who will accuse society of not being neutral and impartial regarding their inwardness, and correspondingly of violating their rights. As a solution, Taylor suggests his alternative interpretation of a liberal society, based on certain collective goals that are essential for the existence of that same society.

Taylor Understands the Liberal Society in View of a Good Life Understood as Common Good

Taylor claims that a modern liberal society can be organized around a definition of the good life, without repudiation of those who do not agree with this definition (1994d, 59). By good life, Taylor means the common good that has to be sought together; as such, it is a matter of public policy. When talking about the common goal, Taylor does not refer to the fundamental liberties that should never be infringed upon (for example, rights to life, liberty, free speech, free exercise of religion, free association). Liberal society has to respect and protect all these rights. But at the same time, society has to pay attention to its cultural heritage, values, history, language, tradition, all that constitutes and forms the citizens of that society. The same society also has to respect the cultural differences among its citizens and, if necessary, opt for the survival and protection of these differences. Their accommodation becomes part of the good life of citizens of this

society. Saying this, Taylor sympathizes with the principles of communitarians, especially when they oppose liberals who argue in favor of individual rights.

In short, Taylor proposes a very flexible definition of liberal society, adaptable to particular circumstances, and based on a common good. As an example (1994d, 58-60), Taylor refers to the French-speaking minority that forms a majority in the Canadian province of Quebec. Its government shows interest in the cultural survival of the French-speaking citizens, without claiming to be neutral regarding their language, history, literature, calendar, and other elements that are important to the French-speaking minority. The government has to make necessary decisions in order to foster survival of that society as a particular good; but at the same time, it has to tolerate and respect ethnic and religious differences among citizens. Minorities have to be allowed to organize their life, express their values, and perpetuate their way of life as they see fit.⁴³

Even though referring to a specific situation of the French-speaking region in Canada, Taylor does not hesitate to extend his interpretation of a modern liberal society as being valid in general, not only in Canada. The modern liberal society should be capable of liberality and neutrality, but at the same time respect diversities, especially when dealing with those who do not accept the same common good. Liberalism that is based on procedural commitments struggles to resolve the issues about what the common

⁴³ This example addresses one specific problem of the French-speaking community in Canada. Unfortunately Taylor does not specify the meaning of collective good on the level of a multicultural society or on the world level, where multicultural and multi-religious dialogue takes place. What would be the nature of the common good in these cases and who will define it? If we take for granted that the common good is the peaceful coexistence of all people, one might immediately raise the question about tolerance or intolerance of certain acts. Where are the limits of tolerance or intolerance of those who do not support the same view of the common good?

It is true that these questions go beyond the intention of Taylor's paper. However, more specific answers are more than desired. Recognition as such is doubtless an important factor in the identity building process, but it cannot become the excuse for justification of any kind of action.

good and collective goals of that society are. A rigid implementation of laws or rules neither accommodates sufficiently people's search for a good life, nor allows them to adequately express their identity. Therefore, Taylor suggests that before any implementation of laws or rules, a liberal society should discover what the members of that society really aspire to and what their collective goals are. These aspirations and collective goals have to be first recognized and then become the organizational principles of that society.⁴⁴

Taylor believes that such a liberalism, which includes recognition of differences as well as the good life as the common good, is more suitable for our multicultural society than the liberalism based on individual rights, as Dworkin understands it. The *difference-blind* liberalism, equality of all citizens, inhospitality to differences, and uniform application of the rules, are not sufficient grounds for a peaceful coexistence in a modern society. Taylor asserts that this form of liberalism seems to be a deficient if not a naïve suggestion for multicultural coexistence. Some recent experiences, e.g., the controversy over Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, confirm the controversial character of such a form of liberalism, in which a subgroup does not accept the principles of difference-blind liberalism as the universal rule (1994d, 63).

⁴⁴ Taylor does not suggest that liberalism or the principles of a modern liberal society are the best guidelines for a new world order. Taylor is very explicit: *liberalism*, or to be more precise *Western liberalism*, is a particular form or product of our civilization and culture that has grown up with Christianity. As such, Western liberalism makes sense in those societies which have a more or less identical historical background as the North Atlantic societies. For example, the term *liberal*, as well as other terms like *secular*, and *the division of church and state*, are neither neutral nor impartial, but are parts of our cultural background, in which they keep their specific meaning. The same words applied to other cultures might lead to a completely different understanding. Thus Taylor concludes: "Liberalism is not a possible meeting ground for all cultures, but is the political expression of one range of cultures, and quite incompatible with other ranges" (1994d, 62). In short, liberalism is not a sufficient principle for our confrontation with other cultures and cannot become the foundational principle for globalization.

To be clear in our exposition of Taylor's thought, let us add the following. Taylor does not neglect many principles of modern democracy (e.g., every citizen should have the same rights independent of his race, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and personal goals). Taylor's point is that next to these principles, the same society has to answer the questions about what is really important for the survival of this society. If we slightly reformulate Taylor's writings, the real question is what is behind our concepts of freedom, equality, and justice, on which a modern democratic society is constructed.⁴⁵

Taylor Proposes a Policy of Equal Recognition as the Grounding Principle for Multicultural Society

Multicultural aspects of the modern world grow continually. In this context Taylor claims that we all have the problem of how to share our "identity space." By this he means not only living alongside people who are different, but also allowing the different people we co-exist with to contribute to our definition of public identity. In his interview with Richard Kearney, Taylor describes this problem in the following way.

The whole problem of how to be *one among others* in the world today is a tremendous problem that nobody has solved, and everybody has to solve it in order to exist. ... All of us have to live in more and more multi-cultural societies, because the world is moving that way. And that raises the

⁴⁵ At this point, Steven C. Rockefeller's critique of Taylor's position is insightful because it makes us aware of Taylor's rigid understanding of democracy. Good life and liberal democracy should not be taken as a static state but as an ongoing process toward the common good. "..., the good life is a process, a way of living, of interacting with the world, and of solving problems, that leads to ongoing individual growth and social transformation. One realizes the end of life, the good life, each and every day by living with a liberal spirit, showing equal respect to all citizens, preserving a sympathetic interest in the needs and struggles of others, imagining new possibilities, protecting basic human rights and freedoms, solving problems with the method of intelligence in a nonviolent atmosphere pervaded by a spirit of cooperation. These are primary among the liberal democratic virtues."

If we take such an understanding of democracy, Taylor's thesis against *difference-blind* liberal democracy loses its originality and persuasiveness (1994d, 91).

problem of being one among the others, in an acute way, even in domestic politics, let alone in international politics (1995e, 27).

Many individuals are citizens of our society and at the same time belong to cultures that call into question our philosophical boundaries. Thanks to the modern means of communication and to the process of globalization, we are continuously in touch with different cultures and civilizations that again challenge the assertions and principles of our society. Taylor's concern at this point is how to deal with other cultures and those members of our society who do not belong to our culture. As a solution, he proposes the policy of equal recognition (1994d, 37).

With this policy, Taylor delineates a simple principle that ensures to our society as well as to neighboring societies the right of self-defense. This policy is based on recognition of the equal value of different cultures. While in dialog with other cultures, we are called not only to let our dialogue partners continue to exist, but also to acknowledge their worth in an explicit way. Doing this, we firstly acknowledge and respect differences among us, recognize the other's identity, and consequently prevent misrecognitions that might harm their identity or lead both sides towards greater tensions; and secondly, with the policy of equal recognition, the survival of a particular group or civilization becomes our common legitimate goal. Their and our survival and flourishing becomes the collective end of the multicultural society.

In addition to that, with the policy of equal recognition, Taylor emphasizes that all of us are equal in our rights and entitlements, and all of us deserve equal dignity. Following this direction, we owe equal respect to all cultures because they are all valuable and each of us has something to contribute. "All human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something

important to say to all human beings” (1994d, 66). This “something important to say” should become the stimulus for our respect and curiosity about other cultures.

Taylor explicitly admits that such a statement may be problematic and stirs up controversy. For example, is it true that every culture has something good to say to us? The understanding of what is of value in other cultures might seem strange and unfamiliar to us. Therefore, Taylor clarifies his statement about the worth of other cultures saying that his statement is only a presumption or starting hypothesis. The validity of this statement has to be demonstrated in our actual study or contact with other cultures. Hence, Taylor specifies that his statement that every culture has something important to say should be taken as an act of faith, leading us deeper into our research.

If we want to understand and appreciate better a specific culture and establish stronger relationships with it, we need to create broader horizons, in which we can develop new vocabularies for articulating contrasts and differences. Here Taylor uses the concept that Gadamer calls “fusion of horizons” (1994d, 67). Only through the process of comparison with others, and forming new articulations, will we gradually understand what constitutes worth in a culture that is unfamiliar to us – what we could not understand prior to our comparison with them. In contact with them and through the transformation of our standards, we will form new knowledge and judgments about them. This is a task in which the universities have a privileged role, fostering cultural exchange and elaborating a broader and clearer picture of the world.

Taylor concludes that we do not have to reach value judgments regarding cultures unfamiliar to us (1994d, 69-70). Even talking about the *objectivity* of our judgments

about others would result in controversy.⁴⁶ As we know from the beginning of this chapter, Taylor opposes the application of principles of natural science to human existence. We should not be looking primarily for a kind of objective, neutral and qualitative judgment about others because this would be a misreading of our research. In our knowing the others, we cannot reach a neutral and objective level of knowledge about them. What Taylor proposes is something different. Before we express our judgments about a specific culture, we have to answer the question whether or not we like this culture. One either endorses another culture or rejects it. If we endorse it, we will find something of great value in that culture. On the other side, our refusal of a specific culture opens up the question about the principles on which we base our refusal.

With these statements, Taylor opposes those relations with others which are based on subjectivism, i.e. our selective understanding and interpretation of others, or on our judgments of the worth of others, where our judgments are based on standards that are ultimately imposed by the structures of power. For correct judgments of the worth of another culture, one has to be transformed by the study of that culture, transcending his own position and ethnocentric view. Otherwise, his study of a different culture becomes a process of homogenization, which is exactly the opposite of what Taylor wants to advocate. "...the last thing one wants at this stage from Eurocentered intellectuals is positive judgments of the worth of cultures that they have not intensively studied"

⁴⁶ "True understanding in human affairs requires a patient identification and undoing of those facets of our implicit assumptions that distort the reality of "the other." This can happen when we begin to see our own peculiarities clearly, as facts *about us*, and not simply as taken-for-granted features of the general human condition. At the same time, we must begin to perceive, without distorting, corresponding features in the lives of others" (Charles Taylor, "The Other and Ourselves: Is Multiculturalism Inherently Relativist?" 2002b).

(1994d, 70). If we invoke standards based on North Atlantic civilization and use them to judge all other civilizations and cultures, the demand for equal recognition would lead us to unacceptable results, and we would be back at the origin of our reflection.⁴⁷

Towards the end of his paper, “The Politics of Recognition,” Taylor summarizes his reflection maintaining that the value of our judgments should not become the most important issue. More challenging is another issue, which Taylor borrows from Roger Kimball:

The multiculturalists notwithstanding, the choice facing us today is not between a ‘repressive’ Western culture and a multicultural paradise, but between culture and barbarism. Civilization is not a gift, it is an achievement – a fragile achievement that needs constantly to be shored and defended from besiegers inside and out (1994d, 72).

Taylor’s choice between culture and barbarism seems startling in its starkness. It looks as if he is introducing a kind of black-and-white reading of reality, with no explanation about how he is seeing the word “barbarism.” This word has a specific meaning in Greek history, referring to people who do not speak the Greek language. Is

⁴⁷ In his paper “A World Consensus on Human Rights?” (1996), Taylor illustrates how difficult it is to find common ground with other cultures if we base our dialog on human rights. For example, some people speak of “human dignity” as a universal value. Yasuaki Onuma, one of the opponents of this view, says that “dignity” is a favorite term in the same Western philosophical stream that has elaborated human rights. Instead of “human dignity”, he suggests “pursuit of spiritual as well as material well-being”.

Instead of persisting with a dialog based on the language of human rights, Taylor suggests looking first for an unforced common consensus on human rights. Such a common consensus on human rights represents a kind of framework which allows us to have a fruitful exchange of our differences, unfamiliarities, the notions of human excellence, and other similar points. Hopefully through this exchange we will find some common points on which we can base our notion of human rights.

In his article “Human Rights, Human Differences” (1994e), Taylor in a slightly different way emphasizes the necessity of having a common consensus. In our globalizing world, there are many different understandings of the good life, many of which command our respect and admiration. At the same time, there seem to us to be clear universal standards of what is right, anchored in an obligatory respect for human beings and for their basic equality. These two claims regularly conflict. For example, certain understandings of family life severely restrict the lives of women; respect for authority can be linked to the denial of adult freedom.

As a solution for these conflicts between understanding of what is the right and the good, Taylor suggests the necessity of looking for a common consensus among us, which will allow to all of us a moral growth, without ethical impoverishment or destruction, or falling into fundamentalist, relativist or reductionist solutions.

everybody who does not speak our language to be called a *barbarian*? Of course this cannot be the case. Taylor has already shown us the danger of imposing our solutions about other civilization upon them.

Putting aside this primarily hermeneutical problem, we can see how Taylor shifts the focus of his interpretation from the worth residing in other cultures and our judgments of other cultures, to a moral question: are we willing to be open to a comparative study and to try to achieve a new civilization? Such a study will require from us an elaboration of a new self-comprehension, i.e., that we are only one part in the whole of the human story. Such a self-comprehension seems to be in Taylor's reflection far from being a reality as yet. In this sense he writes that we have to admit that "we are very far away from that ultimate horizon from which the relative worth of different cultures might be evident" (1994d, 73).

In short, Taylor's proposal to accept the policy of equal recognition is not an elaborated plan or vision of a multicultural society; it is more a starting point or vision that can help us in our daily confrontation with other cultures and in the process of globalization.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ As an illustration of this point, we refer to the Richard Kearney's interview with Charles Taylor. Talking about living together in Modernity and respecting our spiritual roots, Taylor emphasizes that there is a growing awareness in modern subjects about the importance of the self and about its inwardness. This thinking and awareness about the self and its inwardness is profoundly ambivalent and can go in two directions. It can go in a direction that is totally focused on the subject. In this case we talk about subjectivism. This way represents continuation of the post-Romantic idea that everybody has his own original way of existing that needs to be discovered.

The second possible direction is the way on which people discover their vocation as something more universal. For instance, people ought to militate for ecological sanity, or for a sense of connection to the larger world or to the larger nature. This way does not neglect the importance of the subject at his inwardness, but tries to move his way of thinking for something not exclusively subjective ("Federations and Nations – Living among Others", 1995c, 31).

Summary Words

At the end of this subdivision, we are in need of a short summary. Why does Taylor dedicate so much of his reflection to the question of multiculturalism? Why do we argue that Taylor's reflection about multiculturalism has a place in this present study?

First of all, nobody would deny that our societies are more and more multicultural. More recent generations are more exposed to dialogue with other cultures than people were in the past. Encounters with people of different languages, religions and traditions are part of our daily reality. This exposure is the site of the agent's embodiment in modernity. Therefore, if a human agent wants to realize himself, to find new ways of expressing himself in fullness and to live in freedom, then he has to deal with the reality of multiculturalism. It follows that if we want to find an answer to Hegel's concern, we have to include Taylor's reflection on multiculturalism as well.

Our attention to Taylor's thoughts about multiculturalism creates in us a greater sensibility toward and awareness of those aspects of modernity too often ignored. Taylor's position here is very clear: most accounts of modernity provide us inadequate descriptions of our present condition. Differences among individuals, groups, societies, and nations; people's desire to be authentic and able to express in an original way their deepest inspirations; the necessity to be recognized for who we are or want to be – these are some of those aspects that need additional elaboration and clarification. Through focusing on them, Taylor challenges contemporary social and political theories that are based on the principles of liberalism, utilitarianism, and ethnocentrism. Social boundaries, based on a rigid interpretation of social structures, need in our context of

multiculturalism and globalization to be challenged. In this context, Taylor's account of multiculturalism, introducing as it does the policy of recognition, represents a substantial contribution to the philosophical search for new directions towards peaceful coexistence, as well as a better understanding of the agent's embodiment in modernity.

Despite his undeniable contribution, Taylor's reflection might produce some feelings of dissatisfaction, because of a lack of precision in his language. From this point of view, I should have to clarify more particular statements in Taylor's writing and take a more critical position towards his proposals. Intentionally, I do not want to do that until I present more fully Taylor's intentions and the inspiration behind his philosophical writings. This is true not only here where I consider multiculturalism, but also in other areas of Taylor's expertise. Once familiar with his broader goals, I can justify or critically evaluate specific arguments of his exposition.

The philosopher's task is neither to find answers to every question nor to provide concrete solutions, but to point out and elaborate anew the right questions. Definitively, Taylor has been doing this, introducing into contemporary political and social debate in modernity new issues that demand our attention.⁴⁹

Why do I argue that Taylor's multiculturalism has to find a place in this dissertation? I partially answered this question with the previous paragraphs. Multiculturalism represents one component of the embodiment of modern agency. Multiculturalism is the place in which modern agency looks for fulfilment and realization. If we want to talk about the agent's fulfilment, realization, and freedom, we

⁴⁹ See Taylor's position taken at the public forum at Catholic University in Washington, Nov. 19, 2009. In a discussion with Cardinal Francis George about faith and its contribution to the world, Taylor argued that the primary job of a philosopher is to formulate right questions rather than to find correct answers.

have to talk about the agent's embodiment in the context of multiculturalism. For this reason we include Taylor's reflection about multiculturalism in this dissertation.

By reflecting about multiculturalism, Taylor constructs a new social and political framework that allows him to advance to Hegel's major concern (the uniting of two ideals, radical freedom and expressive fullness). Or to formulate this another way: Hegel's new unity and ideal inspires Taylor's critical analysis of the political and social debate in modernity. Through his analysis of modernity in terms of multiculturalism, Taylor identifies those aspects that call for our revision and improvement. The organization and structure of modern societies should be such that they confer freedom on all members, that is, allowing them the possibility of unconstrained expression, self-realization and self-fulfilment. In short, Hegel's desire for a new unity of freedom and expressive fullness remains a model from which Taylor draws his inspirations about the importance of multiculturalism in modernity.

To claim this does not mean that Taylor focuses exclusively on the individual's self-realization and self-fulfilment. If this were the case, there would be little difference between Taylor and those liberals who subordinate the social and political reality to the realization and self-fulfilment of individuals. In contrast to them, Taylor continuously directs our attention to a larger reality we are all part of. This larger reality (common good, language, tradition, customs, religion, social structures) is extremely important because it modifies our identity, and consequently conditions our fulfilment. This larger reality exists on its own, and needs to be taken as such in our search for new ways for the individual's fulfilment. Since multiculturalism continuously challenges this larger reality, Taylor searches for new principles that will preserve the common good(s) on which

society is based, on the one hand, and on the other hand will concede to the individuals within the society maximum conditions of freedom and self-realization.

Taylor's reflection about the realization of individuals extends beyond the challenges and needs of North-Atlantic societies. As we who are living in our society look to be recognized for who we are or want to be, so do the members who belong to other societies. This craving to be free and fully realized is common to our human nature, independent of where we dwell on the earth. Taylor emphasizes that recognition of and respect for others are the essential principles for a peaceful coexistence in our globalized world. Even though he focuses his search for the answer to Hegel's concern on those societies that are most challenged by modernity, the object of his reflection is by its nature universal, extending to all individuals, nations and cultures. The desire to be free, to express openly one's deepest aspirations, and to be recognized and respected, is inherent in human nature, independent of any particular culture.

Taylor's insistence that individuals in every culture have to have the same rights and options to be who they are or want to become, makes his philosophical argumentation stronger and morally more persuasive. Taylor's hope is that his argument will be accepted by those who do not share necessarily our way of thinking. Once this happens, we will establish a common ground for further reflection.

To a certain extent Taylor's proposals remain unstructured. Even though he refers to Hegel as the primary source of his inspiration, Taylor does not propose either Hegel's idea of a greater harmony or someone else's vision as a sufficient grounding for a peaceful coexistence in modernity. In a private conversation (Spring semester 2009, Harvard University), Taylor stated that we simply do not accept the existence of a greater

harmony as Hegel did, or like to talk about universal solutions. Consequently, we struggle to find our place in a reality that we cannot visualize. What Hegel proposed as a unifying force or as an encompassing reality (the existence of a greater order and the idea of *Geist*), remains odd and foreign to our way of thinking in modernity.

We will see how Taylor argues that no religious principle can become the foundation for our peaceful coexistence. In place of religious principles or philosophical ideas of a greater harmony, Taylor refers us back to human nature, especially to its need to be recognized. Taylor argues that every culture has something important to offer and concludes that every culture should be recognized for its worth. After having raised new possibilities and initiated provocative questions, Taylor concludes that we are still far from that ultimate horizon from which the relative worth of different cultures might be evident (1994d, 73). Nonetheless, Taylor's guidance is clearer now than it was before.

Having analyzed Taylor's reflections about the importance of certain aspects of a multiculturalism that allows the modern agent to express who he is or wants to become -- what we might call the external aspect because they help to create an environment of freedom in experiencing individual's ideas about what is crucial for their lives -- we can shift now to Taylor's reflection about the agent's inwardness, especially in his search for what appears to be a primary characteristic in modernity: the agent's search for authenticity. What are the conditions of this search in the agent's interiority? How does the search for authenticity help the agent on the way to fulfilment?

3.4 The Quest for Authenticity as the Remedy for the Modern Sense of Unfulfilment

In our interpretation of Taylor's writings, the search for authenticity represents the fourth mode or area in which the human agent living in modernity expresses his longing for freedom. By authenticity Taylor means a higher and better mode of existence, "where "better" and "higher" are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we ought to desire" (1991b, 16).⁵⁰ We can better understand Taylor's definition of authenticity by comparing it to some narrower and less adequate understandings of the term.

We will first see how Taylor posits three premises of the agent's search for authenticity. From there, we will move to Taylor's description of various expressions that the agent's desire to be authentic finds in modernity. Finally, we will look closely at Taylor's proposal for how to move towards authenticity.

This topic – the search for authenticity – is in Taylor's reflection something new and original. Not that people previously lacked authenticity, but that the quality of authenticity as such was not considered as an important issue until modernity, when it becomes considered as crucial to the agent's construction of his identity.

When we speak of the present time, we apply the term *modernity* to different contexts, with more or less positive or negative connotations. Earlier we saw how modernity represents for us the results of the huge scientific and technological progress made in the last century. Despite this progress, however, modern life seems less structured. The increasing complexity of our multicultural society challenges the present

⁵⁰ Unfortunately Taylor does not explain with more details what he means by this last sentence.

social structures. At the same time, in the face of enormous technological developments we experience a sense of smallness amidst the mysteries of the universe. Many external factors radically modify the routines of our daily life. Confronting all these changes, we experience insecurity, uncertainty, and vulnerability. Life in modernity is far more intriguing, complex, and demanding than it was in an earlier time.

His book *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991b), originally published under the title *The Malaise of Modernity*, offers an alternative and more appreciative comprehension of modernity and of the agent's role in it.⁵¹ Taylor treats authenticity briefly in this book but develops his ideas in others works as well.⁵²

My thesis is that Taylor adopts a modern search of authenticity as the remedy for the agent's sense of unfulfilment. Living in modernity, the modern agent experiences a kind of inner void, in front of which he searches for new ways of fulfilment. The search for authenticity is an expression of the agent's unfulfilment, as well as an expression of his desire to be free. Therefore, Hegel's initial concern will find new extensions in this subdivision. Taylor is very explicit that the ethics of authenticity is something Hegel wanted to deal with in his time, even though not in a very explicit way. In this sense Taylor describes the ethics of authenticity as sprung from the Romantic period (1991b,

⁵¹ *The Ethics of Authenticity* was originally published in Canada under the title *The Malaise of Modernity*, as an extended version of the 1991 Massey Lectures, which were broadcast in November 1991 as part of CBC Radio's *Ideas* series.

⁵² In the article "Nietzsche's Legacy" (1993a), Taylor claims that with modernity something happens that is absolutely unprecedented in human history. Before people used the language of nature as a moral language, i.e. the human agent was supposed to act according to nature and follow nature, doing so his acting was considered moral. Nature was taken as a standard for human acting. Now in modernity the language of nature represents a different standard, i.e. one's own way of becoming human. "... [now] we are talking about nature as a standard insofar as it's suggested to us by the voice, sentiment, whatever, which we find within ourselves. Such is the basis, an important basis of modern humanism. And this of course develops into what I've tried to call, following Lionel Trilling, the 'ethics of authenticity' at a later stage with the idea that each one of us has his or her one way of being human" (177).

25). In other words, what Hegel only discovered from afar, came fully into light only in modernity.

Taylor's interpretation of the ethics of authenticity includes both aspects of modernity, that side in which the modern agent finds himself in a cul-de-sac and thwarted in his search, and on the other side, that in which the agent discovers new, original and refreshing ways to deal with his search. Both aspects commend Taylor's attention; he wants to devolve and if necessary modify the reasons and motives behind these positive and negative aspects of modernity. In doing this, Taylor seems less worried about the correctness of the expressions of the agent's authenticity; his primary concern is what can foster the agent's desire to be authentic, and those deepest inspirations dwelling in his heart. As the expressions of the most inner part of the human agent, they call for special philosophical attention to the ways that these aspirations can be discovered and allowed to flourish, making the human agent more human. Taylor's hope is to enable human agency to arrive at a deeper self-understanding and self-fulfilment.

Taylor applies the same methodology to the question of authenticity as he has been doing elsewhere. If we want to understand the present condition of authenticity, we need to dig into its historical roots. Our present desire to be original, authentic and in touch with our inwardness, can best be explained through examining what took place in the recent past. Once we see our concerns in their historical perspective, we should be able to find a more compelling answer for our present conditions. Taylor does not pretend to be dogmatic in his narration. If we find in his account a deeper meaning for ourselves, his proposed account will meet with our approval; otherwise, Taylor encourages us to look further for a better one.

Let us start now with the premises of Taylor's ethics of authenticity.

3.4.1 Taylor's Premises for the Ethics of Authenticity

Taylor bases his ethics of authenticity on three premises (1991b, 23; 73): (1) authenticity is an ideal worth espousing; (2) we can establish through reason what authenticity involves; (3) this ideal can make a difference in the agent's practices.

It is no mere accident that Taylor begins from these three premises. Each one of them has its reason in Taylor's exploration. With the first premise, Taylor objects to those who are skeptical about the value of authenticity and consider it not worthy as a goal. With the second premise, Taylor rejects subjectivism and all those arguments in favor of individualism. And with the last premise, Taylor opposes those accounts of modern culture that see the human agent as being imprisoned by the "systems" which unconditionally form his life.

In *The Ethics of Authenticity* Taylor does not discuss very much the first premise; the concept of authenticity seems to him a self-evident ideal. As we know, Taylor in his book *Sources of the Self* reflects extensively about the nature of worth, the moral good, inwardness, and the agent's search for something significant in his ordinary life. Taylor maintains that choosing the moral good and what has *worth* is appealing and attractive in itself. The self-evident nature of *worth* is the best argument for it. The agent's relation to *good* and *worth* is also one of the moral sources for the construction of modern identity.

As *good* and *worth* are attractive in themselves, Taylor reflects, so authenticity and the agent's desire to be authentic are appealing and attractive in themselves (1991b, 74-75). The agent's desire to be authentic will lead him toward greater self-responsibility,

self-fulfilment, and more freedom, all commonly accepted as positive results. All of them together make the agent's life fuller and richer. The same desire to be authentic continuously challenges the agent to scrutinize his life, and to conduct deep and searching examination of one's life. As a result, the desire to be authentic helps the human agent to improve his ethical life as well as to actualize his human potentials. The desire to be authentic supports the human agent in his efforts to break out of any kind of system that threatens to deny him his potential.

Keeping in mind this aspect of modernity, we can understand why Taylor recurs in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, to how the agent's desire to be authentic and to develop an ethics of authenticity has fomented divisions in modernity. Taylor describes the agent's search for authenticity as a struggle, properly not a struggle over authenticity, for or against, but how to define it. "We ought to be trying to lift the culture back up, closer to its motivating ideal" (1991b, 73).

This ideal of being authentic is in itself controversial and complicated because it contains within it different and opposed meanings. Taylor's reflection about authenticity considers different meanings, starting with those less positive. He looks at those conditions that drag the culture of authenticity down to its most self-centered and individualistic forms, in which there is no place for other people's needs or for larger social concerns. Authenticity in such cases means narcissistic self-fulfilment; each individual decides for himself what is good for him. Very close to this position is authenticity understood as permissiveness, or negation of any kind of values, promoting individual freedom, without obligation, as the highest principle. Such a view of what it means to be *authentic* can only lead to pessimism.

Taylor adopts neither one of these extreme interpretations of authenticity, but neither does he exclude either of them as irrelevant. Certainly, the attempt to return to an irreversible past, in which people at least apparently did not struggle to realize authenticity, is no solution. The real challenge is to identify and articulate the higher ideal(s) behind these debatable articulations of authenticity. Taylor sees much positive energy and openness behind these articulations. In other words, different ways, different actualizations, however misdirected or incomplete, are expressions of an agent's desire to be authentic.

Taylor does not hesitate to confront unacceptable expressions of authenticity in modernity, which might result in deviations from authenticity. From this perspective, Taylor's writings about authenticity radiate optimism and new energy, inspired by our never-ending confrontation with actuality. He sees the agent's struggling in confrontation with reality as a new opportunity to find out what is really important. This struggle does not have an exact time-frame; it simply takes place in our daily life continuously. In the same way, the agent's desire to be authentic remains a never-ending process but one always open to further development. Taylor describes the agent's efforts to find a more authentic life and its deeper meaning as *la lotta continua*, that is, the continuous battle (the term adopted from the Italian revolutionary movement Red Brigades) (1991b, 78). So we see that Taylor with his description of authenticity does not pretend to pronounce a dogmatic final word on the subject, but rather formulates the ethics of authenticity as an ongoing search.

3.4.2 Variety of Expressions of the Agent's Desire to be Authentic

If the first premise seems to be self-evident, this is not the case for the second premise. The meaning of authenticity is more complicated than it seems; the term carries different shades of meaning. We have seen how the agent's desire to be authentic expresses itself in various ways, many of which are good in themselves; nonetheless, not every interpretation of authenticity is acceptable.

Taylor analyzes various expressions of the desire to be authentic, starting from different angles and exposing various aspects. He starts with authenticity from the point of view of individualism, where *individualism* is taken as a synonym for being authentic.

We live in a world where people have a right to choose for themselves their own pattern of life, to decide in conscience what convictions to espouse, to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways that their ancestors could not control. And these rights are generally defended by our legal systems. In principle, people are no longer sacrificed to the demands of supposedly sacred orders that transcend them (1991b, 2).

Taylor goes on to describe individualism in terms of breaking loose from traditional moral orders, as well as from social, political, and religious structures, that confined the life of individuals within a larger order. The discrediting of these orders has been called the *disenchantment* of the world, in which people lost the broader vision, and preferred to be more centered on themselves.

This kind of individualism easily accepts a form of relativism, which can be seen as an offshoot of individualism. In relativism everybody lives by his own *values*. Serious argumentation about the foundation and qualifications of *one's own values* rarely finds a place in this world. Developing one's own form of life, based on one's own sense of what is really important and valuable, becomes a personal right, as Taylor describes the argument for the individualism of self-fulfilment (1991b, 14). This appeal to right is so

strong that people overlook or shut out “the greater issues or concerns that transcend the self, be they religious, political, historical” (1991b, 14). Developing one’s own life assumes a moral position: out of mutual respect, one ought not to challenge another’s values. We can see the beginnings of the ideals of a liberal society in which individualism is the highest value.

At least apparently, both individualism and relativism lead us toward a larger horizon of freedom and personal actualization. Such a comprehension of freedom finds fertile soil in modern social structures and arrangements which are no longer grounded in the order of things or the will of God, as they were in the past. If the social, moral, and religious structures were in the past solid, unchangeable as nature and God are unchangeable, they now in modernity seem to be less solidly grounded and more flexible. They increase the range of possible choices open to individuals; the variety of options for self-realization they offer is much greater in modernity than it was up to the 17th century. Now everything seems to be centered on the happiness of individuals, but with a diminished certainty.

Such a reading of the search for self-fulfilment and freedom finds additional reinforcement in what Taylor calls the primacy of “instrumental reason.” By instrumental reason, Taylor means the rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency and cost-benefits become the measure of success (1991b, 5). Instrumental reason is like the fuel for a society based on the principles of higher production, material benefits and economic growth. Taylor concludes that the same efficiency that produces material benefits at maximal output, threatens to make our lives miserable. Unequal distribution of wealth, insensitiveness to

the needs of our environment, loss of contact with the earth and its rhythms, are only some sources of the agent's unease when confronted by instrumental reason.

To a certain extent we have already analyzed "instrumental reason" when in the subdivisions at the beginning of this chapter we talked about the scientific interpretation of the world. When Taylor describes the view of instrumental reason as the way to being authentic in modernity, he is basically repeating his view of the scientific interpretation of the world (1991b, 93-108). Taylor wants neither to embrace blindly nor to reject categorically technological improvement and instrumental reason. Both are facts of modernity that we cannot neglect or reject. What Taylor tries to do is to re-discover their origin and the motives behind their appearance. For example, with instrumental reason we moderns like to control nature toward the end of greater freedom. Some advocates of instrumental reason argue that behind this desire to control nature lies a moral ideal of being more self-responsible and self-controlling, with the call to mitigate the conditions of mankind. They understand technology to be a benevolent enterprise of ever-increasing control over resistant nature.

Taylor disagrees with their conclusion and suggests an alternative framing of technology in terms of the ethics of practical benevolence (1991b, 106). Technology should not be seen as having its own moral demands dictating our actions; it should rather remain in the service of real people, helping us to relieve human struggles and suffering and become more authentic, fulfilled, and to free human beings. This might include control of nature as well, not as the final goal of instrumental reason, but as an instrument of help to real people in their normal life. As we have seen many times before, even in this case Taylor applies his *ad hominem* argument.

It is true that technological development provides us additional options for acting that allow us to take further steps in the apparent extension of our freedom and authenticity. Taylor argues, however, that this extension is apparent only because it curtails the influences of moral, social, political and religious orders on our behaviour. Together with these forms of order, we are also losing the meaning and ends of our acting. Taylor argues that the primacy of instrumental reason gave us impersonal mechanisms and social structures, pervaded with bureaucratic management which can only reduce our degree of freedom. The modern technological society locks us into an *iron cage*, which demands from us even more efficiency, and leaves the individual feeling even more isolated (1991b, 98).

In speaking about the *iron cage*, Taylor repeats some of the points already explored under *Atomistic Theories*. The search for individual fulfilment and authenticity when based on atomism and instrumental reason does not lead us toward an extension of freedom, but towards a certain distortion of reality or selective forgetting. By this, Taylor means the following (1991b, 58-61). Individualism based on self-sufficiency and self-fulfilment is a self-centered ideal, creating inner tensions for the individual. For example, if we focus only on our personal development, we can easily come in conflict with others (e.g. our family or the society we live in). If the principle of self-fulfilment holds primacy in our decisions, we will neglect the demands that come from beyond our own desires or aspirations, be they from history, tradition, society, nature, or God. If this is the case, we question the very nature of human agency. If we neglect the larger horizons of our existence, we are on a direct path to the culture of nihilism and to the loss of moral significance. In short, self-fulfilment without connections with others and in negation of

larger horizons of significance is a contradiction in terms. All ideals lose their foundation, including the modern ideals of authenticity, individualism, and self-sufficiency.

All these and similar argumentations in favor of individualism, relativism, and self-fulfilment in terms of egoism or narcissism, moral laxity, subjectivism, atomism, uncritical permissiveness, liberalism, self-indulgence and the like, represent in Taylor's view various expressions of how the human agent in modernity goes his way searching for something deeper, more fulfilling and authentic. Influential books of the last decades are full of pronouncements about what is important in human life and how to reach and increase our freedom. Taylor occasionally refers to some of these books and agrees with their authors on the point that modernity has introduced many positive changes and opened us to new horizons of existence. Nonetheless, Taylor disagrees with the statement that we have already exhausted all possible shades of modernity. It is true that modernity suffers from certain malaises, which Taylor describes: loss of meaning, the eclipse of ends in face of instrumental reason, and loss of freedom (1991b, 10). Even so, Taylor states that there is something much bigger, more valuable and not sufficiently explored behind this pessimistic prognosis for modernity.

Behind the above-mentioned expressions of the agent's search for something deeper, Taylor sees a movement that is essential for an adequate understanding of modern culture. Taylor calls this movement "subjectivation" (1991b, 81). By this, Taylor means that we center more and more on the subject and his choices. Actions that were once settled by some external laws or authority are now referred to an agent's choice. The modern agent wants to think out for himself and to discover what it means to be himself or to be authentic. The ideal of being authentic is by its nature such that it requires the

individual to discover his own identity, to stand for it and be personally engaged in its articulation and the construction of his identity. The very decision to be authentic has to be his choice, and not something imposed upon him.

Taylor sees this desire to be true to oneself as a very powerful ideal working behind an agent's desires and expressions in modernity (1991b, 15). Such a self-referential authenticity might initially seem to be egoistic or exclusively subject-based, but it is not if we take it as a personal engagement in things that really matter to an individual. Being authentic refers us to the things that are the best for us. In this context let us repeat again Taylor's definition of authenticity: being authentic means being in search of what is a higher and better mode of life, where the *higher* and *better* are not defined in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we *ought* to desire (1991b, 16). In this perspective, authenticity becomes the highest principle on the road to actualizing our nature.

Taylor is aware that the movement to subjectivation opens the door to possible misinterpretations about its meaning. To avoid these misunderstandings, he distinguishes between the *manners* of action, i.e. the ways in which the individual expresses and realizes his originality, and the *matter* or *content* of authenticity (1991b, 81-82). If we do not observe this distinction, we risk confusion that can find its expression in the worst forms of subjectivism.

From the point of view of subjectivation of manner, Taylor sees modernity as a time of huge advancement in terms of the agent's personal engagement. Authenticity has to be *my* orientation; authenticity in this sense is clearly self-referential, as we have seen. An individual's endeavor to be authentic and original, and consequently responsible for

his own choices, presents an anthropological freshness in modernity. This is the point from which Taylor traces new and barely touched horizons of exploration.

Nevertheless, the *manner* of action is not interchangeable with its *matter* or content. The content of authenticity cannot be self-referential. We find our genuine fulfilment only in something which has significance independent of us and our desires. Personal goals express or fulfill desires or aspirations, as against larger goals that stand beyond desires, e.g. a political cause, or tending the earth, or serving God – some aspect of life that has a significance independent of personal desires (1991b, 82).

Saying this, Taylor does not maintain that being in touch with God or an idea of the Good are no longer possible sources of our morality and authenticity (1991b, 26-27). They still remain viable sources, but the ways in which the modern agent relates to them are different now. Taylor explains this point broadly in his book *Sources of the Self*, in the section on “Moral Sentiments.” For our purpose, a short summary will be sufficient.

In the age before Romanticism, morality was based on a intellectual calculation of what was right or wrong, and on the consequences of divine reward and punishment. Such an understanding of morality changed in the Romantic period, when we witnessed the displacement of the moral weight from a dry calculation to emotions anchored in the agent. Morality now finds its dwelling place within the agent; the source we have to connect with is deep within us.

The notion of authenticity develops out of this displacement of the moral accent. Authenticity tends to be more and more based on what is deep in us, on human moral feelings, on something that we have to acknowledge and express if we want to be full and true human beings. Consequently, modern man thinks primarily about himself as a being

with inner depths and an intense reflexive awareness of himself. From this awareness and through his personal decisions, he establishes a relationship to God or to some other Ideals. This relationship has to be of his own making. Imitation of another imposed traditions or rules appears contrary to the attainment of his authenticity.

So far, we have discussed Taylor's premises of the ethics of authenticity, and various expressions of the desire to be authentic and free as something coming out of the deepest part of an agent's nature. We also distinguished between the *manner* of authenticity and the *matter* or content of authenticity. All this is necessary if we want to comprehend what Taylor means by the *matter* of authenticity. This is the main topic of the next and last subdivision of this chapter.

3.4.3 Four Conditions for the Agent's Discovery of Authenticity

We have seen how becoming authentic requires us to be in contact with ourselves and our own nature, to be listening to the inner voice, trying to be truthful in articulating and realizing the potentialities that are properly our own. Taylor claims that this is the background essential to understanding the modern ideal of authenticity, self-fulfilment, and self-realization (1991b, 29). However, Taylor's articulation and definition of authenticity are not yet complete. In order to be authentic, we have to be in contact with things that matter in our lives. On the path of discovery to what matters in our life, Taylor considers four factors: the things that matter are part of a larger context; we can discover them while being with others; they require from us a going beyond ourselves; they require a personal engagement.

In the second chapter of this dissertation (“Moral Sources of Modern Identity”), I discussed Taylor’s argument that morality is part of a larger horizon. To define the meaning of human lives or of our identity or the good as such, we have to examine human lives, an agent’s identity, and the good as being inserted into a larger horizon, part of a wider context. This horizon provides us criteria and resources through which we judge some actions or modes of life as higher, deeper, fuller, purer, and more admirable than others. Living within a larger horizon is crucial because it shows us what is important, good, and valuable to us. In relation to what is outstanding in our framework, we constitute our identity and direct our life.

From our analyses of Taylor’s reflection about the identity of human agency and human language, we know that both of them can be defined and properly understood only within a larger context. A human agent cannot define his identity on the self alone, without taking into consideration the context of his embodiment, his engagement with the world, his acting in view of the things that matter, and his coexisting with other subjects. In the same way, even human language always exists as a part of a larger context, which escapes the dominion or control of any single individual. We learn language from others; we use it in our relationships with others; we verify its meaning in dialogue with others. Language is a means of communication and a mode of expression that goes beyond the individual’s invention; therefore, language is always part of a larger reality that emanates from the individual. Human language is never a merely private property.

When Taylor talks about the matter of authenticity, he returns to his statements that morality, the agent’s identity, and human language, all have to be taken as embodied in a larger horizon. The agent’s authenticity does not exist as something independent in

itself or irrespective of its embodiment. The things that matter for our authenticity are part of a greater reality which surpasses an individual's choices and desires for self-fulfilment and self-realization. The things that matter are part of larger horizons and transcend the agent in itself. In other words, the individual is inserted into a horizon of significance or givenness, which comes first or before the individual's desires or concrete choices. In this sense, Taylor maintains that for our authenticity we have to live within "inescapable horizons" that give meaning and significance to the authenticity of our lives (1991b, 31).

Morality, the agent's identity, and human language do not exist in themselves; we can understand them only within a larger reality in which they exist. Only if embodied in a larger context can we understand correctly what *good* or *worth*, or being a just person, or the meaning of a given word, is. In the same way we cannot understand the matter of authenticity, if we are not embodied in larger horizons, i.e. being part of a larger reality. This is an unavoidable condition. For this reason Taylor talks about "inescapable horizons" that give meaning and significance to the agent's authenticity.

There are various factors that modify the inescapability of these horizons. What is significant and meaningful in our lives -- values, moral principles, worth, and human language -- by their nature do not allow us to be confined or determined by any individual. They are always the matter of a larger group or context, in which their significance comes to light. Only when we are in a relationship with other people can we discover, modify, verify, change, and eliminate if necessary what is important in our lives. In Taylor's words, "Reasoning in moral matters is always reasoning with somebody" (1991b, 31). Of course, this presupposes that an individual as well as his

interlocutor is willing to have a reasonable discussion and to acknowledge moral demands.⁵³

Taylor states that the same is true for a life of authenticity. What is authentic and genuine in the agent's life transcends the definitions and comprehension of any individual. Authenticity is found, verified, and explored only in contact with another. We negotiate our authenticity through our dialogue with others where negotiation represents the best evaluation of our personal decisions and principles. This dialogue can take different forms: respect, dismissal, contention, agreement; through any of these forms we become who we are. Only in dialogue with others and living in a community can we become full human beings, capable of understanding ourselves, defining our identity, questioning what is the best for us, and verifying our desire to be authentic. Since authenticity grows only through an agent's being in contact with others, Taylor concludes that the determining of an individual's originality and constructing of his authenticity must have a dialogical character (1991b, 33).

A strictly self-centered life, prioritizing independence from others, self-reliance, can provide only a very narrow-minded and shallow approach to authenticity. A critical examination of these ideals shows us their limits; the individual's dependence on other people and his community is greater and more complex than whatever the ideals of independence can claim. For this reason Taylor states that the agent cannot invent or self-impose his authenticity without being in dialogical contact with others who either recognize and respect his authenticity, or disrespect and reject it.

⁵³ "A person who accepted no moral demands would be as impossible to argue with about right and wrong as would a person who refused to accept the world of perception around us be impossible to argue with about empirical matters" (1991b, 32).

With this conclusion, Taylor opposes understandings of authenticity on the principle of soft relativism, which claims that things have significance not of themselves, but because people deem them to have it or because people just determine what is important by choice or by feeling (1991b, 36). The principle of soft relativism and its correspondent understanding of authenticity assume that all options before the agent have an equal worth, that options are morally neutral and at the disposition of the agent's choice. There is no acknowledged horizon of significance which would qualify some options as being higher or lower. Soft relativism assumes that differences between various options have no significance at all; what is significant is only what the agent desires or wills.

In Taylor's argumentation, then, soft-relativism is unacceptable because it is not based on a horizon of significance but on authenticity as self-defining freedom (1991b, 38-39). He insists that authenticity cannot be constructed or defended in ways that collapse such as a horizon of significance. While it is true that my freedom, the determination of my identity, my authenticity and independence, depend on my willingness to give shape to my life, the significance of this shape of life has to be taken as one option among many others. This option cannot be simply the matter of my own creation. Before deciding to choose it, I need to see it as part a larger social structure that makes its choice possible. Again, there is always a pre-existing horizon of significance visible to us before we make our choice.

The pre-existing horizons of significance, or the ideals that matter in our life, are defined in relation to our past experiences and history, the demands of nature, our relations with others, with religion and spiritual concerns (1991b, 40-41). All these things

constantly challenge the individual to that which emanate beyond the self, beyond his exclusive self-fulfilment and narcissistic desires. So the individual moves from self-centered forms of life, which flatten and narrow his desire to be authentic, to what is significant in his life. Taylor puts this as a requirement of the culture of authenticity that challenges us to move from the self-centered decision based only on fulfilment of the self, which trivializes our daily choices, to what is more worthy, significant, and higher in our life. In other words, the culture of authenticity does not suppress the conditions of significance, but challenges us to discover and follow these conditions.

Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order *matters* crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands (1991b, 41).

Taylor's definition of the culture of authenticity extends beyond the bounds of the personal feelings and self-fulfilment, beyond subjectivism, individualism, soft relativism and similar forms which too easily descend into narcissism, egoism, or self-indulgence, while despising the demands of society, nature, and bonds of solidarity with others. Taylor claims that people who defend these forms have a deficient understanding of low standards of authenticity.⁵⁴ Rational argument in defense of their positions is difficult if not impossible. Defenders of these positions find the demands emanating beyond the self

⁵⁴ "They tend to center fulfilment on the individual, making his or her affiliations purely instrumental; they push, in other words, to a social *atomism*. And they tend to see fulfilment as just of the self, neglecting or delegitimizing the demands that come from beyond our own desires or aspirations, be they from history, tradition, society, nature, or God; they foster, in other words, a radical anthropocentrism" (1991b, 58).

threatening to their individuality and their sense of authenticity.⁵⁵ No wonder that Taylor describes such positions as destroying in themselves the conditions for realizing authenticity (1991b, 35).

So far we have three factors: agent's openness to horizons of significance, self-definition in dialogue with others, and demands emanating beyond the self. These three factors modify agent's search and understanding of authenticity, and agent's way towards the things that matter in his life. To these three, Taylor adds a fourth factor: each one of us has his original way to go. Every human being has to discover for himself what it is to be authentic and what the best is for him and his "self".⁵⁶ With this, Taylor emphasizes that the agent's actualization of authenticity, along with his being free and constructing his identity, is finally the matter of his responsibility. It is the agent, in person, who decides whether or not to discover and embrace his authenticity or how to construct his identity. The notion that each one of us has an original way of being human entails that each one of us has to articulate afresh and to give expression in our speech and action to

⁵⁵ Taylor is very aware that ideals of creativity, originality, and self-determination, can be taken to extreme positions where these ideals clash with morality and other forms of convention. In such a case, authenticity might become a synonym for opposition to morality. If we push the notion of self-determination to its limits, it can generally recognized boundaries. From here, we have not far to go to extreme forms of anthropocentrism, based only on a self-determining choice. These forms might be so keen that they become violent, i.e., Fascism, Communism or even ecological aggressiveness (1991b, 67- 68).

⁵⁶ In the article "Exploring 'l'humaine condition'" (1990), Taylor in a very concise way represents the historical development of the notion "the self" from Augustine to modernity. According to Taylor, Montaigne is the crucial figure for the modern understanding of the self, and in connection with that the ideals of self-responsibility, freedom, and new sense of dignity. Montaigne suggests that we should look not for the universal nature, but each of us for his own being. Our reflection should be intensely individual and self-explanatory. Its aim is to reach self-knowledge by coming to see through the screens of self-delusion that passion or spiritual pride have erected. It is entirely a first-person study, so to speak.

To have a "self", to follow the ideals of self-responsibility, freedom, dignity, authenticity, identity, become in modernity as obvious and normal for understanding of human agency as having different physical organs in our body. These ideals cannot be defined any more in terms of some universal description of human agency as such, for examples as soul, or reason, or will. The search for identity can be seen as the search for what *I* essentially *am*.

what is original in us. Taylor calls this “expressivism of the modern notion of the individual” (1991b, 61).

Expressivism in this case represents the principle wherein each one of us can and should find his authenticity. This expressivism includes two components: imitation and creation. We generally tend to imitate a pre-existing order. However, in each individual case of imitation, we create something anew and independent of that which pre-existed. As a result, even our act of imitation becomes a unique expression of who we are. Our imitation and creation, together with expressions of ourselves, are basically the discovery of our human nature and its potentialities. As an example, Taylor refers us to an artist who through his painting creates new ways of employing art, and in doing so, he finds new and original ways of expressing himself. In using such an example, Taylor does not want to open the question about evaluation of particular forms or the originality of the artist’s self-expression; the point is that self-discovery and authenticity requires from us *poiesis*, i.e. making, acting, creating, constructing (1991b, 62), which are crucial elements of authenticity for every individual.

Expressivism in the modern notion of the individual desire to be authentic is in Taylor’s writings closely connected with the idea of freedom. “Authenticity is itself an idea of freedom; it involves my finding the design of my life myself, against the demands of external conformity” (1991b, 67-68). To put it differently, if we want to be authentic and expressive, we have to be free first. Freedom allows us to express ourselves and bring to light our deepest aspirations.

Taylor’s reflection about authenticity is not an original discovery. He explicitly refers us to Herder as the one who elaborated a modern understanding of life in terms of

expressivism (1991b, 61). In the first chapter of this dissertation we discussed Taylor's interpretation of expressivism as used by Herder and Hegel. In this section in which we discuss Taylor's understanding of authenticity, we have to acknowledge Herder first and Hegel secondly as prime sources for Taylor. What Herder perceived in its early stages becomes developed and key to Taylor's interpretation of modernity.

We come back then to our main thesis, i.e. Hegel's main concern represents Taylor's main concern as well. Taylor's reflection about authenticity and the expressions of an agent's desire to be original basically reflect Hegel's concern about the uniting of radical freedom and expressive fullness in the Romantic period.

The ideals of being authentic and free are two of the most attractive forces of modernity. Because of their attractiveness and relevance, they offer many occasions for misunderstanding and misinterpretation of what constitutes a genuine condition of authenticity and freedom. Taylor focuses on these attractive powers because they represent a form of energy that needs to be channeled in the right direction, that is, toward making the human agency in modernity more genuinely authentic and human. Taylor's philosophical contribution regarding authenticity is enormous. The agent will become authentic and find his fulfilment only if he goes beyond his narrow-minded understanding of fulfilment and authenticity. It can be summarized in the following way: the agent's understanding of himself within larger horizons is not a loss but a rediscovery of the horizons of significance that allows the agent to find a deeper understanding of himself and thus his human potential.

Summary of Chapter Three and Transition

In this third chapter we saw how Taylor examines the agent's life in modernity as based on four main beliefs: the modern agent believes in epistemology as the fundamental basis of the whole structure of knowledge; he asserts the neutrality and objectivity of the social and political sciences; he looks for new ways of peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society; and he considers authenticity and originality as something very important in his life. In examination, Taylor is less interested in the forms these beliefs take than in the agent's actualization of them. Taylor continuously turns our attention back to the human agent.

In the agent's prioritizing of epistemology and claiming neutrality and objectivity for the social and political sciences, Taylor conceives him as in search of something that would supply a solidity and absoluteness in his life. To put it differently, in the midst of a changing reality, the agent experiences a sense of discontent and restlessness driving him to seek for certitude. Furthermore, non Western societies challenge the social structure and form of coexistence common to Western societies, and demand either justification or modification of those structures and forms. Differences in social structures appear to be relative to and conditioned by agent's embodiment in his time and place. Once "his" structures come in contact with the principles of "their" social structures, the modern agent's understanding deepens and drives him to find new horizons of greater certainty, as well as freedom, authenticity and fulfilment.

Faced with these modern challenges and changing social realities, Taylor as a philosopher embraces the task of exploring the agent's unrest and discontent. He wants to

expose the narrow boundaries and closed nature of those contemporary interpretations of human nature that disturb the agent. Once aware of their limitations and closedness, he might be able to modify his view of human existence, reshape it and open himself to new horizons, and doing so find more fulfilment in his life.

Although Taylor's philosophical reflections on modern epistemology are remarkable, it is also true that his critique of the epistemological tradition favors the hermeneutical approach and descriptive method, which are by definition open to dispute. Taylor's reluctance to give more decisive answers is somewhat disappointing at this point, but clearly points us to a way for us to open the door for new pursuits of his suggestions in future research. What direction we shall take and where will we find a better answer, remains in our hand and responsibility.

In short, Taylor's examination of modernity is much more than a critical reading of modernity. His reflection points us to features of human nature that are in modern accounts easily missed or overlooked: e.g. the intentionality of human actions; the agent's embodiment in time and space; the agent's desires, purposes and goals; the agent's connectedness with other agents; and his quest for recognition and authenticity. Why are these features missing or insufficiently integrated into accounts of modern epistemology, naturalism, subjectivism, and individualism? For Taylor, this is a crucial question because none of these features are accidental in human nature or random; they constitute the very essence of the agent's nature. As such, they must be taken seriously into consideration; we hope to form an adequate understanding of our time and the human agency.

Correspondingly, Taylor refers us to the agent's intentionality in four different areas of the agent's embodiment in modernity. For example, when the agent argues in favor of a scientific interpretation of the world, and claims the neutrality and objectivity of the political and social sciences, Taylor concludes that the agent intends to look for in human sciences something as solid scientific, neutral and objective as the knowledge of the natural sciences is. Similarly, when defending subjectivism, individualism, liberalism, and relativism, the human agent is trying to find conditions favoring his self-fulfilment and self-realization. Taylor likewise considers atomism, behaviorism, and mechanist psychology as expressions of the agent's search for a solid, unchanging, universally valid and acceptable interpretation of human existence, which would allow him to reach a deeper meaning in his life.

Taylor does not want to disregard or disrespect any phenomena of modernity or any expression of the agent's search. Taylor prefers to examine all of them and check the assertions and presuppositions behind them. These assertions and presuppositions are expressions of a human agency in search of something greater.

We saw first that approaches based on modern epistemology, or modern social and political sciences based on naturalism fail to sufficiently open us up to this "something greater." Then we saw how Taylor leads the modern self-sufficient agent to the conclusion that he is not the only one in search of "something greater." His search will remain on a narrow and closed path as long as he refuses to recognize other agents as equal partners in the search. This act of searching binds us together. In other words, search is inevitably connected with a larger reality that provides me with the conditions of my personal fulfilment and realization. But this fulfilment can take place only if I

accept my condition as a small part of a larger reality, meaning that: I am a member of a society that appreciates self-realization as a value and allows me to actualize this value; when I speak, I use the language that I learned from others. The weight of my values and the coherence of the highest principles on which I base my life can be discovered and lived only through continuous checking with the others.

Continuing on the same line, Taylor's examination of various phenomena coming to light in modernity is preferentially phenomenological and descriptive. He constantly refers us back to the historical background of a particular modern phenomenon. His primary intention is more to comprehend adequately a phenomenon in its historical perspective than to critically evaluate it. What requires a critical evaluation in modernity for Taylor is what reveals to us those features of our present time that are "missing" or covered deficiently, or simply uncritically assumed to be true. Such an evaluation and description becomes most useful if we insert ourselves and our time into a historical perspective that allows us to measure the differences between then and now and their consequences. Once we are aware of how our present age is connected to our past, we can grasp more easily what is important for us in modernity now and for our future.

This summary of Taylor's approach to modernity brings us back to what he found in Hegel's theory to build on. Taylor's philosophical reflection regarding modernity reflects in itself an answer to Hegel's concern about unity of freedom and expressive fullness. As Hegel two centuries ago constructed a philosophical structure in which the human agent could find his place of fulfilment and freedom, so does Taylor through his reflections on modernity. Hegel remains the inspiration and model for Taylor's work.

How much has my interpretation of Taylor's writings so far come closer to an answer to Hegel's concern? The response to this question has different layers. In my interpretation so far, Taylor in his exploration of modernity has not yet found an explicit answer to Hegel's concern. Nonetheless, exploring together four different areas of Taylor's description of modernity, we can discern a relatively clear outline of his position. We might say that my interpretation of Taylor's search for an answer became much more evident and explicit in this third chapter, but still remains far from being a final answer. If we combine this chapter with the second chapter, in which we traced three different steps towards an answer to Hegel's concern (Taylor's exposition of moral sources of the modern identity, his understanding of human agency and of human language, and his descriptive methodology), an outline of the final picture comes more into view. Its contours are clear, even though many details have yet to be filled. What is clearly evident is that Taylor is following in Hegel's steps.

Just as Hegel started his reflection with an analysis of the agent's life and his embodiment (see the opening of his book *Phenomenology of the Spirit*), so does Taylor begin with the agent's embodiment in modernity. Taylor repeats this point: the agent will find freedom and fulfilment in his life if, and only if, he is inserted in the place of his embodiment, which also includes also his being part of a larger reality. Modern epistemology, modern social and political sciences based on naturalism, as well as other accounts based on the principles of behaviorism, atomism, mechanist psychology, subjectivism, and relativism, do not sufficiently connect the agent with the larger reality of which he is part. The principles of dualism, inner/outer distinction, and objectification of nature, only widen the gap between the agent and the rest of nature. The agent's search

of fulfilment and freedom has to go beyond these principles. The agent's fulfilment, as well as the union of freedom and fullness, resides neither in his relation to something external, nor in his exclusive self-realization and self-fulfilment. The only place of fulfilment and of the union of freedom and fullness, is the place of agent's embodiment, which includes also his being part of a larger reality (society, other agents, transcendence). Hence my claim: as Hegel was opposed to the Enlightenment thought of his time, so Taylor opposes the Enlightenment elements in modernity (modern epistemology, naturalism, instrumental and material conceptions of man and nature).

In my first chapter we saw how Herder and Hegel developed ideas about the uniqueness, originality, differentiation, and expressiveness of the human agency. With these ideas they went beyond the position of Romanticism, which was grounded on sentiments and feelings dwelling in the human agent, but which failed to include the agent's rationality as part of his expressiveness. As a critic of Romantic thought, Hegel claims that for an agent's fulfilment he has to have a rational element in his expressiveness, has to give a certain rational shape and form to this expressive power, and to define what this power is. This is the only way to come to know himself, and correspondingly, to discover his identity. Later, Herder's theory of expressivism and Hegel's opposition to Romanticism inspired Taylor to develop his idea of the politics of recognition, and reject subjectivism, self-fulfilment, liberalism, and other modern philosophies focused exclusively on the fulfilment of the individual.

In short, Hegel's opposition to the Enlightenment and Romanticism finds its development in Taylor's description of human agency living in modernity. In contrast to Hegel, who finally posits *Geist* as the binding power of the whole, Taylor does not look

to anything outside the human agent, but focuses on the human agent and his search for fulfilment and freedom. In the last division of this chapter, we saw how Taylor emphasizes the agent's desire to be authentic, original, himself, and how important this agent's desires are for our interpretation of modernity. At this point, Taylor touches on something that is suggested in Herder's and Hegel's writings, but not explicitly developed. Taylor interprets the agent's desire to be authentic as an expression of disquiet and restlessness. Such disquiet is nothing new in modernity: the ancient and medieval agent was probably as restless as the modern agent is. The levels of intensity of this disquiet can differ in different historical periods.

Taylor understands modern disquiet as something common and essential to human nature. The agent's disquiet fuels his search and drives him to find answers to his questions. The controversy starts at the point where a given interpretation becomes all-inclusive or totalitarian, claiming to give us the final solution. This is the point of Taylor's philosophical intervention: let us check and critically examine all presuppositions and assertions. Doing this will save us from one-sided or narrow-minded views of our nature, on the one hand, and on the other direct us to wider unexplored horizons of human existence.

In the light of this, we can understand Taylor's hesitation to introduce a new system of thought similar to what Hegel did. Nonetheless, one can argue that Taylor tries to introduce or re-establish a new cosmology or at least a new vision of an order in which everything would find its place. His politics of recognition can be easily seen as an initial step in this direction. So far, we have been tracing Taylor's philosophical writings from the point of view of his effort to show us those areas of modernity and human existence

on which we need to reflect more and go into more deeply. Whether this investigation will lead us to a new order or a new cosmology, we do not yet know. In any case, it will lead us toward a more complete picture of ourselves, society and the reality we are part of. There are many aspects of human existence that the modern agent fails to take seriously into his consideration. These aspects have to be scrutinized, if he wants to explore all the possible solutions to his unease.

Whether or not the modern agent will become authentic and free is in Taylor's writings a moral and spiritual question that goes beyond an epistemological, scientific, or naturalist view of the human agency. It is a moral question because it continuously challenges the human agent about what is the best and the highest goal for his life, self-fulfilment and self-realization. It is a moral question because it demands the agent's opening himself to alternative possibilities. At the same time, it is a spiritual question because it challenges the human agent to go beyond any kind of "external" reality given to his disposal, and leave behind the familiar, limited way of thinking that gives rise to his disquiet. The external reality in this case is not only material reality, or something opposed to the spiritual reality; by "external" reality we mean any kind of reality to which the agent looks for a solution (material reality, psychological realities, ideologies) but which at the same time keeps him blocked from reaching something greater.

That freedom and human reason are the pre-eminent qualities of our nature as human beings is self-evident. Hence Hegel and Taylor, like many other philosophers, treat the question of man's freedom as the most challenging and difficult one. It goes without saying that the modern agent wants to be free. But it is not as easy to say what will bring us to attain the freedom we seek. In my interpretation of Taylor, I have shown

that he challenges the modern agent to be open to all possible horizons in which he can search out answers. The religious and spiritual dimensions of the agent's existence have to be part of the search; otherwise, we exclude a priori some options in which the answer might be found. At this point, then, we need to turn to Taylor's reflections on the spiritual and religious aspects of human existence.

Because these dimensions of human existence have been kept in the background so far, and mentioned only rarely, does it mean that Taylor considers them irrelevant or insignificant? Not at all; but it is true that the spiritual and religious elements only gradually gain a place in Taylor's philosophical endeavors. Looking at his recent publications over the last twenty years, we can see his increasing interest in religious and spiritual matters. One can say that his general reflections on modernity have matured to the point where spiritual and religious realities take a more prominent place.

I state that Taylor's shift to these areas is based on his conviction that the modern agent will remain closed within the narrow-minded interpretation of human existence as long as he fails to take seriously the religious and spiritual components of human existence. This does not mean that Taylor finds that modernity is completely atheistic or a-religious. Rather he claims that our explanation of human existence will remain incomplete until it includes as well the transcendence. In the following chapter, we will see how Taylor moves toward this position.

The question remains as to the nature of this spiritual and religious reality, and an agent's relation to this reality. As we already know, Taylor does not consider modernity or the modern human agency as being opposed to spirituality and religious issues, or completely lacking in any kind of transcendence. Modernity is deeply permeated with

spirituality, which Taylor accentuates again and again in his writing. Nonetheless, Taylor states that modern spirituality has to be thoroughly examined as well. Only in this way will we find how it may increase and reinforce in us the drive to reach our highest potential.

In summary, in order to find a more sophisticated answer to Hegel's concern from the point of view of modernity, the modern agent has to explore and test his relation to transcendent reality as well.

Chapter Four: The Agent's Fulfillment and Life in Freedom Requires Opening of the Horizons of Modernity

In the previous chapter we saw how Taylor maintains that certain aspects of modernity are treated inadequately and insufficiently, many times obstructing the agent's creativity of thought. So, modernity requires from us that we think differently and apply an approach that will bring us closer to a more satisfying answer to our concerns. This approach should give us an answer to our initial question borrowed from Hegel about how to attain freedom and expressive fullness. A purely rational or a rigidly scientific approach can be misleading because it narrows the spectrum of our perception. Beside the reality which we can expose in a scientific and purely rational manner, there is a reality that is different and does not lend itself to treatment by scientific instruments. For example, in the third chapter we spoke about the requirements for a peaceful coexistence with others who do not share our view of reality. Then we described the modern quest for authenticity. In both cases, Taylor challenges us to go beyond the scientific mindset, especially when based on the principles of the natural sciences, because it cannot help us to grasp properly the dimensions of other people's lives or an agent's deepest desires. In order to grasp them, we need to be open to something different. In this chapter, we will see how Taylor questions some narrow-minded positions in modernity, which hinder us from grasping something greater. Before we continue, we presuppose with Taylor that such diversity exists and that we are willing to accept its existence.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ At the occasion of receiving the Templeton award in 2007, Taylor talked about the necessity of spiritual rediscovery. There is a kind of forgetfulness in modernity about the very central questions, such as the meaning of life, what is a higher or a lower mode of life, what is really worth to live, what drives us to be on the side of good, what is the basis of the dignity that I am trying to define for myself and other similar deep questions that are central to the modern world. In a search for these answers, Taylor tries to

In addition, we will see how Taylor delineates modernity in a more accurate way, exposing those areas which seem to be inadequately described, and accentuating those principles which appear to be often intentionally put aside as irrelevant, such as the spiritual and religious dimensions of human nature. We will look at modernity as a synonym for a variety of narratives (i.e., narratives about the immanence of modernity, closed world structures, the scientific interpretation of the world, secularization, the death of God in modernity, exclusive humanism, and other such narratives). What is common to these narratives is the fact that they entail a limited and rigid anthropological understanding of human nature. For example, the importance of religious fact and interpretation, and their inspirational power that have shaped and modified human practices for ages, is in modernity often disparaged, misunderstood, or completely overlooked. For this reason, Taylor claims that modernity, especially modern anthropology, calls for a serious review.

Even though the time of grand narratives and cosmological views seems to be now over in modernity, Taylor maintains on different occasions that we need to retell ourselves our past, if we want to discover what is deep and important in us, to reconstruct our identity and to find a new way to the sought for fulfillment. The way we perceive ourselves in the present time depends on the coordinates of our history. Taylor's work *Sources of the Self* (1989) provides a masterly interpretation of the making of the modern identity through its past. In *A Secular Age* (2007), Taylor continues the same historical descriptive approach. The need for retelling our past and for reconstructing our identity is an urgent one because there are so many disintegrating forces in modernity that are

break down the barriers between our contemporary culture of science and disciplined academic study on the one hand, and the domain of spirit on the other (Statement at The Templeton Prize News Conference 2007b, 9).

leading us into atomistic, partial, fragmentary, prevalently immanent and sometimes meaningless perceptions of reality, away from a vision of reality as a unity.

Through analyzing many narratives about modernity, Taylor discovers anew the missing aspects of our human nature, reevaluates the modern search for meaning and fullness of life, emphasizes the importance of religion, spirituality, authenticity, freedom, equality and differences in our belief systems, and of many other concepts and principles that are shaping modernity. Not with hesitation, but with all due respect for modernity, Taylor attempts to find new ways out of the immanence and narrowness of modern thinking. At the same time, he challenges modernity in its struggle whether or not to be open to belief in a transcendent realm.

When Taylor reflects about certain prevalent modern narratives and their historical background, he slowly creates a new narrative, i.e. his own narrative. This original narrative has a double function; and both functions are intertwined. The first function is practical: the new narrative leads us towards enrichment of our lives on the individual as well as on the community level. The second function is more theoretical: the new narrative should offer us a new synthesis of the disintegrating forces of modernity, and at the same time give a deeper meaning and more complete perception and understanding of who we are.

The stories and narratives that Taylor critically analyzes, he calls “the subtraction stories,” saying:

Concisely put, I mean by this stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves for certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge (2007, 22).

Subtraction stories are narratives based on disenchantment, immanent frameworks, closed world structures, exclusive humanism, scientific interpretation of the world, secularization, including the ones that proclaim the death of God, and other similar narratives which in their narration subtract or lose something important in our understanding. In Taylor's view, these stories seem to exhaust their interpretational force. They can no longer inspire modern man to seek out new commitments, and at the same time they offer an impoverished picture of human nature settled in the horizon of modernity.

Nonetheless, Taylor does not look at the rise of modernity with all its varied shades just as a story of loss and subtraction. A condemnation of the period between 1500 and our time would again be a misreading of what is deep in our nature and calling to be enlightened. Therefore, Taylor's analysis of the subtraction stories is much more than a critique of secularity as one of modernity's main features. Through the analysis of modernity and secularity, Taylor brings to light the "underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside" (2007, 22). Even though these features are essential elements of our human nature, they are easily overlooked by many thinkers in modernity. In continuation we will see that some of these features are the agent's desire to be fulfilled, to be able to freely express himself, and be authentic, and to find meaning, to have a harmonious life.

Taylor adopts for this project sociological, anthropological, phenomenological, and theological points of view. He considers the last 500 years of our Western history as a period in which a major shift happens, the shift in the understanding of what Taylor calls "fullness," from a position in which it was almost impossible not to believe in God

when our highest spiritual and moral aspirations pointed us inescapably to God, to a position today where not to believe in God becomes for many people not only easy but even an inevitable option (2007, 25-26). This shift represents in Taylor's book *A Secular Age* the main enigmatic question, to which he tries to find an answer. What caused this shift? Why are the conditions of belief today so different from what they were in the 16th century? What is the fuelling power behind the modern subtraction stories? How have these subtraction stories conveyed the human search for meaning since 1500? If the modern agent does not believe in God any longer, what does he believe in and put his hope in? What is his goal in life? How can a religious belief help him on the way to greater freedom and personal fulfilment? We will propose an answer to these and similar questions at the end of this chapter.

We start with Taylor's analysis of certain narratives that are profoundly shaping modernity. Such an analysis is necessary because it provides us the historical background for an adequate understanding of our present situation. In the second subchapter, we take a closer look at Taylor's interpretation of some of the modern phenomena such as secularization, secularity, and human flourishing. Finally, in the last subchapter, we talk about Taylor's understanding of belief as the potential path towards a greater freedom and fulfilment. I hope that an accurate reading of these topics will bring us closer to Taylor's answer to Hegel's concern to unite radical freedom and expressive fullness, i.e. the question with which we started this dissertation.

4.1 Some Narratives that are (Dis)-Integrating Modernity

In the second chapter of this dissertation we discussed Taylor's descriptive method of investigation and interpretation. Treating the narratives that have influenced and shaped modernity, Taylor applies the same approach. He compares, contrasts, and finally exposes the differences between the conditions of belief in 1500 and in 2000. Our history as such is too complex and intriguing to be embraced in a simple narrative or explained from a singular point of view. Taylor is aware of that; he does not pretend to offer us a full historical account, or to use a black/white description of each period. Through his descriptive method he wants to expose the struggle of the human agent to properly express and coherently justify his position as a believer. Taylor claims in his introduction to *A Secular Age* (2007, 10-15) that the believer living in 1500 struggled to properly express his faith; in an analogous way, in 2000, not only the believer but the unbeliever struggles to express and justify coherently his faith or lack of faith. Their struggle as such remains similar, but the conditions of their beliefs have been changed. This is what Taylor wants to expose.

Taylor in his exploration of modernity, as well as in his reconstruction of the historical background of modernity, does not follow a strict chronological order. His exposition is primarily a description of our spiritual development in the last 500 years, including historical facts, as well as art, literature, human and natural sciences, philosophy, and other factors shaping the last 500 years of our history. His description and interpretation is based on the following principle: if we want to grasp our present spiritual predicament, i.e. the way we moderns understand and reflect upon ourselves, we

need to understand the previous conditions which we overcame. Such a description is much more than an option; it is something inescapably necessary. In Taylor's words:

...our sense of where we are is crucially defined in part by a story of how we got there. [...] Our past is sedimented in our present, and we are doomed to misidentify ourselves, as long as we can't do justice to where we come from (2007, 29).

Once we know our historical background and illuminating the contrasts between our past and present, we will hopefully have a larger and more adequate picture of our modernity. We should be for example able to understand better the meaning of subtraction stories, or the significance of references to God in a secular age, or different accounts of the negation of God. Retelling our history is mandatory, so that we can understand what has been lost and when the negation of God has become so overwhelming in our secular age.⁵⁸

Keeping in mind Taylor's intention and way of proceeding, I would like to show in this subchapter how Taylor exposes and interprets the human agent's search for fulfillment, as well as his unease and spiritual dissatisfaction from the 16th century up to the present time. In Taylor's reading, subtraction stories are the modes through which modern man tries to appease his concerns and unease. The main subtraction stories are: disenchantment, deism, exclusive humanism, immanent counter-Enlightenment, stories based on immanent frame and closed world-structures. All of them are filled with an on-going struggle to define anew what is important and meaningful in our life. All of them

⁵⁸ "... our understanding of ourselves as secular is defined by the (often terribly vague) historical sense that we have come to be that way through overcoming and rising out of earlier modes of belief. That is why God is still a reference point for even the most untroubled unbelievers, because he helps define the temptation you have to overcome and set aside to rise to the heights of rationality on which they dwell" (2007, 268).

together bring us to the achievements of where we are in the present time. Through the analysis of these stories we can be able to grasp Taylor's point that with modernity something other than God would become the necessary objective pole of moral or spiritual aspirations, of "fullness" (2007, 26).

My claim is that the above-mentioned subtraction stories represent in Taylor's reflection a variety of attempts to create frameworks through which the pre-modern as well as the modern agent tries to fully express himself and live in freedom, liberated from restrictive principles or outdated past views.

Let us take a closer look at different forms of subtraction stories: disenchantment, deism, exclusive humanism, immanent counter-Enlightenment and anti-humanism, and immanent frame. For Taylor, they condition and limit the present search for a deeper understanding of human identity. After exposition of each one of them, we examine Taylor's explanation of what is lacking in that particular form of the subtraction story.

4.1.1 Disenchantment and the Move from a Naïve to a Reflective Understanding of the World

The term *disenchantment* is not original in Taylor's writing; he adopts it from Max Weber, who uses it in his "Essays in Sociology," in order to delineate the passage from the ancient cosmological traditions, full of magical ways of describing Nature, to the mechanistic vision that has dominated science since Galileo and Newton up to our time. Taylor uses the same term, but gives it a different meaning: "I am going to use its antonym to describe a crucial feature of the pre-modern condition. The enchanted world

in this sense is the world of spirits, demons, and moral forces which our ancestors lived in” (2007, 26).

Taylor explains the contrast between the enchanted and disenchanted world (2007, 29-42). In the enchanted world everything had a divine purpose; everything was included in a pre-established order seen as an act of God, who was implicated in the very existence of society (i.e., various associations, parishes, boroughs, guilds, polis, kingdoms, and church). The existence of God was the guarantee that good would triumph, at least that the plentiful forces of darkness would be kept at bay. Human spiritual and moral aspirations pointed inescapably to God. Without God they would make no sense. The “fullness” of life was guaranteed in God. The presence of the saints and the importance of relics embodied people’s faith. Certain objects, like blessed objects, candles, particular rituals, were charged and incorporated with a special power and meaning.

Believers perceived the existence not only of God but also of good and bad spirits, demons. Believers felt themselves subject to the benevolent or malevolent powers of these spirits. The line between humans and impersonal forces of nature was not at all clearly drawn. Such a world was the place where people found responses to their concerns about the meaning of life. Meaning as such existed there in the enchanted world, independently of humans and prior to their contact with it. People came in contact with this meaning by communication, imposition, or by bringing themselves into its force.

Even the perception of time was split into two: the sacred and the not-sacred, i.e. secular time. There were sacred periods of intense dedication to rituals, celebrations,

prayers, and the periods of ordinary time. The sacred moments regulated perception of the time-horizon.

In contrast to this world, Taylor places the disenchanted world, in which all enchantment disappears. Something other than God becomes the necessary objective pole of moral and spiritual aspiration and of human “fullness.” This is the world where the human mind with its thoughts, feelings, spiritual élan, occupies the central space. Talking about thoughts in this case, Taylor refers to human perceptions and beliefs or propositions about the world and ourselves. By thoughts, he means also our responses to enigmatic questions, the significance, importance, and meaning we find in things. Taylor summarizes all these categories with the generic term “the meaning of life” (2007, 31).

In the disenchanted world we primarily look for meaning in the human mind. Our concerns are limited to the human agent and his potentialities, and do not include his relationship to anything outside. The meaning resides “within” the human, in the sense that things carry the meaning that they do in the way that they awaken a certain response in us. In our human nature, which includes our feelings, desires, and aversions, we are capable of responding, i.e. explaining the meanings of things. These responses come from within and depend on how we have been programmed and “wired.” Correspondingly, the line between personal agency and impersonal force is clearly drawn, which was not the case in the enchanted world.

All these together build in Taylor’s reflection a “mind-centered view,” i.e. a view that is opposite to the view in the enchanted world, where the focus was not the human mind, but on something else outside of the human mind. From the mind-centered view, Taylor deduces not only disenchantment, but objectification of the world as well. To

objectify a certain domain in this case means to deprive it of normative force for us, or at least to bracket the meanings it has for us in our lives. Once this domain or the world in general is objectified, we can take a neutral stance toward it (2007, 283).

The passage from the enchanted to the disenchanted world, Taylor describes as follows:

We have moved from an era in which religious life was more “embodied”, where the presence of the sacred could be enacted in ritual, or seen, felt, touched, walked towards (in pilgrimage); into one which is more “in the mind,” where the link with God passes more through our endorsing contested interpretations – for instance, of our political identity as religiously defined, or of God as the authority and moral source underpinning our ethical life (2007, 554).

The reason for the shift from the enchanted to disenchanted world goes, in Taylor’s reflection, beyond the changes involved in the passage from the Middle Ages to modernity, such as the scientific revolution, the rise of Humanism, the Renaissance. Many subtraction stories claim that the rise of the sciences and scientific explanations of Nature and society deprived religion of its mythical and magical charge, which consequently lost its power. Such a deprivation leads to the fading of God’s presence in the natural world and social structures, so powerfully present in the enchanted world. In Taylor’s view, this is however only partially true. None of the listed factors taken singularly was strong enough to provoke such a marked change. Each one of them and all together express the revolutionary change in the last 500 years, but none of them sufficiently explains this change.

Thus Taylor denies any kind of simple explanation and justification for the present moment. The “disenchantment” process is more complex than a simple passage from enchantment to disenchantment. It is true that during the process of disenchantment,

some new doctrines, different points of view and approaches were gradually developing, with which orthodox writers and authorities of that time had to deal; but at the moment of their appearance they were not yet strong and influential enough to be taken as available alternatives, i.e. strong enough to make sense to people. The process from enchantment to disenchantment is far from being a simple process; Taylor talks about a process full of struggle, through which people sought new satisfactory answers. In this process, there are two movements which fueled the process: a newly emerging perception of the self and a profound dissatisfaction with the present order.

Newly emerging perception of the self: The sense of the self and of the place of the self in the cosmos had been gradually changing its shape. From the 16th century on, the perception of the self had been transformed from the self who is open, porous and vulnerable, to a perception which Taylor calls “buffered” (2007, 27). The porous self finds its home in the enchanted world, where it is exposed to cosmic forces which influence and shape his life. The self is embedded in larger frames of the cosmos; therefore, it becomes porous, vulnerable, fuzzy, capable of being penetrated by different sources, dependent on external structures. The complete opposite to the porous self is the buffered self, residing in a disenchanted world. This self is buffered in a sense that things do not need to “get to him,” Taylor explains (2007, 37-39). For the buffered self it seems to be axiomatic that all thought, feeling and purpose, all the features that we normally ascribe to agents, must be residing in minds, which are distinct from the “outer” world. As buffered, he is able to establish a distance from the embedding cosmos and to become disengaged from everything outside his mind. He perceives himself as invulnerable to external sources, self-controlling, fearless, master of the meanings of things, able to

create his own autonomous order, and willing to shape both the natural and the social world.

The buffered self is essentially the self which is aware of the possibility of disengagement. And disengagement is frequently carried out in relation to one's whole surroundings, natural and social (2007, 42).

This possibility of disengagement includes also the ability to separate oneself from certain social practices, collective rites, devotions, traditions, social bonds. The buffered self gives preference to individual desires over social structures. Such an act in the enchanted world would mean self-ruin, because social equilibrium and established order identified the individual and prevailed over the individual desires.

The Inner/Outer distinction and separation between mind and world reinforce the process of interiorization in the buffered self.⁵⁹ Inner thoughts and feelings become the new realm of exploration, creating a new and richer vocabulary. Self-exploration, self-examination, -- seen in the development of the modern novel and the rise of Romanticism -- and later on the ethics of authenticity, provide different paths for expressing the inner depths. Intimacy, privacy, new ways of experiencing the inwardness, and the search for individuality will soon become key areas of the life of the buffered self, calling for a new moral order.

Profound dissatisfaction with the established order:⁶⁰ This is the second movement that fueled the change from enchantment to disenchantment (2007, 61-62).

⁵⁹ See the first part of the third chapter of this dissertation, where we talked about the scientific interpretation of the world, based on assuming the priority of epistemology.

⁶⁰ "The drive to a new form of religious life, more personal, committed, devoted; more christocentric; one which will largely replace the older forms which centred on collective ritual; the drive moreover, to wreak this change for everyone, not just certain religious élites; all this not only powers disenchantment (hence the buffer), and new discipline of self-control, but also ends up making older holistic understandings of society less and less believable, even in the end nigh incomprehensible" (2007, 541).

Taylor describes the whole process as a “Reform.” The “Reform” has to be distinguished from different attempts or “reforms” of certain dedicated people to spread new devotional practices, new forms of preaching and encouragement. By “Reform” Taylor means a profound dissatisfaction with the hierarchical equilibrium between lay life and the renunciative vocations:

The Reformation as Reform is central to the story I want to tell – that of the abolition of the enchanted cosmos, and the eventual creation of a humanist alternative to faith. The first consequence seems evident enough: the Reformation is known as an engine of disenchantment. The second is less obvious, and more direct. It passes through the attempts to re-order a whole society which emerges in the radical, Calvinist wing of Protestantism (2007, 77).

In medieval Christendom, believers were pointed toward self-transcendence, something beyond ordinary human flourishing that included a transformation of their life. The established social order was grounded cosmically, in which everyone had to take up his allotted place. The established institutions and practices allowed everyone a certain degree of human flourishing. When individuals and groups perceived themselves to be in a hierarchical structure where every element found its place in complementarity to the whole structure, the tension resolved into equilibrium and harmony (e.g. the clergy pray for and fulfill priestly and pastoral function for the laity, which in turn support the clergy).

When individuals and groups no longer felt a need to be incorporated into such structures, they experienced a tension between their personal and structural goals. Dissatisfaction with the new situation pushed them to search for different ways to fill the gap between the required perfection and self-fulfillment on the one side and on the other side, their social reality. There were different attempts at filling this gap: in new religious

movements, different religious practices and devotions. On the ecclesial level, we can track various attempts to ameliorate the situation of tension. The need for reformation took a different pace between intellectuals and élites on the one side, and on the other side, the majority of the common people who looked for a new equilibrium.

Once we pass from the porous self to the buffered self in the 17th and 18th centuries, the search for a new order became even more urgent. The buffered and disciplined self perceives himself as an individual in a society with structure, and not as a part of a larger structure. Society is made by individuals and for individuals. The main reason why individuals stay together is not the cosmological one, but a certain good that is resulting from human beings as such. There are different ways of how to understand and achieve this good. Locke claimed that individuals can achieve this good as individuals, while others (Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx) maintained that this good is common and shared, and can be reached only by the way of being common and shared. In short, we are now dealing with a completely different situation, which Taylor calls the Modern Moral Order (2007, 540).

Taylor's description of the process of the disenchanting of the world does not rigidly follow the theological or historical points of view, and Taylor is aware of that. He says explicitly that he wants to propose to us a new theory, and not to critically investigate different philosophical explanations about the human "mind" and its relation to the "body," or Cartesian dualism, or identity theory, or anything similar that arose in the process of disenchanting. By describing the world as being enchanted and then the move from enchantment to disenchantment, Taylor wants to capture the level of understanding prior to philosophical puzzlement (2007, 30). By this Taylor means the

modern understanding of the mind which opens itself to Cartesian theories in a way that prior “enchanted” understanding did not. The modern understanding makes something like the “mind-body” relationship conceivable, in a way inescapable, whereas to the earlier understanding this relationship made no sense.

In other words, Taylor intends to explain the shift which occurred in the move from enchantment to disenchantment (2007, 13-14). To better explain this move, he introduces first the “naïve” understanding of reality, by which he means an unproblematic acceptance of reality, or of the existence of God and spiritual creatures. In contrast to this unproblematic acceptance of reality, Taylor describes a new understanding that sees the previous understanding as inconceivable and naïve. It does not mean that the existence of God and spirits is now negated; it means that their existence is open to doubt, argumentation, and mediating explanations, which was not the case in the previous understanding. So we have a move from where the existence of God is unproblematic, to a sense that either to affirm or to deny this reality means to enter into a disputed terrain. Taylor calls this new understanding the “reflective” understanding, i.e., an understanding that is open to the questions which had been foreclosed in the “naïve” understanding of the world.

The naïve understanding of the world is not limited only to the 16th century; it might find its place in the 21st century also, or in any other time when people take the construal they live in, without being aware of it, or without formulating it as a construal, but simply accepting it as reality. Taylor wants us to be aware of these forms of the “naïve” understanding and of the construal we live in. Such awareness is the

presupposition for our understanding the change in the conditions of belief from the 16th to the 21st century.

Having the framework of yesterday and today, and of “naïve” and “reflective” understanding, Taylor states that certain distinctions will come to light; for example, the distinctions between the immanent and the transcendent, and the natural and the supernatural. Everyone in modernity understands these pairs, both those who affirm and those who deny the second term of each pair. Even believers in the 16th century understood them very well. However, in the 16th century, it was almost impossible not to believe in God, denying God was not an option, and atheism was inconceivable. In contrast, believing in God becomes in modernity one possible option among many others, full of doubts, and requiring solid argumentation. Human fulfilment in modernity can find its place elsewhere, not necessarily in the realm of transcendence and the supernatural.

As stated previously, Taylor’s explanation of disenchantment and of the move from the naïve to reflective understanding does not offer a complete picture of modernity. However, it helps us to better understand certain features of modernity. Once aware of the construal in which we live, of the power of the naïve understanding, and the meaning of the disenchanted world, Taylor hopes to open modernity to new horizons of meaning.

4.1.2 Deism

Let me propose “deism” as the second subtraction story which in Taylor’s reflection generally explains why in 2000 it is so difficult to believe in God, and why an exclusive humanism became a live option for large numbers of people. At this point, I

will only describe exclusive humanism as a type of humanism that accepts no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing. Later on, we will devote a whole subdivision to the meaning of exclusive humanism.

With the term “deism” Taylor refers to a historical process in which the notion of the world as designed by God but left to human management becomes an impersonal order with a natural religion in it.

The crucial feature here is a change in the understanding of God, and his relation to the world. That is, there is a drift away from orthodox Christian conceptions of God as an agent interacting with humans and intervening in human history; and towards God as architect of a universe operating by unchanging laws, which humans have to conform to or suffer the consequences (2007, 270).

As in the case of disenchantment, even deism is a process that includes a variety of different forms. Their common denominator is the rejection of God as a personal agent intervening in human history. Understanding of this change is a crucial factor for an adequate understanding of modernity first and then of secularization. Taylor outlines his explanation by referring to a number of authors and books, which sustains his theory.⁶¹ For our purpose, there is no need to go into a detailed explanation of this change; for us it is enough to reconstruct the main lines of Taylor’s thesis.

To perceive God as a creator of the world is basic in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. A crucial feature of the whole creation is order, which is created by God, and by which every creature is oriented to its good. As for human beings, it is clear that God created us and endowed us with reason and benevolence, through which we can carry out

⁶¹ In his book *A Secular Age*, Part II: “The Turning Point”, and Part III: “The Nova Effect,” Taylor offers an extended explanation of the move away from God as a personal agency intervening in human history.

God's plan. Our recognition of God and our dependence on him become the conditions for our human flourishing.

In the 17th and 18th centuries we track a phenomenon that Taylor calls the anthropocentric shift (2007, 222-224). In short, this shift is an attempt to express the Christian life in terms of a code of action in the saeculum, i.e. in this world, without explicit reference to God as our creator and judge. This code opens the possibility of devising new codes whose main aim is to encompass the basic goods of life in the saeculum: life, prosperity, peace, and mutual benefit. In other words, the secular goods become the final goal of the whole code.

Taylor explains this anthropocentric shift as taking place in four steps (2007, 222-225). First, people came to the idea that the realization of God's plan is equal to the achievement of humans' own good, happiness, wellbeing, flourishing. Following this vision, the religious and social goals merge into one, and the transcendental dimension of religion becomes less central.⁶² It is the first time that a secondary consideration replaces the centering of everything on God.

The second shift presents the eclipse of grace. Once humans contemplate with reason and discipline the order of God's designs in nature, grace seems less essential. To experience moral fullness becomes possible without any reference to God and simply within the range of purely intra-human powers.⁶³ Nonetheless, God still keeps his role as

⁶² "...the central moral concern becomes the imposition of a disciplined order on personal and social life, ensuring high standards of self-control and good behaviour in the individual, and peace and prosperity in society. [] The highest goals of human beings seem, even in the sphere of religion, to aim at purely human goods" (2007, 260-261).

⁶³ "... the need for God's aid in order to achieve the highest moral / spiritual goals ceases to be something obvious, undeniable, a matter of felt experience for most. People come to sense themselves as actuated by purely human motives, like a sense of impartial benevolence, or purely human sympathy, in their action to

creator and judge at the end of the time, even though the role of Hell is increasingly less evident.

From here, Taylor derives the third shift, in which the sense of mystery fades. If reason can read the design of human nature, then it follows that there is no place for further mystery. What is to be understood is defined in relation to purely human goals, i.e. the well-being of humans. The real challenge becomes the organization of human life in view of human fulfillment and happiness. In this sense, human self-interest and feelings of benevolence come to slowly replace God and evil. Different forms of mystery lose their place in the human heart. Everything which takes us out of the path of ordinary human enjoyments and productive activities seems to be a threat to the good life.

The fourth and final shift takes place when the idea that God was planning a transformation of human beings becomes irrelevant. God still remains there as a Creator, to whom we owe gratitude beyond all measure for his providential plan. His role now is to empower us in our search for a new harmonious order, which is basically economic-centered. However, God becomes indifferent to the direction of the world as such.

These four shifts provide us some insights for our understanding of deism; nonetheless, these shifts do not sufficiently explain the anthropocentric shift we faced in the 17th and 18th centuries, as Taylor points out. These four steps can be tracked in various ways among the leading strata of many European countries that were at a different pace embracing various forums of social life, and were increasingly less bound

further the ordering project; while at the same time they feel that there is nothing higher or more important than this project" (2007, 261).

by the normative limits of religion and church authority.⁶⁴ The pioneers of these shifts were exceptional individuals who introduced new ways of looking at human nature and social structures. The majority had been slowly either accepting or rejecting the new reforms of manners and thinking. At the same time, the church and other élites insistently had been attempting to re-establish the previous order with contra-reforms, including new rules, re-organization, and renewed dedication. To have a complete historical framework, Taylor states, we have to take these aspects into our account as well.

Nonetheless, the power and radiance of the anthropocentric shift in itself fascinated many intellectuals. Therefore Taylor concludes that it was not too difficult to imagine that someone who felt to be taken into this anthropocentric shift could quite easily feel that Christianity became the enemy.

Thus, by a variety of routes, one could end up rejecting Christianity, because in calling for something more than human flourishing, it was the implacable enemy of the human good; and at the same time a denial of the dignity of the self-sufficient buffered identity (2007, 264).

Despite this hostility toward Christianity, Taylor sees something very important here: the rise of the new idea of moral order, which was born together with the anthropocentric shift. People felt tired of difficult theological explanations dealing with grace, free will, and predestination. They looked for a new way to live a holy life, with a simpler and less theologically elaborated faith to guide them towards holy living. This

⁶⁴ One of Taylor's theses how certain reforms take place is the following. New ideas start first among the intellectuals, in small circles, with no influential or reforming power. Only slowly the circle of people akin with the new idea becomes larger and more influential. From here, new ideas become familiar to average people, who will adopt this idea into their way of thinking and acting. This process might take the timeframe of one or more generations, sometimes even centuries, depending on social, political, economical, and religious factors. For this reason Taylor talks about different speeds and gaps that take place among different social groups.

might be seen as a call to center more explicitly on morality and correct conduct, in which religion is narrowed to morality, as Taylor explains (2007, 225).

The idea that God relates to humans through an impersonal order and as the indwelling spirit of this order, became very attractive. It created a new cosmological understanding, in which the universe itself became indifferent, unresponsive, with a God who, far from being a personal agent, is indifferent towards humans. The rise of the natural sciences reinforced this cosmological understanding and led toward the disenchantment of the world, rapidly changing people's devotional life and their practice of religion.

However, the rise of the sciences cannot be the main factor for the shift to deism, as some interpreters claim to be the case. As an example, Taylor often critically refers to Edward Gibbon⁶⁵ and his historical narrative about the fall of the Roman Empire (2007, 240-242; 263-264; 272-273). In Gibbon's Enlightened narrative, as Taylor understands it, in the ancient world the leading élites who were unbelieving, were sophisticated enough to conform to various modes of the people's worship but they preferred an attitude of politeness, and refinement, keeping a cool and ironic distance from religious matters. In this way they displayed an apparent superiority and sophistication, which put them above the practices of the non-élites. Gibbon's conviction was that after the centuries of Christendom, now in the time of Enlightenment one should return to the same attitude of

⁶⁵ Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) was an Enlightenment historian and the author of the six volumes of the very influential book *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published in 1776- 1789). His theory was that citizens of the Roman Empire became weak, lost their civic virtues, unwilling to live a tougher military lifestyle. In addition, Christianity created a belief that a better life existed after death, and a belief in pacifism. For these reasons, barbarians destroyed the whole Empire. The Medieval period is in Gibbon's eyes the time where barbarism, superstition, and religion triumphed. It was not until the age of reason and rational thought (Enlightenment), Gibbon believed that human history could resume its progress.

sophistication as the ancient élites. Social institutions and social laws should be viewed in polite society and in practice, as they were in ancient Rome by the unbelieving élites. The questions of truth or falsehood of religious matters, and of people's beliefs, life, their struggles and difficult living conditions are irrelevant in Gibbon's narrative. There should be no place for any reference to God as inspiration, source of strength, or motivation for human action. Religious doctrines have no status; they should be disregarded and considered irrelevant for the purpose of scientific explanation.

Gibbon's enlightened narrative illustrates in Taylor's reflection why the idea of an impersonal order became so attractive. To Gibbon's narrow but very appealing picture of human reality, Taylor adds his concept of the buffered self, already discussed, but here with some additional details. The buffered self feels more confident in his own order-creating powers, less scrupulous about religious questions and mysteries, more inclined to the material and sensuous life. He adopts new social manners, which are more refined and more distanced from religious matters, especially those connected to religious enthusiasts. The buffered self likes to use his instrumental reason, with which he prefers to view the whole, rather than perceiving himself as a small part of the great cosmological vision. His identity is based on

...a sense of power, of capacity, in being able to order our world and ourselves. To the extent that this power was connected with reason and science, a sense of having made great gains in knowledge and understanding (2007, 300).

Taylor continues that in the 18th century we have a new culture wherein the buffered self occupies its center. The buffered self feels himself free, invulnerable in front of the world of spirits and forces of the disenchanted world. The universe becomes for him an order of mutual benefit, in which different interests have to merge together

into a greater harmony. He perceives his life as being freed and independent of spiritual demands, of religious codes, organizations, and disciplines, no longer a part of a sacramental way of life, but simply a follower of his own deepest inspirations.

Taylor sees in the buffered self's relationship to religion two opposite changes taking place. First, the buffered self's religious outlook is moving away from Transcendence, narrowing down to the potentials in the rational agent, his instrumental reason and industrious work, that which will bring him to a new flourishing, as is also God's wish.⁶⁶ Second, simultaneously with the desire of flourishing the rational agent also feels pride and a sense of his own worth. The agent is aware of his achievements, of his having reached invulnerability and surpassed the state of captivity in an enchanted world.

The sense of invulnerability and distance from the unreason of the past finds expression in the cool self-possession, the "unflappable" tone in which the wild and disturbing antics of monks and bishops in Byzantium are recounted. Invulnerability is enacted in the style, in which the violent, extreme, God-haunted acts of our forebears are held at a fastidious distance through the unperturbable voice of a dry, ironic wit. This tone tells us: We no longer belong to this world; we have transcended it (2007, 301).

Taylor claims that despite these two changes and the growing desire to replace religion with a rational account, the main reason for the anthropocentric shift still remains the religious component (2007, 266-267). The anthropocentric shift in the 17th and 18th century follows the track of the religious Reform started in the 11th century. The challenge of that time was the question of how to help the mass of laity to more fully

⁶⁶ Taylor mentions immediately that the same buffered self soon comes to the limits and contradictions of his claims. From the one side, the buffered self claims that God's wish is that we flourish, and we flourish by judicious use of industry and instrumental reason; from the other side, the same buffered self does not know what to do with a Saint Francis, who called on his followers to dedicate themselves to a life of poverty (2007, 230).

shape their life as Christians. Personal devotion and ascetic disciplines, once the domain only of monks, were supposed to become the common practice of everyone. Consequently, the distinction between the spiritual vocation of monks and the ordinary life had been increasingly losing its relevance. The peak of this medieval Reform represents the Protestant Reform, claiming that the Christian life requires a certain prescribed manner of living in the “world.” For that it needs to be liberated from the weight of gratuitous asceticism. The only valid Christian vocations became those of ordinary life in which the human body with all its drives and desires receives more attention. Not only the human body, but also human history, the place of the individual in the universe, his contingency and his emotions gain new significance. These dimensions of our understanding of human life were in the medieval context related to God, in relation to whom they took their meaning. After the eclipse of God, the same dimensions must find their meaning elsewhere: in the impersonal order, morality, and reason. From here, we are very close to a “secular” good; for example, natural law, the utilitarian principles and the imperative principle, become the new center.

How then does the break-out occur? Because the very attempt to express what the Christian life means in terms of a code of action in the saeculum opens the possibility of devising a code whose main aim is to encompass the basic goods of life in the saeculum: life, prosperity, peace, mutual benefit. Once this happens then the break-out is ready to occur. It just needs the step to holding that these “secular” goods are the point of the whole code (2007, 266-267).

In discussing deism, Taylor’s basic claim is that the anthropocentric shift to a new vision of the world is a continuation of the medieval attempt to find new ways of living. The religious or spiritual components in the deistic narrative do not cease to exist; they find new ways of expressing themselves, this time as a deep-seated moral distaste for the

old religion that sees God as an agent in history (2007, 274). Taylor's thesis is that the reformed Christianity (and not only its Protestant variants) was a large part of the motor behind this development, creating an immanent order of law, ethics, and a universe governed by natural law (2007, 291). The second thesis follows from the first one: the modern unbelieving ethos could not have arisen in any other form than this one, and all contemporary unbelief is still marked by that origin (2007, 268). With this, we are already to the main topic of exclusive humanism.

4.1.3 Exclusive Humanism

Exclusive humanism can be taken as the younger sibling of Deism; it follows the same steps of its older brother and allows itself full sway in the period of secularity. Taylor does not claim that this kind of humanism was born in our time (ancient Epicureanism belongs to the same family), or that modern secularity equals exclusive humanism, or that exclusive humanism is the only alternative to religion. One might think that all this is the case. Taylor's claim is that exclusive humanism represents the point of time at which the shift from a society where belief in God was unchallenged, unproblematic and where unbelief was virtually impossible, to one in which faith is one human possibility among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace (2007, 18-20). Seen from this perspective, exclusive humanism widens the range of possible options for modernity; it ends the era of "naïve" religious faith so strong in the pre-modern time; it explains how something other than God can become the "fullness" of human aspiration; it offers a substitute for agape, so crucial for the Christian religion. This kind of

humanism would not be possible without a series of previous stages, emerging out of the earlier Christian forms.

Taylor does not pretend to give us a full explanation of the rise of exclusive humanism or to show us its inevitability. The same period remains open to alternative readings and interpretations as well. Taylor's intention is to propose a reading which makes sense to us moderns in our orientation in a secular age. Let us now take a closer look at exclusive humanism, its characteristics, origin and its relationship to us.

In a cosmology based on God, the universe instantiates a system of normative patterns, which humans should first discover, and second, model themselves on. This normative order filled with God's songs and symbols earns human admiration. Opposite to this view is the world ruled by instrumental reason, in which humans do not admire the creator, his sovereignty or his creation, but look at the world as a vast field of mutually affected parts. Instead of normative patterns, they search for the most efficient systems, which will reinforce the harmony of their mutual interests, and in a special way their material benefits. These new norms are not imposed on human life from somewhere outside, but by the same power of the human will. Human will, exercised through human reason, becomes the most important component of human dignity, which will realize a new order as far as possible. Identification and realization of this order energize and motivate the acting subject on his path toward moral fullness and personal fulfilment. These two rewards, fullness and fulfilment, which replace Christian agape, should happen in the span of the agent's life. No wonder that affirmation of the value of life, its sustaining, healing and feeding, become so powerful and appealing. The power of these ideas reflects itself in our modern concern to preserve life, bring prosperity, reduce

suffering world-wide, to an extent that is in Taylor's belief without precedent in history (2007, 370).

These are the frameworks in which takes place the life of the buffered self. Despite his struggle, he claims to be able to impose a new order and discipline on self and society. Realization of this project is at the same time his self-realization. The attempt to re-order and re-shape human lives inspires and motivates him. The idea of a new order becomes a moral obligation, the success of which will benefit all people. No wonder that benevolence and universal justice, which includes all people, become the leading moral source, as Taylor concludes.⁶⁷

In short, Taylor maintains that exclusive humanism needs for its appearance two conditions: "the negative one, that the enchanted world fade; and also the positive one, that a viable conception of our highest spiritual and moral aspirations arise such that we could conceive of doing without God in acknowledging and pursuing them" (2007, 234). The first condition, which refers to the changes, most probably does not present any difficulty for our understanding. The second condition is more surprising, because Taylor sees it as a positive move, in which the moral/spiritual resources, and consequently the moral fullness, can be experienced as purely immanent, within the range of purely intra-human powers, as a capacity in "human nature." The fulfillment and fullness of human life become exclusive, i.e. within the domain of human power, making no reference to something higher that humans should reverence, love, or acknowledge. For this reason Taylor talks about "exclusive" humanism. This move is in Taylor's narrative the crucial

⁶⁷ In Taylor's view, benevolence and universal justice are part of every type of humanism which turns to be exclusive. For example, exclusive humanism is also utilitarianism, the theory of Kant, the Enlightenment's idea of the rights of man, and any similar idea based on general human happiness and welfare.

part of his interpretation because it explains how in modernity “unbelief” became one option among others (2007, 244-245).

Even though excluding every reference to the transcendent, the new humanism takes over the idea of universalism from its Christian background, which had been teaching that the good of everyone must be served in the process of re-ordering things. In this sense, Christian agape teaches its believers to go beyond the bounds of any already existing solidarity (e.g., the good Samaritan). The ultimate power to do that does not reside in a pre-existing community or the idea of solidarity, but is considered as a free gift of God, Taylor states (2007, 245-246).

To act for the good of human beings becomes the main motivation and principle of the new humanism. This motivation is based on the idea that human beings are endowed with a capacity for benevolence, or altruism, or sympathy, empowering us to act for the good of others in virtue of their being fellow humans. Therefore, the great power of benevolence and altruism, once attributed to God, is now immanentized and attributed to humans. Such a shift in the understanding of benevolence is basically seen as a fruit of escaping from narrow particular obligations. This understanding of benevolence, deeply rooted in our nature, constitutes at the same time the power necessary for creation of a new order in which universal benevolence and justice find their place.

Taylor maintains that the transition to an exclusive humanism is built on the confidence acquired in effecting order in life and society, which at least began to closer approximate the ideal model of mutual benefit (2007, 247). The main expressions of Christian faith are an active re-ordering in life and society that creates a harmonious social order involving taking care of all members of society, - in other words, universal

love and benevolence. One takes care of other members of his society and lives his life in terms of right conduct that makes him a decent man. These same features become or remain the main characteristics of exclusive humanism as well. The difference is that the power to create a new order now finds its place in all of us, in our human nature, independently of grace and God's help. The disengaged reason, freed from religion, or confused and perturbed personal desires, cravings, and envy, creates a new view of the whole, which reinforces in itself the individual's desire to serve that whole. This view fills the individual with benevolence, since acting for the universal good represents the highest moral experience and ideal.

Even here, Taylor does not claim to be proposing to us an exhaustive definitive account. His intention is to identify the moving forces and motivations behind the birth and development of exclusive humanism. What is important at this point is the discovery of a new moral motivation as a composite of experience and reality, focused within us and amounting to a new mode of moral living. These motivations have to be seen in relation to traditional humanist ethics and as related to metaphysical and religious beliefs. In Taylor's interpretation, exclusive humanism tries go to beyond these frameworks and to offer an alternative set of moral sources for the ethics of freedom and mutual benefit (2007, 259).

Hence it follows that exclusive humanism is not something we fell into, but something that has its history and, at the moment of its appearance, opened up new human potentialities. It is an achievement that many subtraction stories do not take sufficiently into account. This achievement constitutes in Taylor's writing the crucial point, which is inspired and empowers us to beneficence through an impartial view of

things, or a sense of buried sympathy within our nature.⁶⁸ This new understanding of beneficence requires from us training, insight, and frequently much work on ourselves. The beneficence and sense of freedom are not simply given to us by birth, but are result of much struggle and continuous attempts to actualize them. What occurred with exclusive humanism is without parallel in our history, and should not be dismissed lightly; Taylor claims (2007, 255):⁶⁹ "...the discovery/definition of these intra-human sources of benevolence is one of the great achievements of our civilization, and the charter of modern unbelief" (2007, 257).

In saying this, Taylor is not uncritically embracing the position of exclusive humanism. Exclusive humanism brings something new and positive, and this is what Taylor is interested in. However, at the moment of closing the window to transcendence, as though there were nothing beyond, exclusive humanism becomes problematic. Taylor formulates this problem saying that need of the human heart to open that window and go beyond cannot be seen as a result of a mistake, an erroneous world-view, bad conditioning or, even worse, as a pathology. Human beings have an ineradicable bent to respond to something beyond life, to which exclusive humanism does not offer a sufficient answer (2007, 639).

⁶⁸ This achievement as such is a continuation of the struggle started in the 16th century to define the value of the freedom of conscience, which has to be cherished. Alongside this growing emphasis on freedom, comes a greater concern about welfare, economic prosperity and growth, needed in view of the continuous wars. The emphasis on freedom and welfare take more and more place first among the élite, and then slowly transforming public opinion. Taylor sees these emphases to tie together narrowly with human concerns (2007, 259-260).

⁶⁹ On the same page, Taylor refers to Bernard Russell's articulation: "... for the first time, we have such an opening to the universal which is not based in some way on a connection to the transcendence. [...] we have to recognize that the development of this purely immanent sense of universal solidarity is an important achievement, a milestone in human history" (2007, 255).

Let us focus now more on the period after exclusive humanism, in which we can trace multiple reactions in terms of immanent counter-Enlightenment, anti-humanism, immanent framework and closed world structure.

4.1.4 Immanent Counter-Enlightenment and Anti-Humanism

With the term “immanent counter-Enlightenment” Taylor refers to a specific way of thinking in the 19th century, born as reaction to the ideas of Enlightenment in the 18th century, when reason was advocated as having the authoritative primacy and legitimacy (2007, 369-374). The principles of the Enlightenment were based on a view of life full of harmony, with no suffering, evil or violence, and consequently of a world in which religion and transcendence were not relevant. The legacy of the Enlightenment is in Taylor’s terms a powerful humanism, affirming the importance of preserving and enhancing life, of avoiding death and suffering, an eclipse/denial of transcendence which tends to make this humanism an exclusive one (2007, 371).

The Romantic writers and artists resisted such a world as denuded of meaning, and proposed a remedy based on sentiment and aesthetics (i.e., counter-Enlightenment). A more extreme view or reaction to the Enlightenment saw the irrational, amoral, and violent forces within human nature as having greater importance. The basic idea was that these forces cannot be simply condemned and uprooted, because human existence, vitality, creativity, strength, and ability to create beauty depend on them. Nonetheless, what the advocates of this intuition suggested as a solution was not a return to religion or the transcendent or the long-existing standards of honour and excellence; they remained

resolutely within the human and naturalist realm, without any reference to transcendent reality. That is the reason why Taylor calls it the “immanent counter-Enlightenment.”

In Taylor’s reflection, such a way of thinking is an immanent revolt against the primacy of life, not in the name of something beyond, but really more just from a sense of being confined, diminished by the acknowledgement of the primacy of life (2007, 372). In a more specific way, the immanent counter-Enlightenment owes its existence to a revolt against the belief that one’s highest goal is to preserve and increase life, and prevent suffering. It resisted also the culture of equality and benevolence, so highly praised and sought in both exclusive humanism and in the Enlightenment.

Adherents of this revolt were exposing human nature as limited and having death at its core. In this way, what humans need is a kind of warrior ethic, elevating the heroic dimension of humans, capable of accepting human suffering and of a condition of enforced diminishment and mortality. In this view, humans should not look for rewards, that is, to be exceptional, great, or heroic, but simply accept their narrowed situation. Nietzsche as the main spokesman of this group suggested going back to the pre-Platonic and pre-Christian warrior ethic, from which he borrowed the idea of a willingness to face death (2007, 373).

Let me mention explicitly that Taylor often refers to Nietzsche as the key figure of this immanent revolt and of the immanent counter-Enlightenment. Nietzsche’s critique is in many aspects both negative and positive, because through deconstruction he indicates new solutions as well. For this reason Taylor finds Nietzsche’s writings important.

Nietzsche denounced the importance of the concept of mutual benefits and the modern moral order, in our time still a much discussed question. He favored accepting

the wilder dimensions of human life, even its apparent meaninglessness and flatness; he rehabilitated destruction and chaos, the infliction of suffering and exploitation, as part of the life to be affirmed. The wilderness of life experiences should be taken as a place that awakens in us or communicates to us a power of having a better life wherever we are. Human happiness resides in the fight against the forces that are destroying us, death included. Nietzsche sharply opposed Christianity based on Platonism, especially in those aspects and religious doctrines which are, according to Nietzsche, deforming our human life (e.g., the understanding of the fullness of life, an inability to find satisfaction in ordinary human pleasures and fulfillments). Despite his renunciation of transcendence, Nietzsche reintroduced it in a different somewhat problematic way. However, his proposals cannot be simply eliminated or condemned, because they constitute new ways of trying to find meaning in human life, and they represent the human aspiration to wholeness and fulfillment possible in ordinary life. Nietzsche's creative destruction represents in Taylor's view an attempt to meet and fulfill in human nature the deep need which religion has been striving to fulfill. Taylor takes Nietzsche's critique as a helpful and useful tool for integrating into human life those aspects that in modernity tend to remain "excarnated." By excarnation in this context Taylor means "the steady disembodiment of spiritual life, so that it is less and less carried in deeply meaningful bodily forms, and lies more and more *in the head*" (2007, 771).

In other words, Taylor interprets Nietzsche's position with the immanent counter-Enlightenment, the move from a world of belief to the world of unbelief, and the appearance of the immanent revolt, not as negation but as affirmation of life, exalting the movement of life itself. Ideals of benevolence, universality, harmony, and order, are as

such incomplete and insufficient if they fail to integrate destruction, chaos, death, and the infliction of suffering and exploitation, as parts of life to be affirmed. To pretend otherwise is to limit human life and deprive it of its highest manifestations. Taylor summarizes his point saying that the immanent counter-Enlightenment involves a new valorization of and even fascination with the negation of life, that is, with experiences of death, violence and suffering (2007, 373). Even though the immanent counter-Enlightenment appears to reject any kind of previous understanding of transcendence, it still suggests to us a life which fully affirms itself and takes us beyond life. In this sense, its advocates, despite their refusal of any reference to ideas of transcendence, still modify their statements as their transcendent-inspired predecessors did.

This is the point at which Taylor explicitly sympathizes with the affirmation of life, that originates from within the immanent counter-Enlightenment. He says that the practical primacy of life has been a great gain for humankind, and that this gain was in fact unlikely to have come about without some breach with established religion (2007, 637). Nietzsche first, and after him other thinkers of the immanent counter-Enlightenment, wanted to open a space for the wilder, more unbounded forms of self-affirmation, which would rehabilitate human impulses to violence, destruction and orgiastic sexuality. Along with these impulses, modern thinkers are almost obliged to say some words about death as the natural end of human life as well, because these phenomena call for a new interpretation and meaning. Thus Heidegger talks about *Sein-zum-Tode*, and Sartre, Camus, and Foucault about “the death of man” and “the death of the subject.” In their writings, death becomes again one of the privileged perspective points from which we can grasp the meaning of life, and the gathering point, at which the

confusion and disorder of life gain a new dimension. Taylor calls this paradox “immanent transcendence” and considers it one of the principal contributions of the immanent counter-Enlightenment (2007, 726).

These ideas relating to death are akin to the traditional Christian ideas and perspective regarding death, where death represents the moment of giving up everything, one’s very self, at the moment of maximum union with God who is the source of the most abundant life. Such a union with God is a renewed affirmation of life, of something beyond human flourishing. Keeping in mind this pattern of thinking, we can see why Taylor writes on different occasions that modern immanent counter-Enlightenment thinkers have an affinity with the traditional religious thinkers. The theories of the immanent counter-Enlightenment are what they are because of their relationship to traditional Christian patterns of thought. Or, as Taylor states at different points, our Western mindset is essentially formed by a religious way of thinking, which again and again finds new ways of expressing itself. The immanent counter-Enlightenment is such a way.

Within the framework of the immanent counter-Enlightenment, Taylor looks at another account, modern anti-humanism (2007, 373-374). As the main advocates of this account, Taylor identifies the neo-Nietzschean thinkers Foucault, Derrida, and Bataille. Following the path of the immanent counter-Enlightenment, the neo-Nietzschean thinkers stress the importance of the death and violence that fascinate them and challenge them to find a new meaning for them. When modern humanism fights for equality, and happiness, and proclaims an end to suffering, it degrades the human being and reduces human life to something no longer worth living for. This is a kind of *nihilism*. If we remove from our

life all tragedy, doubts, conflicts, we might conclude that all good things will effortlessly come together. But what will in fact happen is the degradation of all values. The goods of life will finish in the basket of liberal values, now at the disposition of the individual and his free choice. This kind of thinking understands “normal” life to be conflict-free, a state of untroubled harmony. Taylor concludes that such a vision of unalloyed happiness is not only a childish illusion, but leads to a truncation of human nature as well. This is the point at which many modernists pronounce the end of humanism (2007, 635).

Taylor claims that the position of modern anti-humanism is important for our account because it expresses the modern rebellion against the exclusive humanism that influences modernity with its instrumental and objectivizing stance.

The point is to allow us to recognize that there is an anti-humanism which rebels precisely against the unrelenting concern with life, the proscription of violence, the imposition of equality (2007, 374).

Taylor’s statement is that anti-humanism’s opposition to equality and the efforts to find new meaning in human suffering, struggle, violence, and death, represent an opening door to someplace beyond them. This door to new paths leading in different directions is less restrained by traditional religious viewpoints and by secular humanism. As a result, Taylor concludes that recognition of the forces revealed to us by anti-humanism is an important step forward in understanding of modernity that in actuality is more complex than it initially seems to be. The modern paradigm is not a battle between religious tradition on the one side and secular humanism on the other side. It is a three-cornered battle, where the third corner represents a kind of position free from the religious tradition and secular humanism (2007, 374).

Earlier we spoke of the immanent counter-Enlightenment's relationship to a Christian way of thinking. Taylor states that even in the case of anti-humanism, the presence of a Christian influence cannot be denied. As an example, Taylor finds parallels between anti-humanism and the Christian teaching that it is impossible to be fully happy as a sinful agent in a sinful world. Conflicts, and aggression as a more extreme form of struggle, are a part of life that can and should be transformed through Christian faith and hope. Nietzsche and many of his followers rejected such an answer as unrealistic and as softening the hard truths of the human condition. What they proposed was a celebration of aggression. Taylor does not want to pursue this Nietzschean argument. What is important is that Nietzsche, despite his rejection of transcendence in religious terms, still extrinsically related to the transformation of human life, i.e. by borrowing an idea from a oversimplified reading of Christian faith (2007, 636).

4.1.5 Immanent Framework

Analyzing the changes taking place in the process of disenchantment, and within this framework the buffered self in search of a new identity, we saw the shift from the cosmic order to a new moral order, in which humans were deeply and comprehensively placed in secular time. If the cosmic order was thought to be maintaining itself, the new moral order was established through human action, without any reference to the *higher* time of the cosmic.

The main features of such human action are twofold: constructiveness and an instrumental approach towards the world on the one side, and on the other side, the secular perception of time, i.e. time has to be measured, humans are called to make the

best out of their time without wastefulness, and their lives are ordered by accurate clock-readings. Once the buffered identity of the disciplined individual moves into social space, where instrumental rationality, self-discipline, and responsibility are key values, and once time becomes pervasively secular, Taylor labels the result “the immanent frame” (2007, 542). This frame constitutes a “natural” order, which is contrasted to a “supernatural” one in an “immanent” world opposed to a potential “transcendent” one.⁷⁰

Even this distinction is not a completely new one; it has a religious background. This idea was born in the Middle Ages and in the early modern period in order to clearly mark the autonomy of the supernatural. God is sovereign in his power; his judgments are right and wrong, and not chained by “nature.” In the process of disenchantment, the cosmic orders were put aside and the rules of the “physical” universe came to the fore, influencing human self-perception and the placing of humanity in the world. The role of society changed completely. Science becomes a new source of moral and social laws, claiming to be able to explain immanent frames without interventions from outside. Taylor summarizes this new position by saying that humans perceive themselves within a self-sufficient immanent order, or better, within a constellation of cosmic, social and moral orders. These orders are impersonal. Human history is grasped as a development from earlier and more primitive stages of society and self-understanding to modernity (2007, 543).

⁷⁰ In the book *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, Taylor describes the “immanent frame” as follows: “This understanding [of immanent frame] draws on the sharp distinction between “natural” and “supernatural” that became dominant in Latin Christendom. The sense of the immanent frame is that of living in impersonal orders, cosmic, social, and ethical orders which can be fully explained in their own terms and don’t need to be conceived as dependent on anything outside, on the “supernatural” or the “transcendent.” This frame can be lived as “closed” but also as “open” to a beyond, and the tension between these two spins runs through the multiplying gamut of mutually cross-pressured positions that I call nova.” (Michael Warner, *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, 306-307).

Taylor conceives such an immanent frame as an auxiliary tool for his further rumination on modernity. Any kind of black-or-white description of modernity would be misleading, including this account of the immanent frame. However, we need this kind of narrative as a means to a better awareness of modern ways of thinking. Some of these ways claim to be strongly immanent and completely closed; others are, despite their apparent immanence and closedness, still open to something beyond. Hence it becomes obvious why Taylor claims that the immanent frame is in some form common to all of us in the modern West (2007, 543).

Sources for the closure of immanence are various: anti-clericalism, rejection of asceticism and miracles, materialism, the idea of the order of “nature” as our primary dwelling-place, naturalistic rejection of the transcendent, objectification of the world, modern natural sciences, technology, and the like. At the same time, people living within the immanent frame still feel driven by something beyond this simple frame. It might be collective identity, nationalism, ethnic groupings, religious movements; it might be something that helps them evaluate different goods and make distinctions between good and evil; it might be a kind of more radical and far reaching understanding of the good, as was the case with Marxism. Others claim that the aesthetic experiences of art represent the fulfilment of their search. We moderns do live within the immanent frame, even though not at all times and in every place with the same intensity and consistency.

From here Taylor concludes that we can see the transcendent, or at least an opening to something beyond, either as a threat, a dangerous temptation, a distraction, or an obstacle to our greatest good; or we can read it as an answer to our deepest cravings,

and need for a fulfillment of the good (2007, 548).⁷¹ If this is the case, Taylor continues, then the features of the immanent frame, which we all share and experience, allow us to challenge and re-interpret both its open and closed positions. We can read and stretch the immanent frame in different directions, without being compelled to any one of them. The real question is not what direction we take, but the reasons and principles behind our embracing of a particular direction.

For example, how much trust do we put in the first step on the way to the preferred position? Here we come back to the same concern we analyzed in the section on “Modern Search of Fulfilment Based primarily on the Scientific View” in my second chapter, when we spoke about the human agent in the field of natural and social sciences. Before doing any kind of work, the human agent already has in his mind certain motives, desires, inclinations, which lead, shape, and influence his consequent research. Taylor describes this as a background to our thinking, which is often largely unformulated, and to which we frequently imagine no alternative. Taylor finds Wittgenstein’s expression that “a picture held us captive” very appropriate (2007, 549). Sometimes we are so captured by the picture in our mind that we do not see any possible alternative or variation.

Taylor’s understanding of the immanent frame allows us both open and closed readings (2007, 550). If we grasp our predicament without ideological distortion, and without blinders, then we can proceed one way or another. Both choices require from us what is often called a “leap of faith,” what Taylor comprehends as “anticipatory

⁷¹ ...the immanent frame isn’t simply neutral. To live in this frame is to be nudged in one direction rather than another. ...living within the frame is living according to the norms and practices that it incorporates (2007, 555).

confidence,” in which our overall sense of things anticipates or leaps ahead of the reasons we can muster. Independently of what stance we take, both closed and open stances demand from us a certain amount of anticipatory confidence, which sets in motion our investigation. The “leap of faith” is always there, and is not restricted exclusively to religious accounts, where it refers us to the personal relationship of trust and confidence in God, rather than to our motives.

As the opposite stance to the “leap of faith,” Taylor puts those accounts which are formulated with lucidity as perfectly clear concepts. These accounts can be a way of convincing oneself that this particular reading is so obvious and compelling that there is no need to enter into discussion about it or to take a questioning stance. Taylor calls this phenomenon “spin”, i.e. a way of avoiding entering this space, a way of convincing oneself that this reading is obvious, compelling, allowing of no cavil (2007, 551). This “spin” might have different origins: it may refer to intellectual dishonesty, when one intentionally avoids certain aspects of reality; or it can mean having in mind a closed picture that prevents one from seeing important aspects of reality. “Atheism,” “death of God,” “Darwinism,” “materialism,” and “secularization” might be seen as examples of this kind of picture, which in some minds cannot be challenged and present a position without alternatives. Such a picture seems to be very convincing and captivating in itself, at least at certain moments, but it becomes quite indistinct once we check the assumptions on which it is built.⁷²

⁷² When Taylor talks about the pictures, he refers to a certain kind of thinking or articulation of the world from within. This articulation involves three degrees of abstraction. The first degree: one describes not the world in its entirety but only in terms of “world structures”, i.e. in terms of the way his experiences and thoughts are shaped and cohere, but not the whole wherein they are constituents. The second degree: these descriptions of the world do not belong to any concrete human being. They are more articulations of certain world-types or ideals, with which we think and articulate our visions. These types or ideas do not coincide

One of the most common assumptions, on which the “closed pictures” are based, is the uncritically accepted presupposition that the world is proceeding towards a suppressing or relegation of religion. If we put this assumption into the context of Western society, where we have witnessed massive alterations of institutional and social structures from the 16th century to our time, then it becomes evident why these pictures gain their persuasive power. This partially explains why it is so hard to believe in our time, while in the 16th century it was almost impossible not to believe, as Taylor claims in *A Secular Age*.

However, Taylor does not conclude that this assumption gives us a sufficient reason for defining our reality in terms of the decline and marginalization of religion. It is true that the modern understanding of scientific, social, and technological structures keeps us within the immanent frame, bound to a this-worldly order, perfectly comprehensible in its own terminology and without need to refer to the supernatural and transcendent. However, this order itself leaves the issues open as to whether, for purposes of ultimate explanation, spiritual transformation, and a final making sense, we might have to invoke some form of the transcendent. As an example, Taylor refers to the experience of living within a Western modernity that tends to awaken in us protests and resistance of various kinds, which would not be the case if we had attained a sufficient meaningful understanding. Therefore, Taylor concludes that certain interpretations and pictures

with any real person’s world. The third degree: these articulations involve an intellectualization; one has to get at the connections in lived experience through ideas, and very often these ideas are not consciously available to the people concerned, unless they are forced to articulate them (2007, 557).

It is important to keep in mind the structure and genesis of these pictures, because they enable us to see certain world structures which are not aware that there are possible alternatives.

remain closed only if they are “spun” in a certain way. When this is not the case, they lose their persuasiveness (2007, 594), and open up a possibility of alternative views.

4.1.6 Closed World Structures

As a variation of the “immanent frame” account, Taylor elaborates another account of modernity, which he calls “closed world structures” (2007, 551). In this account Taylor describes a closed reading of modernity, in which the reader restricts his grasp of things but does not recognize his restricting as such, because he takes his reading as obvious, unchallengeable, and axiomatic. With it Taylor wants to explain the unjustified attraction of the mainstream account of secularization, as well as of the modern disinterest in religion. Taylor says explicitly that he will not be arguing either for or against an open or closed reading; he will just try to dissipate the false aura of obviousness that surrounds them. From the point of view of this dissertation, the “closed world structures” account, like the “immanent frame” account, is important because it provides us background information for the secularization theory, i.e. the main topic of the next subchapter.

Taylor elaborates not one but four facets of the “closed world structures” (in continuation CWSs). These four facets are intrinsically connected; each one of them expresses one aspect of the account. Taylor analyzes them and puts them together as a narrative of coming of age (2007, 589). As there are various periods in the process of maturation from a childlike to an adult consciousness, so there are various facets that depict different steps in the process of maturation in modern consciousness. If we look at these steps in themselves, they represent stages that are both closed and immanent.

The first step is about the rational “obviousness” of the closed perspective that claims science has shown that God cannot exist; the second step is about the subtraction story, reinforcing the position of the first step. The first two steps prepare the background for the full narrative. The third step is the narrative of maturation and sociability that creates a new political-moral space. The last is about the authorization of values by the autonomous self.

a. The Rational “Obviousness” of the Closed Perspective: Taylor claims that one part of modernity looks at the world primarily through a “horizontal” perspective, which leaves no space for the “vertical” and “transcendental” perspective; this perspective is simply inaccessible or even unthinkable (2007, 556). Taylor considers this perspective as the framework for modern epistemology, constructed on the foundation of the exclusively horizontal perception of the world.⁷³ This perception contains some primary features: knowledge of the agent comes before knowledge of external reality; knowledge of reality is neutral fact, without value or relevance; knowledge of “this world,” i.e. the natural order, precedes any invocation of transcendent forces and realities.⁷⁴

Taylor considers this view as a typical example of how a powerful theory, positing the primacy of the individual, the neutral, and of the intra-mental as the locus of

⁷³ From a different perspective, we spoke about this narrative at the beginning of the third chapter, in the subchapter “Scientific Interpretation of the World and Assuming Priority of Epistemology in Modernity.”

⁷⁴ Taylor explains that some 20th-century philosophers (e.g., Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty) have already turned this perspective and epistemological picture on its head, and rejected its priority relations. Our representations of the world cannot be completely isolated and independent from outer reality, because we constantly use and modify our perception in our coping with the world. This coping activity is a kind of social action, which goes beyond purely individual activity. Finally, the coping activity is not a neutral and value-free activity, able to keep an equal distance to all objects. Some objects have greater relevance, meaning, and significance for us than others, and this is the reason why we consider them first (2007, 560).

certainty, shapes human experiences (2007, 559-560). Behind this view lie undiscussed values or excellences of an independent, disengaged subject, who reflexively controls his own thought processes, and claims to be completely self-responsible. From this picture follows an ethics of independence, self-control, self-responsibility and disengagement. In the name of objectivity and neutrality, this new ethic requires from the subject courage, rejection of the easy comforts of conformity to authority, of the consolations of an enchanted world, and of the surrender to the prompting of the senses. Those who inhabit such a CWS believe their perception of the world to be the “natural” one, in relation to which there is no alternative, except a regression to earlier myths or illusions.

Taylor sees this picture based on the “natural perception of the world” as the strategic partner to a different account based on the “death of God” (2007, 559-560). This very influential and modern mind-shaping account claims that we humans have to learn how to live in our world without believing in God. We have to learn to believe in nothing beyond human happiness, potentialities, or heroism. Despite the neutrality and indifference of the world, this world is threatening to us. The solution is not to run away into certain comforting illusions about a benign God; Nietzsche would say that this is a childish behaviour, showing a lack of the courage to face the cruel reality. The ideal is a self-supporting individual, independent of any traditional moral convictions, determined to affirm human worth and good, and without reference to religion for consoling illusions.

Taylor concludes that here we have a new humanism, based on a victory over religion and an earlier moral order. This humanism finds its support in the “natural perception of the world.” Both images together, the image of the “natural perception of

the world” and of the “death of God,” build a new image that Taylor calls “death of God atheism” (2007, 565). This image is based on a series of well-grounded epistemological steps and arguments, which lead us from science to atheism. As a science-driven image it holds us captive, persuading us that there is no other option.⁷⁵

b. Subtraction Story of the Rise of Modern Humanism: The merging of these two images together, the natural perception of the world and the death of God, is in Taylor’s reflection an example of the subtraction story of the rise of modern humanism, or the second step in the maturation of modern consciousness. Taylor describes the logic behind this subtraction story in this way: “once we slough off our concern with serving God, or attending to any other transcendent reality, what we’re left with is human good, and that is what modern societies are concerned with” (2007, 572). Both accounts, the “death of God atheism” and the “natural perception of the world,” intrinsically refer to God through negation of God’s relevance. Both accounts together elaborate a picture of the CWS where there is no need of the religious dimension of human life. This image keeps us as a modern captive to a certain way of thinking, negating to ourselves the religious dimension of our life. As long as we keep this image in our mind, it is almost impossible to imagine alternatives and changes that could lead us beyond the immanent frame and CWS. In Taylor’s words:

Living from out of this sense of agency [agency which sustains the closed world structures] gives a certain spin to the immanent frame, which then seems to reflect back to us the validity of our closed image of it. Science,

⁷⁵ ...once you accept unbelief, then you will probably also accept the ideology which accords primacy to the external sources, which deprecates the internal ones as incompetent here, indeed, as likely sources of childish illusions – following our own modern code of honour, that of the adult, rational subject of knowledge. It now looks *ex post facto* as though there was no rational alternative ... (2007, 568).

modern individualism, instrumental reason, secular time, all seem further proofs of the truth of immanence (2007, 566).

If we remain locked into this image, Taylor keenly notes that we have lost touch with a crucial spiritual reality, and we have lost from view certain perennial truths. This view rules out the possibility that Western modernity might be powered and sustained by an original and positive vision of the good, proper to its own tradition, rather than by the only vision left after the old myths and legends have been exploded. Instead of forming a novel moral self-understanding, modernity caught within this picture prefers to create a “naturalized” status by negating old horizons and beliefs (2007, 571).

The next question becomes why is this picture so convincing and attractive for us moderns? Taylor gives us two possible answers. For different reasons, many people easily give up their faith and accept unbelief as the only valid way to describe their experiences. With the picture of the natural perception of the world based on science-driven interpretations, they come to the conclusion that they can no longer rationally believe in God. Belief becomes for them an almost impossible option, or a childish illusion. The world in which political and moral life focus on human welfare, human rights, human flourishing, equality between humans, and other human goods, reconfirms their conviction about the impossibility of a belief in God (2007, 569).

The second possible answer, is in Taylor’s interpretation, even stronger than the first one, and refers us to the connection between the natural perception of the world, i.e. materialism and exclusive humanism. Both of them are very attractive because they have in their background the same ideals. As we already know from the subchapter on exclusive humanism (4.1.3), the human agent claims to be able to impose a new order and discipline on self and society, which then becomes the way to his self-realization. Re-

organization of the world inspires and motivates him to the point where his acting becomes for him a moral obligation. In this way, he experiences a kind of fulfilment and flourishing as something purely immanent, exclusive to his nature and power, without any reference to God. Thus, naturalism and materialism appear to be the best grounds for his self-fulfilment.

If this is the case, Taylor argues, (2007, 571-572), we come to the same conclusion about the “death of God” from two different directions: from exclusive humanism, which sees God as a limitation of human flourishing, and from materialism, which sees God as an unnecessary element in a “natural perception of the world.” Both directions claim to be liberating us from previous religious and metaphysical frames. Both argue that this liberation is an open door to a “discovery” which is unchallengeable and without an alternative. What they cannot see is that their construction is only one among many other historically-constructed understandings of human agency. They cannot see that they are offering only partial or pseudo-solutions, dependent on the development of the natural and social sciences. They cannot see that we can be modern, and at the same time deal with the same crucial issues, and still believe in God. They see belief as necessarily a product of deprivation, humiliation and a lack of hope, but they cannot perceive it as the reflection of the human desire for flourishing.

What is at this point crucial for our interpretation, Taylor states, is to change the reading of our own motivation (2007, 563). Instead of nourishing the impetus in us toward truth, the advocates of this closed system prefer to give assent to comforting untruths. They prefer to give credence to what appears to be clearly demonstrated by the evidence. They have learned to mistrust some of their own deepest instincts, especially

those which might draw them closer to religious belief; instead of acknowledging the desire to believe, they reduce it to a childish temptation. I will discuss this condition more extensively in the second part of this chapter.

However, Taylor does not limit his reflection to only negative criticism. The same subtraction story brings to light many positive elements, which are in Taylor's view crucial for the maturation of modern consciousness. Now we experience our world as autonomous subjects, as beings who can revel in choice, as citizens among sovereign peoples, as potential controllers of history (2007, 573). We have to keep these elements in mind, if we want to comprehend the new understanding of self, agency, time, and society that Western modernity has generated. The modernity and secularity within modernity are much more than theses about the "death of God," the rise of modern humanism, and the retreat of religion in the face of science. Taylor is even more explicit in saying that we should not take the "death of God" merely as an erroneous aspect of modern secularity, but as a way through which we can interpret and experience the modern condition of belief (2007, 836, footnote 41).

c. The Narrative of Maturation and Sociability: Taylor considers the narrative of the "death of God," as seen in the first two steps, as the way through which emerges the identity of Western modernity (2007, 574). There is a shift in the center of gravity away from Nietzsche's critique of modernity towards the positive side of modernity. Materialism with its "naturalization of the world" becomes a necessary step in the maturation of modern consciousness. The modern agent becomes capable of identifying, and then resisting earlier illusions. With the growth of knowledge, he is willing to face

reality as it is; this requires from him courage, which allows him to become more mature and responsible for his own life.

Once we get rid of illusions, the desire to discover the truth in things, including the truth about ourselves, grows in us. Taylor's point is that we should look for the new answer not exclusively within materialism, but in something beyond it. The same desire, to face our reality as it is, challenges us to be willing to deal with the metaphysical and religious domain as well. This should not be seen as a return to the state of illusions as Nietzsche understood it, but as an expression of an authentic desire to face our reality and to adequately know it. If the modern subject really has courage to face reality, then he will not avoid confronting it. The same courage will allow him to take responsibility for his own take on reality and on his place in it (2007, 575).

Taylor reinforces his position in reference to the despair and illusions that modern man experiences in the face of a society marked by technology, individualism, negative freedom, instrumentalism, and other burning issues. The tendency to despair and illusions open the door to regret and nostalgia for old views, loyalties, and spiritual realities; they become forms of escape from the burdens of reality (2007, 570).

Again, Taylor's solution is not to return to the past forms but rather facing up to the challenge of our acceptance of reality. The desire to become an adult is an invitation to deal courageously with the burdens of modernity. Through confronting rather than avoiding them, one can find new answers to the longings for disquiet, and hopelessness hope.

Parallel to this courageous and responsible search for new answers, Taylor puts the agent's desire to construct a new social space that will be more universal, fraternal,

and open to others, where even strangers can find their place (2007, 575).⁷⁶ Modern man experiences himself as being liberated from the narrow world of hierarchical structure in the pre-modern feudal society, with its excessive controls and social distinctions. What attracts modern man is liberation into a new, broader space and the construction of a new society wherein equality, justice, liberty, even solidarity will be the basis of the new relationship. People will cast off old cultural distinctions and come together as fellow citizens and fellow human beings. Coming together as social beings and human beings, they will feel sovereign, experiencing collective power and efficacy, based on equality, justice, solidarity, and liberty. Such an experience is not completely new in modernity; something of the sort has appeared in various forms many times in human history. For example, followers of Buddha, Christ, and Muhammad, the Stoics felt the need to create a new, more universal and fraternal space.

This desire to create new spaces explains why more and more populations are willing to change their social structures and construct new ones. For Taylor, this account of new and unprecedented creation has to be taken into consideration as well, if we want to understand the rise of modernity (2007, 578). This desire is an expression of modern courage and willingness to soften the previous “obvious and unchallengeable picture” of the CWSs. However, this account of “obviousness” and the necessity to find new solutions is not completely unproblematic. If modernity is really open to finding new solutions and also willing to accept them, why is it not also open to new solutions to the secular mind-set based on an anti-religious narrative? This is one of the topics in the second part of this chapter.

⁷⁶ Taylor likes to use the term “sociability of strangers,” borrowed from Michael Warner’s books *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York/Cambridge, Mass, 2002.

d. The Narrative of Self-Authorization: The narrative of self-authorization is based upon the modern tendency to decide for itself what is good and right. In the past, human beings took their norms, goods and standards of ultimate value from an authority outside of themselves, i.e., God, the gods, or the cosmos. Then they decided that these higher authorities were their own fictions; therefore, they established their norms and values for themselves, on their own authority. When this happens, Taylor states, we have a radicalization of the coming-to-adulthood story, in which humans come to establish their truths about the world and dictate the ultimate values by which they will live (2007, 580).

Taylor refers to Hume and Kant who developed the ideas that what is good and right is determined by our innate tendency to happiness, on the one hand, and on the other hand, by our reason, which requires that we act on universal maxims, and determines what in fact conduces to human welfare. At this point, we are not far from a new moral order imposed on us. This idea is very attractive and appealing, and illustrates a modern way of thinking.

However, a closer analysis shows that this new moral order is based exclusively on the moral agent himself who has rejected any reference to outside sources of morality. Taylor sees this as a paradox (2007, 581). In order to be moral, we are supposed to follow the higher and over-riding moral demands, those we really ought to listen to. At the same time, we exclude the option that these higher and over-riding demands can be based on the will of God, or the nature of the universe, or something similar. In addition to that, our identity is deeply ingrained with our history and culture. How can we so easily put

aside this historical part of ourselves, neglect our roots, and still claim to be independent, neutral, and open to possible suggestion? Even though these are some important points to call to our attention, Taylor does not stop at them. More important is the fact that taking this radical position -- excluding any kind of outside sources -- requires from the agent a certain level of courage and confidence in his own authority.

Having the courage to take a responsible position before the world is a very powerful ideal in modernity, though it may come into conflict with the CWSs. If we claim that the universe is indifferent to us, and at the same time we favor materialism as the “natural” way of living, we contradict ourselves, because we hope to find meaning in a universe that is indifferent to us. Something similar happens if we start with the moral agent who claims to be independent and able to determine good and right on his own, and at the same times favors the materialistic and “natural” approach as the best way to reach meaning. The moral agent contradicts, with facts, what he claims with words; he claims to be independent and authoritative in taking positions, but at the same time looks for meaning somewhere else.

As an illustration, Taylor tracks this kind of struggle, contradiction and enormous courage in the writings of Albert Camus (1913 – 1960, French author, journalist, and key philosopher of the 20th century), who searches and struggles for good with no guarantee of success. Despite the certainty of failure, Camus is still willing to struggle and accept an indifferent universe with no transcendent hope beyond history. This is in Taylor’s reflection an inspiring ideal of courage, i.e. another key-concept on the way to maturation.

In the first two steps we saw how the modern agent finishes his reflection with the “death of God.” Now we see Camus who claims that absurdity is the best conclusion. These are only two possible variants of the same account of the coming of age. We should not stop here, Taylor states; if we do, we will miss something very important. If one claims to be able to face the loss of meaning in the universe, and at the same time, he is ready to find or to project meaning despite a universe which itself is without sense, this reveals something that is much more than the virtue of disengaged reason and scientific responsibility. Taylor talks about the imaginative courage to face the void, and to be energized by it to the creation of meaning. This courage is something that is far from being self-evident.

This element of the narrative of self-authorization is something that too easily passes by unobserved. In Taylor’s reflection, the modern agent, when claiming to become adult, remains at the point from which he faces the reality in a new way. But being autonomous, he can take a different stance and reading of his own past and tradition. The unchallenged axioms on which the CWS’s reading is based are less solid than they seem to be. At this point he can find new interpretations for fulfilling his search for meaning. When this happens, the narratives about modernity can be lively and powerful, exciting and engaging, proposing courageous and clear-sighted adulthood as a new variation on the virtues of life. Hopefully, this outcome comes out through our analysis of Taylor’s narrative of the CWSs. (2007, 584-591).

At this point I look at Taylor’s reflections from the perspective of his book *Ethics of Authenticity*, already discussed at the end of our third chapter (“The Quest for Authenticity as the Remedy for the Modern Sense of Unfulfillment”). Taylor’s narrative

about the modern agent in search of authenticity is a variation of the narrative of self-authorization. Both narratives, the narrative of authenticity and of self-authorization, can be variations of the CWSs, in which the agent remains closed in his narrow-minded imagination, uncritically excluding some possible interpretations. Nonetheless, these two narratives can become an occasion for the modern agent opening himself to a deeper meaning.

Looking with Taylor at the positive features of modernity is another way to describe the modern search for meaning. It is true that some versions of the secularization story claim that religion with all its illusions will disappear in the face of scientific development. It is true also that some traditional ways of living and expressing religion have been disappearing, as Taylor explains through his narrative of disenchantment, deism, and exclusive humanism. But this does not mean that the search for meaning has to share the same fate. A world of beauty, warmth, and spiritual meaning, including the search for God, is as attractive now as it was in the past. If the modern agent is really in a search for meaning, then he must explore the religious and spiritual spheres as well. This is the point that Taylor elaborates in his critical reflection about forces that are (dis)integrating modernity.

In the next subchapter, I continue with Taylor's analysis of the agent's search for meaning, now in the framework of secularization. Taylor touches both sides of the coin: those theories that exclude religion and any spiritual dimension from modernity, and those theories that find in religion and faith new answers to the perennial questions.

4.2 Secularization Theory in Modernity

Strictly speaking, Taylor's reflection about secularization could be placed in the previous subchapter among the narratives that either open or close the horizons of modernity and act as (dis)integrating forces of modernity. However, I treat Taylor's reflection about secularization as a separate subchapter for two reasons. First, Taylor offers a specific interpretation about secularization in modernity that contrasts with other theories about secularization. Taylor integrates into his theory the previously mentioned narratives and folds them together in a new more comprehensive narrative. Because of the originality of his approach, we have to take a closer look at it. Second, by unfolding secularization, Taylor wants to indicate the conditions of belief that are in the time of modernity different from those in the 16th century.

Let us remind ourselves that we are still in search of the answer to Hegel's concern. In this subchapter, we will look for it within secularization. My claim is that Taylor's reflection about secularization brings us a step closer to freedom and expressive fullness.

4.2.1 Taylor's Critical Interpretation of the Mainstream Secularization Theory

When Taylor talks about secularization, he uses this term carefully because it designates a very complex and intriguing process. Many philosophers, theologians, sociologists, politicians, historians, and others who talk about modernity apply this term to religion, its changing role in modern society, Church institutions, faith's expressions, and other phenomena related to religion, faith, and spirituality. Within the term they refer to wide variations and changes to be found in different countries, regions, classes,

milieus, groups, and individuals. The decline of religion appears to be the common denominator of all these variations. Such descriptions can be misleading because there are some situations *sui generis* situations, and within them many divergent factors. To generalize and presume to encompass the characters of secularization within some wide-ranging terminology and concepts, risks missing the heart of the process of secularization.

For this reason, Taylor proceeds step by step, first providing a general description of *secularization*: “It is a commonplace that something that deserves this title has taken place in our civilization” (2007, 426). In the next sentence he adds that such a description does not help us much because we have to define what it is that “has taken place in our civilization.” If we understand secularization as the retreat of religion from public space and as an alteration of religious practices, we can find many examples of that in Western history in the last five centuries, and not only in modernity. If this is the case, secularization is nothing new in modernity. If we take secularization as a move that involves the decline of religion, we have to define the meaning of religion as well. The term *religion* might designate either an explicit belief in a supernatural being, or beliefs in spiritual and semi-spiritual beings, or different institutions which incarnate religion, or some form of ultimate concerns. Again we are at the starting point in which the imprecision of terms such as *secularization* and *religion* generates confusion. Taylor is aware that there is not only a hermeneutical challenge in how to determine the proper terminology; it is an intellectual problem and loaded with emotion, which makes difficult our arriving at any easy solution (2007, 427).

Keeping in mind the complexity of this phenomenon, Taylor carefully elaborates his theory about secularization, which is provisional and delineates some general changes that have been taking place in the last five centuries in our Western societies (mainly Britain, France and the United States). The aim of his theory is manifold: to make a small contribution to the general story of secularization in the West (2007, 424); to set forth the arguments through which believers and unbelievers can modify their judgments and widen mutual sympathies (2007, 428); to expose the “unthought,” i.e. unspoken and unexpressed presuppositions which underlie the whole discussion about religion and secularization; to propose a more exact description of the thesis that modernity tends to repress or reduce the influence of religion (2007, 429).

By introducing his theory about secularization, Taylor wants to take a critical stance opposing the mainline secularization theory, which is insufficient in its exposition and interpretation. This theory depicts modernity as the time that glorifies secularization and proposes exclusive humanism with the “death of God” as an alternative to religion. Such a theory is in Taylor’s view unacceptable because secularization is a phenomenon that is much more complex than the decline of religious practices.⁷⁷

To elaborate his own theory, Taylor compares the mainstream secularization theory to a three-storey dwelling (2007, 431-433). On the ground floor we have those who claim that religious belief and practices have declined in modernity, with the diminishing influence of religious institutions. In the basement of this three-storey

⁷⁷ In his latest book *Dilemmas and Connections*, in the paper “What Does Secularism Mean?” Taylor elaborates a new meaning of *secularism*. We think that secularism has to do with the relation of the state and religion, “whereas in fact it has to do with the (correct) response of the democratic state to diversity” (2011, 310). A democratic state has to guarantee freedom in the domain of freedom, equality between people of different faiths, and that all spiritual families have been heard in the process of determining what the society is about.

dwelling, we have different theories exploring reasons for the diminishing role of religion in the public space. The upper floor represents different explanations and theories about religion in modernity in the present time.

With this blueprint in hand, Taylor refines his reflection about the mainstream secularization theory, asking what part of the building we are concerned with. If talking about the ground floor, we have a kind of general agreement: there is a certain decline of religious belief and practices. In the basement, we refer to various explanations of this decline, which illuminate certain aspects about the withdrawal of religion from the public sphere (i.e. social fragmentation, disappearance of community, rationalization, urbanization, modernization, the rise of science/technology). Both floors are essential for the construction of the building on the upper floor where Taylor discusses the place of religion in modernity. As we cannot dwell on the upper floor if our house has no ground floor and basement, so we cannot comprehend the place of religion in modernity without placing it in its historical perspective. We can already see that Taylor's originality in modifying the mainstream secularization theory carries forward into his integration of other theories about secularization into a greater narrative. This new narrative will open our reflection to new horizons.

Keeping in mind the image of the three-storey dwelling, it will become easier to understand why Taylor does not identify himself with any of the present theories of secularization and their explanations about the retreat of religion from public space and its loss of importance. All of them seem to him to be narrow and one-sided in their exposition. For example, the *orthodox* secularization theory bases on the view that modernity tends to repress and reduce religion. Taylor agrees with the last point about

repression and reduction of religion, but at the same time reads this theory as incomplete. It is true that modernity to a certain extent represses and reduces the influence of religion; however, we need to define the meaning of *religion*, *supernatural*, *natural* and *spiritual* with greater exactness, if we want to comprehend adequately the radical claim of this theory. Through undermining of the old forms of religion we have in modernity more space for new expressions of religion. To point out these new forms and options for human flourishing in the spiritual and religious field is one of the main goals of his book *A Secular Age* (2007, 429).

Similarly, Taylor disagrees with identifying secularization with the disenchantment process. Secularization includes much more than distancing from a magical and enchanted world. Modernity's rejecting such a world is nothing new; from the history of Judaism and Christianity we are familiar with many examples of believers experiencing various kinds of disenchantment (2007, 426).

Taylor struggles also with the *revisionist* secularization theories, which claim that undermining and sidelining religious faith is caused by certain features of modernization, e.g. urbanization, industrialization, the development of class society, the rise of science. It is true that these features had a negative effect on the previously existing religious forms; however, these social features are not primarily triggered by anti-faith and anti-religion forces. Once in a new social context, the secularized agent found the existing forms of religious life to be disruptive and unviable; therefore he left them behind. At the same time, the new social context brought to light new forms of religious life which could now flourish (2007, 432, 437).

Regarding those secularization theories that are grounded on the disappearance thesis, i.e. religious belief and practices tend to disappear in modernity, Taylor argues that they are based on the assumption that modern technology makes it difficult for us to believe or to relate to any kind of a magical or enchanted world. This assumption shows a very limited understanding of religion, Taylor concludes. The same critique applies to the secularization theories based on the epiphenomenal thesis, i.e. the understanding that religious belief and action can only function for a distinct goal or purpose, such as bearing the misery, suffering, and despair of the human condition. Once we control the world and society, religion will lose its functional connection to these goals and purposes, and disappear. Taylor is clear: these theories appear plausible to people with a certain view of religion (2007, 434).

Appropriating Taylor's position, one can say that he grounds his theory of secularization on the idea that history knows constant changes of religious forms and motivations; new forms and practices of religious and non-religious life are continuously replacing those proving disruptive and unviable. In other words, secularization is not the same as the death of faith or the end of religion. Even so, Taylor does not deduce that religion has been constantly present and functioning in an identical way throughout different periods of history. Our present time is incomparable to any other time, Taylor says, because it is marked by "an unheard of pluralism of outlooks, religious and non-religious and anti-religious, in which the number of possible positions seems to be increasing without end" (2007, 437). In each historical moment religion has to find and reestablish anew its place; religion in modernity is no exception.

Let us take these general affirmations as coordinates within which Taylor places his theory of secularization. As he usually does, once more Taylor proposes the historical approach as the best possible way of proceeding: in order to understand adequately the changes in the present time, we need to comprehend also the changes in the previous periods. Hence Taylor distinguishes three facets of secularity,⁷⁸ which represent three consecutive periods: first, the retreat of religion from public life; second, the decline in belief and practice in the private sphere; and third, the changes in the conditions of belief.⁷⁹ These three facets cannot be sharply differentiated because they overlap in many cases. Each one of them relates to “religion” in a different way, and consequently results in a different meaning for “secularization” as well.

a. Secularity as Retreat of Religion from Public life

This first facet of secularity has an extremely broad meaning. In pre-modern societies, the political organizations and institutions were in some way connected to or based on faith, religion, or adherence to a belief in God. God and religion were present everywhere: in the structures of religious, social, political, economical, cultural, educational, and professional life. With secularity, in terms of retreat of religion from public life, we face a shift of understanding of what society is grounded on. What retreats

⁷⁸ With “secularity” Taylor describes certain facts about the place of religion in public life, such as separation of Churches from political structures; believing in God is in modernity a private matter, what was not the case in 16th century; political, economic, cultural, educational activities in modernity do not necessarily refer to God. These are some of the facts that in modernity seem to be obvious. Taylor starts his book *A Secular Age* with a question/assertion that we live in a secular age.

To understand these facts, as well as the changes and differences between modernity and our past, Taylor talks about “secularization,” i.e. the process which explains why and how these changes take place.

⁷⁹ In his book *A Secular Age* Taylor talks about these facets throughout (2007, 1-4, 12-15, 18-21, 31, 136, 192-194, 423-426). I will summarize Taylor’s description, without continuously referring to specific pages of his book.

are certain social activities, which had been primarily based on religion. With time, these activities found their own inherent rationality, not necessarily based on religion. Instead of a divine foundation, people start looking for new foundations based on common opinion and exchange of new ideas. Taylor presents the history of the 16th and the 17th centuries as the framework in which the process of this kind of secularity was born.

This facet of secularity includes some features treated in my subdivision about disenchantment, i.e. a new perception of the self, a shift from the porous to the buffered self, the loss of naïve understanding, a profound dissatisfaction with the present order and the search for a new one. Taylor includes all these features in his reflection about the retreat of religion from the public sphere.

In addition, Taylor explains this retreat in terms of structure and anti-structure. This terminology is not original with him; he borrows it from Victor Turner's books *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* and *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (2007, 45-51). Taylor repeats Turner's definition of structure as the code of behavior of a society, in which are defined different roles and statutes, and their rights, duties, powers, and vulnerabilities. When the pressure of these codes becomes too strong, people look for relaxation and relief. The stronger a certain structure with its limiting code is, the stronger the anti-structure with its anti-code grows. Through the anti-structure and anti-code, members of a certain society can find new ways of expressing themselves and realizing their potential. The shift from a certain structure and codes to their anti-structure and anti-codes does not necessarily include the destination of the structure and codes. The shift might be an expression of the need to find a new equilibrium amid the tension emerging within society and individuals. As a simple example, Taylor refers to Carnival and other

similar festivities (Saturnalia in Roman times, Aztec renewals of the world), when ordinary order is turned upside down, allowing people to enjoy a reversal of their normal life.

However, Taylor does not accept this or similar explanations as a satisfactory explanation for a retreat of religion from the public sphere; these explanations are too *functionalist*. They are based on the idea that the whole dynamic between structure and anti-structure is centered on the preservation of society. Taylor does not mention explicitly that behind this idea is the Marxist's conception of reality and society, in which the material reality assumes the ontological function. Even though Taylor does not explicitly criticize this position, such mindsets and theories based on materialism remain unacceptable to him.

The reason why Taylor does not accept these theories is that they do not answer the question of where the power for the anti-structure comes from. The origin of this power cannot be material or limited to the function of preserving society. In Taylor's words, the power comes from "the sense that all codes limit us, shut us out from something important, prevent us from seeing and feeling things of great moment" (2007, 50). Taylor continues that a "human code exists within a larger spiritual cosmos, and its opening to anti-structure is what is required to keep the society in tune with the cosmos, or to draw on its forces." With this rather enigmatic statement Taylor says that human structures taken in themselves cannot express and exhaust fully the meaning of human life; they cannot provide the ultimate reason for the existence of society. There are moments when individuals and members of society experience unease in the face of the same structures of society or of the present codes of behaviour. The tensions and unease

they experience are the same tensions humans experience faced with the *temporal*, which is insufficient as such, and calls for something deeper, more spiritual, and other-than-temporal. This is the same tension and unease which unbelievers living in a secular time might experience when facing religious matters. In all three cases, facing either social or temporal or secular structures, people search for something more meaningful and want to go beyond their present existence. Consequently, their desire for the anti-structure is an expression of a much deeper human need, which cannot be expressed in simple terms of opposition to the official, socio-political structures or certain historical events of their time.

When exploring secularity in terms of a retreat of religion from the public space, Taylor is more interested in the change in thinking than in the change of social reality. By analyzing thinking, he finds the reason that fails to recognize that aspect of human nature which provokes the construction of the anti-structure. The anti-structure is much more than the opposed or complementary part of the structure; the anti-structure is an expression of the human desire to create a better world, in which one can go beyond the structures that are rigid, and unjust and that suffocate human dreams. For the same reason, Taylor finds the narratives based on the structure and anti-structure model unsatisfactory, and talks about the “eclipse of anti-structure” (2007, 51). These theories do not explore the motivations and aspirations on which they are based.

The same secularity, in this case understood as *retreat of religion from public space*, is an expression of a deeper desire, which has not been taken sufficiently into account; this is the main point of Taylor’s argument. In the second facet of secularity we will see through Taylor’s reflection how the mainstream secularization theory neglects or

avoids this part of human nature. The desire and search for something deeper never ceases to exist in human history; they are part of our nature. This desire will reappear strongly in modernity within the private domain of the human agent seeking new ways of expressing himself.

b. Secularity as Decline in Belief and Practices

A continuation of the first facet of secularity is the second one, secularity as a falling off of religious belief and practice, a turning away from God and the Church. Religion at this stage consists of certain old beliefs and practices that are now in retreat.

Changes taking place in the social, political, economical, religious, and spiritual spheres were pushing both individuals and whole societies to search for new forms of coexistence. These external changes reflect the shift taking place in individuals who are now searching for a different kind of self-perception, trying to find their place in the new social context. In the subdivisions “Disenchantment” and “Deism” we already mentioned the search for the foundation of a new order, which was supposed to be impersonal, natural, without any intervention of God into history. Prosperity, peace, and mutual benefits become the basic goods of life in the *saeculum*. The new principles of ethical life are based on the achieving of the human’s own good, happiness, well-being, and flourishing. Consequently, the transcendental dimension of religion becomes less central and religious practices less important. Now, a secondary element replaces the center previously occupied by God. Taylor calls this the anthropocentric shift, which we discussed in the subdivision “Deism.”

In addition to the anthropocentric shift, Taylor also points out sociological changes, those that some secularization theories adopt as their foundation (2007, 425). One of these factors is the differentiation process. Certain social functions were originally carried out by religious institutions. At a certain moment, these functions crystallize and divide into separate social spheres, each with their own norms, roles, and institutions. For example, the church used to provide an educational and health care system; now some secular institutions took over these systems, causing religious institutions to lose their social influence. Other changes in society, e.g., urbanization, the disappearance of community, the democratization process, the industrial revolution, and weight of wars, profoundly altered people's religious life, their traditional practices, as they did the role of religious institutions.

Secularity in terms of the decline and falling off of religious beliefs and practices was also largely powered by the rise of other beliefs, especially those of science (e.g., evolutionary theory, Darwinism, neuro-physiological explanations of mental functioning). In the Enlightenment period, belief in science encouraged the spread of secularization in all its dimensions.

However, the rise of natural sciences, with their rational approach to reality, together with the many changes in social life, are not in Taylor's reflection the main reason for the appearance and growth of secularity. Taylor's claim is that religious doctrines and practices simply became less relevant for scientific explanations and social organization; consequently, they were put aside. This is not to say, however, that religious and spiritual components of human nature were put aside. Taylor argues that the same religious and spiritual components triggered, in effect, the whole process of

secularity. Dealing with far reaching social changes, and living with the differentiation process of existing structures and codes, people experienced a kind of uneasiness and discomfort. They did not then intentionally distance themselves from traditional ways of believing and practicing religion; what happened is that they looked about them for new meaningful answers that might be found elsewhere -- in Deism, exclusive humanism, Jacobinism, Marxism. These and other similar forms became in their mind viable alternatives to traditional Christianity. In search of an easing of their discontent, they develop novel religious practices, sprung up in response to new spiritual directions they were taking (2007, 436).

In Taylor's reflection, the unease and discomfort is not something new in the 18th or 19th centuries; the same unease had been moving Christianity in its constant process of reformation from its very beginning to the present time. Renaissance humanism, the scientific revolution, and the Protestant Reformation and Catholic counter-reformation are only some expressions of this constant reforming.⁸⁰

In other words, Taylor's understanding of secularity in terms of decline in belief and practices is not something linear as the mainstream secularization theory argues to be the case. Secularity should not be seen as the time where belief and religious practices will finally decline; it is rather a time that undermines earlier forms and creates space for new ones. Once the traditional ways of expressing belief and actualizing religious

⁸⁰ In Taylor's review of the history of the Catholic Church, the terms *reform* and *reformation* represent something constantly present in Christendom. From the early beginning, the Church has been in the process of changing and looking for new forms of expressing its faith. The meaning of terms *reform* and *reformation* depend on their historical context.

For example, when Taylor talks about the Catholic Reform in the High Middle Age, he refers to various attempts in the Church to inculcate a deep, personal devotion to God, through Christ or Mary. The clergy preached, persuaded, sometimes even pushed their charges towards a new, higher orientation, away from the traditional forms of the sacred and sanctity. Some hoped to bring people by fear to reshape them up at least minimally (2007, 496).

practices become insufficient -- that is, unable to provide convincing answers -- people start looking for new, creative practices and beliefs-systems, hoping that will provide meaningful answers. For this reason Taylor claims that more important than external social changes is the power and energy triggering these changes.⁸¹

c. Secularity as the Change in the Conditions of Belief

The third definition of secularity is in Taylor's writing the most complex one. It refers us to an intriguing process by which our moral, spiritual or religious experiences and search for meaning take place. In modernity we are at the end of the move from a society in which belief in God was unchallenged and unproblematic, to a society in which belief in God is once again understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest one to embrace. Taylor characterizes this move to the change that "takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others" (2007, 3).

In other words, belief in God becomes no longer as axiomatic as it was previous to the 16th century. In many places the opinion prevailed that exclusive humanism was

⁸¹ When talking about the Middle Age, Taylor distinguishes two meanings of the same term. By "Reform" with a capital R, Taylor refers to a growing dissatisfaction and uneasiness of masses of believers who cannot accept the demands of perfection of their time. "Reform" in this case refers us to many attempts to narrow the gaps between the simple believers, and élite, and clergy in their approach to the demands of perfection.

This "Reform" with the capital R has to be distinguished from "reform" with a small r. This latter term designates different attempts of dedicated people and various religious movements which were spreading new forms of religious practices and devotions, whose aim was to convert more people to the higher demands of religion. What distinguishes them from Reform is that they do not try to delegitimize less dedicated forms, but only to convert more people from these to the higher traditional forms (2007, 61-63).

the only alternative to the Christian faith.⁸² The term *religion* in this context refers us to a certain kind of belief and commitment whose conditions are being examined. Certain experiences that were before more or less occluded or left aside are coming now again to the fore as new possibilities. With these general observations and conclusions, Taylor delineates the main horizon of secularity, with no pretention to enter into particular situations.⁸³ Using the picture of the three-storey dwelling, we are now on the upper level.

Taylor explores the origin of this third type of secularity in terms of the *nova effect*, what he defines as “spawning an ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options, across the span of the thinkable and perhaps even beyond” (2007, 299).⁸⁴ Comparing this phenomenon to a similar effect in astrophysics, we have an image of an increasingly expanding number of options and alternatives in the field of religion, like that of the stars. As a result, the believer, facing this steadily widening gamut of options, finds himself in a

⁸² “To say we live in a secular civilization is to say that God is no longer inescapable. It *doesn't* mean that we live in a society from which God has been expelled. I don't think we ever *will* live in such a society for very long; the Communists tried that. But the nature of this modern secular society is that it's deeply plural. We have to accept that the ultimate grounding of the civilization we share in common is up for grabs” (“What it Means to be Secular,” Interview with Bruce Ellis Benson 2002a).

⁸³ Taylor does not want to go beyond general exposition of certain changes we are facing in modernity, because the same secularity has various meanings in different places. As a classical example, Taylor contrasts the situation in the USA and Europe. The USA has a long and positive experience of integration through religious identities, while in Europe the religious identities have been one of the factors of division. It seems that Europeans have interiorized the secularization story of steady decline of religion much deeper than the Americans. Europeans like to understate any kind of religious involvement, while the Americans prefer to exaggerate. The reactions against the state-church are much stronger in Europe than in the USA; consequently, exclusive humanism and militant humanism find better soil in Europe. The situation in the USA is different because there is a strong reaction of resistance against loosening the ties of religion, political identity and morality. Charles Taylor (2007, 522-529).

⁸⁴ Taylor adopts the term *nova* from astrophysics and uses it as an adequate example to explain the “explosion” of new possibilities and options in modernity. In astrophysics, the term *nova* describes the nuclear explosion caused by the accretion of hydrogen onto the surface of a dwarf star, which ignites and starts nuclear fusion in a runaway manner. Something like this happens in modernity when we have an explosion of new options how and what to believe. Taylor describes this phenomenon in the third part of *A Secular Age*.

very intriguing choice-making process, which is now in modernity much more complex than it was in the past. Faith and religious life become one option among many others (e.g. unbelief, atheism, materialism, exclusive humanism), and for many people ultimately an unviable one.

Taylor argues that there are different sources out of which the *nova effect* originates. One of them is the pressure that the agent experiences in his life (2007, 303). Since the 18th and 19th centuries, the believer has been deeply embedded in his identity as a buffered self with a strong feeling of invulnerability to anything beyond the human world. At the same time, that believer felt a sense that something might be occluded in his position. Living within the immanent frame, he experienced a sense of flatness and emptiness, that pushed him to search for something that could compensate for what he lost by laying aside the transcendent. The pioneers in this search were individuals who could not accept orthodox Christianity and preferred some alternative spiritual source. Others followed their examples of exploration. Their search went in many different directions, and every successive generation has increased the number of possible choices. This is not the case when the believer is embedded in his own faith and alternatives and pluralities of faiths have little or no effect on him. Once his deepest convictions are loosened, he becomes more open to other people's positions, which increases in him feelings of instability and fragility.

As the second possible source for explanation of the *nova effect*, Taylor takes the creation of a new order of freedom and mutual benefit; such an order triggers in the agent

negative reactions regarding religion (2007, 305-310).⁸⁵ In the 18th century the believer lived within the immanent frame in tension between the new order of freedom and mutual benefits on the one side, and on the other side, orthodox religion. He comprehended religion as something against his reason, as being authoritarian, posing impossible problems of theodicy, threatening the order of mutual benefits. The *scientific proofs* and discoveries in material nature reinforced in him the non-believer's way of reasoning. At the same time he claimed to better understand the universe, which is given to him to his benefit. As a free agent, he perceives God as a limiting factor, who does not help him in the way he would like. The eclipse of religion follows as a logical consequence.

Simultaneously, the sense of the fragility of meaning, the search for an overarching significance, the felt flatness of our attempts to solemnize the crucial passages of human lives, and the utter flatness, and emptiness of the ordinary, become more and more evident. Taylor calls these forms "malaises of immanence," which have risen up with the eclipse of transcendence (2007, 309). People do not necessarily seek the cure for these malaises through a return to transcendence. Their search for meaning takes place through a different reading of the same immanence. Some possible attempts at alternative readings are: a search for meaning in Nature, in the wisdom of the old, the bearing and loving of children, the protection of the young, in living a more *natural* life, elaborating more demanding standards of justice and solidarity, constructing a new morality. Taylor's idea is not to canvass all of the different solutions, but rather to articulate further

⁸⁵ In the chapter "Nineteenth-century trajectories", Taylor talks about the *nova effect* as an explicit reaction against Christianity in the 19th century. In Christianity, the heroes were saints, and suffering, obedience, and sacrifice were something essential. After the anthropological shift, the heroes become closer to the warriors of old, and the suffering results as an ineradicable dimension of the human condition which these heroes learn to face and surmount. Nietzsche was the most prominent figure of this view. Christianity, with its stress on peace and humility, and its hope of ultimate union with God, can easily be seen as an enemy, the original source of this enervating modern humanism (2007, 414-415).

the dissatisfaction, even the intense fear that comes of not having identified a satisfactory purpose of life. What we have then is another element of what Taylor calls the *nova effect* (2007, 310).

As the third possible source of the *nova effect*, Taylor suggests the crisis of civilization (2007, 416-418). If we take civilization as the constituent factor for the protection of life from violence through law and order, then this concept lost its meaning in wars in the 19th and 20th century in Europe and the United States. Many men became soldiers in the belief that they would be fighting to save and create a higher civilization, one that would be more democratic, egalitarian, careful of its less fortunate citizens, and more peaceful. But the result of the wars was an even more crushing disappointment and new crisis of civilization, pushing people into cynicism and despair, redefining the goals of society, and producing counter-cultural forms of art. In addition, this crisis of civilization was partially due to certain forms of Christian culture losing their regulative power over the social reality. All these phenomena are spreading the *nova effect* of belief and unbelief, Taylor concludes.

An additional possible source of the *nova effect* is “the development of new, unbelieving variants of the vertical ideal of order” (2007, 418-419). After World War I, many people remained terribly disillusioned by broken promises that would renew society and civilization. Their spiritual hunger and expectations remained unsatisfied. The ideals and values that they experienced during the war (e.g., command, leadership, dedication, obedience) inspired them to search for a new moral order, in which democracy, based on an idea of greatness, will, action, and life would be realized. There was no place left for the traditional morality of Christianity. As an example, Taylor

advertises to fascism, a reaction against the modern order that failed in its attempt to construct a better world. Communism like fascism introduced new standards: the impact of power, domination, conquest, will, personal dedication, including risking and giving one's life, with the ultimate goal of making something great out of one's life.

Summary of the Fourth Chapter so far and Transition

Three facets of secularity help Taylor to describe better the move from a world in which the place of fullness was understood as unproblematic “outside of” or “beyond” human life, to a conflicted age in which this construal is challenged by others that place it “within” human life (2007, 15). This move should not be seen as something taking place apart in itself; this move is intrinsically interwoven with the narratives about the (dis)integrating forces as we have analyzed them at the beginning of this chapter. My division in the narratives about the (dis)integrating forces and Taylor's reflection about the mainstream secularization theory is purely instrumental, with the intention to more easily comprehend Taylor's reflection.

The first facet of secularity, i.e. the retreat of religion from the public sphere, is freighted with the disenchantment process, Deism, and finally Providential Deism. From here, we landed in the third facet of secularity, when we talked about the changes of the conditions of belief. This facet promulgates exclusive humanism and different forms of the CWSs, including the narrative about the “death of God.” The common denominator to all of these forms is a growing conviction that there is no final goal beyond human flourishing. Paying no attention to religion and spiritual questions in terms of transcendence becomes in modernity one of the widely available options. Taylor notes

that it becomes obvious that a decline in belief and practice has occurred, and that the unchallengeable status that belief enjoyed in earlier centuries has been lost (2007, 530). With this movement, we witness an increasing pluralization of opinions, spreading out over the last centuries, first among the élites and then to other strata of society.

At the end of this move, we find ourselves living in modernity but amid much residue from the past. Taylor describes our world in terms of a culture that is ideologically fractured, with a growing expressive individualism, inhospitable to belief in traditional religions, remaining within the bounds of the human domain (2007, 727). The level of understanding of the great languages of transcendence has declined; a massive unlearning is taking place. The narrative about the individual pursuit of happiness as defined by consumer culture absorbs much of our time and energy. At the same time, the threat of being shut out of this pursuit of happiness through poverty, unemployment, and incapacity galvanizes all our efforts, as Taylor notes. When people reflect about their life, especially in the moments of relaxation, bereavement, or loss, they feel something pressing on their consciousness. This age is far from settled into a comfortable unbelief. Even though many people would deny their discomfort, the unrest continues to surface. Taylor summarizes this by saying that the secular age is schizophrenic. People prefer to keep a safe distance from religion, but at the same time, they find themselves moved by the examples of dedicated believers (e.g., Mother Theresa of Calcutta).

Behind the many changes and contradictions in modernity, Taylor looks for positive features that are too easily overlooked or put aside. In reference to the CWSs we spoke about four narratives, depicting four steps in the process of maturation of the modern consciousness (i.e., the rational “obviousness” of the closed perspective, the

subtraction story, the narrative of maturation and sociability, and the narrative of self-authorization). Taylor puts them together in a new narrative of coming of age, where the last one -- the narrative of self-authorization -- represents the possibilities of our present time with all its challenges and limitations. The human search for fullness has not been disappearing or losing its relevance through different shifts and changes. The search for fullness continues now within the frameworks of secularity, which becomes the condition wherein the search for fullness occurs for both believers and unbelievers alike. Religion in its presence or absence becomes largely a private matter. We can be engaged in politics, education, culture, the economy, without ever encountering God and without any reference to religion. The public sphere, less religiously permeated than it was in the past, does not ease the individual's decisions. The social world, based on a political ethic, democracy and human rights, tends to keep itself equally distant from positions of belief or unbelief.

Along with the shift of religion into the background, modern society is pervaded by the culture of authenticity and expressive individualism. These are two points where Taylor strives to put out newness, originality, and energy, coming to light in modernity. People are encouraged to find their own way of fulfilment and to "do their own things." "We could say that this is a world in which the fate of belief depends much more than before on powerful intuitions of individuals, radiating out to others" (2007, 531). If this is the case, we can look at the last five hundred years of our history as the move towards more personal, committed forms of religious devotion and practice, Taylor concludes. Is not this the dream of every religion?

The age of authenticity presents fertile soil for individual believers to find deeper answers. Their search for adequate forms of spiritual life has become in modernity very intensive. People are much more aware now than they were in the past that any kind of the CWSs cannot provide a satisfactory solution for their deepest questions. As an example, Taylor mentions Mikhaïl Epstein's reflection of *post-atheist* Russia, where people had been brought up under a militantly atheist regime (2007, 534). Despite their education, people reacted against their training and acquired some sense of God, which, however ill-defined, places them outside the world of their upbringing. In surveys these people declare themselves "just Christians," in contrast to those who adhere to a specific Christian confession. At the same time, they prefer to live their spirituality in a more immediate circle of family and friends, rather than in churches. Epstein describes this way as living spirituality in terms of *minimal religion*, where people are more aware of the individuals in the place that surrounds them, and less of the universal horizons of their spirituality.

Taylor takes this description as a powerful example of the desire to be authentic. He argues that modernity is the time in which a desire to be spiritual and to have one's own spiritual itinerary is growing. *Spiritual* in this case sense means keeping some distance from the disciplines and authority of religious confessions. Where this religious search will lead us is almost impossible to foresee.

With the examples of *minimal religion* and the growing desire to be authentic and spiritual, Taylor wants to emphasize that we live in a time in which the hegemony of the mainstream master-narrative of secularization will be more and more challenged (2007, 534). By this Taylor means that the solidness of the mainstream master-narrative of

secularization depends on how we read and interpret our time. Our imposition of the coordinates will determine our reading of reality. If our reading is based on a closed position, then even our interpretation of modernity will argue in favor of those secularization theories which are logically closed.⁸⁶ In this case, we deal again with a narrative of immanent frame, already analyzed previously in the discussion of Taylor's interpretation of the phenomenon of "spin," i.e., a reading of reality that avoids certain aspects of it.

Taylor suggests an opposite view or reading, based on a supposition that in our religious lives we are responding to a transcendent reality (2007, 768). By this, Taylor means that we humans are constantly looking for something that is deeper and higher in our lives, leading us towards fullness. In a more traditional terminology, we would call this a spiritual life in the broader sense of the term. Exclusive humanism is an expression of this spiritual search, even though it remains within the immanent frame. It is responding to a transcendent reality, but misrecognizing it or shutting out its crucial features.

This being the case, we are at the beginning of a future in which one feels himself breaking out of a narrow frame into a broader field, which allows him to make sense of things in a different way. "It can easily be that an earlier sense of fullness is now given a new and deeper meaning" (2007, 768). Saying this, we are already on a different level where the challenging question becomes whether we really want to be open to this broader horizon and aware of what we are shutting out. Breaking out into the broader

⁸⁶ An example of closed interpretation of modernity is what Taylor calls the "myth" of the Enlightenment. According to this myth, the Enlightenment represents our stepping out of a realm in which religion in general counted as a source of insight about human affairs, into a realm in which these are now understood in purely this-world or human terms. As representative of this "myth" Taylor sees Kant, Rawls, and Habermas ("What Does Secularism Mean?" 2011, 322-323).

horizon will destabilize one's present position, for both believers and atheists alike. Atheists will have to face the challenge that the fullness of life can have another dimension as well, and believers will have to ask themselves if they have really got God right (2007, 769).

I will now continue with exposition of Taylor's theory of secularization, which he represents as an upgrading of the mainstream secularization theory. Taylor proposes to discuss seriously the meaning of concept of *religion*, and in connection to it, the concept of *human flourishing*. Theories about secularization as a phenomenon in modernity constantly refer us to religion and human flourishing; they are two essential concepts for construction of any theory about secularization, and its relation to spiritual issues, and for a coherent understanding of these phenomena. So far we have seen that different secularization theories use the same concept in heterogeneous ways, referring to various social, political, religious, and spiritual phenomena in modernity. Taylor has explored the wide range of meanings, embedded in the terms related to secularization, pointing out new dimensions of these terms in the hope of stretching the boundaries of our understanding of modernity in the field of religion.

4.2.2 Taylor Imposes the Problem of Religion in Terms of Human Flourishing and Wholeness of Life

In the introduction to *A Secular Age*, Taylor early suggests that we should elaborate a definition of the concept *religion*. Usually with this concept we demarcate a set of beliefs, religious practices and institutions, which have different meanings in various historical contexts. So the meaning of religion in the 16th century is not

necessarily identical to how we understand it in modernity. Out of prudence, Taylor prefers not a rigidly defined religion because “we don’t need to forge a definition which covers everything *religious* in all human societies in all ages” (2007, 15). Religious phenomena are so tremendously varied that it is difficult to find their common denominator. Therefore, Taylor specifies the meaning of this word every time he uses it. For example, when he speaks of the mainstream secularization theory with three facets of secularity, with each one he refers to *religion* as that which is retreating in public space, as a type of belief and practices which are in retreat, and as a form of belief and commitment whose conditions are being examined.

Rather than repeatedly defining *religion* and its meaning in different contexts, Taylor imposes his narrative about secularization in terms of *fullness of life* and the human pursuit of this fullness. With this terminology he hopes to better explain the shift taking place over the last 500 years: in the 16th century, the fullness of life was unproblematically conceived outside of and “beyond” human life; now in modernity, the fullness of life finds its place “within” human life. To put it differently, Taylor interprets religion and religious phenomena as reflecting a distinction between *transcendent* and *immanent*, a distinction that he finds a more suitable tool for his project, i.e. “trying to understand changes in a culture for which this distinction has become fundamental” (2007, 16).

The main question of Taylor’s new narrative becomes the question of whether or not people recognize in their search for fulfilment something beyond or transcendent to their lives (2007, 16). This general question includes many others: what does human flourishing mean? How can we reach a fulfilled life? What makes our life worth living?

What are the final goals of our life? With his answers Taylor hopes to explain the move from the 16th to the 20th century. The recognition of the transcendent and the distinction between it and the *immanent* becomes a crucial factor.

In saying this, we are claiming that Taylor distances himself from religion or religious language. The distinction *transcendent/immanent* includes the domain of religion as well, even though it does not completely cover the same domain as religion does. Let us see now how Taylor justifies the use of particular terminology when talking about religious matters.

a. Discussion in Terms of Religion might be Misleading

When Taylor elaborates his theory of secularization, he speaks of religion in various contexts, whereby each context carries different meanings for religion. When we talk about the decline of religion and its retreat from the public space, we identify religion with the great historic faiths and an explicit belief in a supernatural being. Taylor agrees that this kind of religion has been in decline (2007, 427). Disenchantment, and the development of science and technology, have obviously accelerated this process of retreat and decline. But Taylor does not want to stop at this point because it would leave us on the level of sociological interpretation of “external” changes, without touching the core of the change.

Behind the fact of the decline of religion in the public space, Taylor sees something that he calls a very powerfully operative “unthought” of religion, underpinning much of secularization theory (2007, 427-429). The “unthought” of religion is what holds specific claim about religion, such as that religion is false and science shows this to be so;

religion is in modernity irrelevant because we have found better solutions; religion is based on authority, which is unacceptable for modern society that elevates the individual. Taylor finds these conclusions problematic because their use of the term *religion* excludes a wide range of spiritual and semi-spiritual beliefs and new expressions of people's ultimate concerns, which still express themselves in modernity in new ways. If we include these elements, then religion is as present as ever in modernity (2007, 427).

To avoid misreading or exclusion of certain expressions of religion, some theorists of secularization propose very broad, all inclusive, universally applicable definitions of religion.⁸⁷ Such definitions are for Taylor problematic and not suitable for his project. These definitions usually do not contain a line between natural and supernatural, or immanence and transcendence. Holding a broad and all-inclusive definition of religion, we might end up arguing that nothing has changed at all, which is the opposite of Taylor's thesis. The decline of religion and the many changes in the religious experience are significant facts of modernity, and to understand them, Taylor concludes, we cannot apply a too broad definition of religion (2007, 430).

When we speak of *religion*, we have much more than a hermeneutic problem; discussion about religion in modernity is heavily loaded with emotion and historical experiences that complicate philosophical reflection. For this reason Taylor prefers speaking about the *move* and *changes* from the 16th to the 20th century and not strictly

⁸⁷ Here Taylor refers to Steve Bruce's description of religion: "Religion for us consists of actions, beliefs and institutions predicated upon the assumption of the existence of either supernatural entities with power of agency, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose, which have the capacity to set the conditions of, or to intervene in, human affairs" (2007, 429).

In footnotes, Taylor mentions another definition taken from David Martin's book *A General Theory of Secularization*: "By 'religious' I mean the acceptance of a level of reality beyond the observable world known to science, to which are ascribed meanings and purposes completing and transcending those of the purely human realm" (2007, 818).

about *religion*. He focuses on what he calls “the transformation in religious life itself” taking place in the last five hundred years (2007, 553-554).

Transformation as such is not a phenomenon occurring only within modernity; Church history is full of battles against older forms of religious life and different efforts at reformation. The crucial issue is the moving power behind this transformation, and how do we in modernity embody and express our relation to the transcendent? In Taylor’s words:

The issue is whether our relation to the highest – God for believers, generally morality for unbelieving *Aufklärer* – is mediated in embodied form, as was plainly the case for parishioners “creeping to the Cross” on Good Friday in pre-Reformation England. Or looking to what moves us towards the highest, the issue is to what degree our highest desires, those which allow us to discern the highest, are embodied, as the pity captured in the New Testament verb ‘*splangnizesthai*’ [the Greek word for compassion or tenderness] plainly is (2007, 554).

This long citation calls for additional explanation, including the distinction between *incarnation/excarnation* and the meaning of *human flourishing*. At this point, I will focus on one aspect of Taylor’s reflection, i.e. on his question of what moves us toward the highest. What is that which is transforming us? Why are people constantly looking for something deeper to lead them beyond certain practices, theoretical insights or, more generally, beyond the immanent frame they live in?

With this kind of question Taylor criticizes those aspects of modernity founded on the analytical thinking and principles of the natural sciences; claiming objectivity, they uncritically neglect certain aspects of human life. Following such patterns, one can easily construct and move only within an impersonal order -- scientific, natural and objective, allowing a “view from nowhere” and, therefore, obvious, “right.” With this point Taylor strongly disagrees, as we have already seen. We have to take into consideration, he

insists, even those aspects of human life influencing us whether or not we can measure them explicitly. In the case of religious experiences and transforming powers of human life, we have to also talk about those aspects which are based on the individual experiences of love, prayer, special intuitions, aesthetical moments, values, and social life. All these and other similar experiences strongly influence our religious lives and cannot be simply measured with principles taken from the natural sciences.

Tackling the same point from a slightly different perspective, Taylor asks why the actual experience of living within Western modernity tends to awaken protest and resistance of various kinds (2007, 555). By this Taylor means that living within the frameworks of modernity, we are pulled in different directions between the open and closed perspectives. What is the full power behind these forces that continuously astonish us and contradict the claims of an impersonal order, which endeavors to provide us the best possible life conditions?

In short, the question is what this transformative power looks like and where is it leading us? Looked at from this perspective, it becomes obvious why Taylor wishes to go beyond the more traditional discussions of constitutional religion, belief and religious practices based on the existence of supernatural entities. Taylor wants to examine the process of transformation of human beings that goes beyond or outside of whatever is generally understood as human flourishing (2007, 430). Of course, religion in the traditional sense of the word finds its place in this process.

The term *human flourishing* calls for more specification; Taylor's concern is whether we are open as well to what is beyond human flourishing.

b. The Relation to Transcendent/Immanent Defines the Level of Human Flourishing

The crucial question for Taylor is whether people in their search for fullness recognize something beyond or transcendent to their lives (2007, 16-17). In a slightly different way, he reformulates the question, asking whether human flourishing includes a good which is beyond, i.e. independent of human flourishing. The answer is affirmative if we look from the perspective of Christianity or Buddhism, because neither of them holds human flourishing as the final goal. The goal is to go beyond flourishing as a value in itself, to the point of the extinction of self in the case of Buddhism, or to that of renunciation of human fulfillment to serve God in the other. In both, there is a transcendent dimension to human flourishing. As the opposite case, Taylor identifies immanence, in which the human agent finds fulfillment exclusively within himself.

But what does it mean to speak of *human flourishing* and *fulfillment*? Taylor starts with a very broad description of these terms (2007, 5). There are always certain moral and spiritual activities in our life which contain a higher level of fullness and richness. These activities make our life fuller, richer, deeper, more worthy, more admirable, more as it should be. They have an attractive and transformative power even though they may unsettle us by breaking through our sense of the ordinary being in our world. Some moments of fullness may occur when the deep divisions, distractions, worries, or sadness that seem to drag us down are somehow dissolved, so that we feel a wholeness, moving forward, suddenly more capable and full of energy. They help us to situate a source of fullness in our life, which might be connected with God, or nature, or with a certain force that flows through everything. Normally we do not have a clear vision of these places and moments, and we struggle to articulate or formulate them. They remain unsettling,

enigmatic, unclear, confused, and lacunal, and our articulation of them remains incomplete.

Within this broad description of human fullness, Taylor introduces two different ways of understanding human flourishing, the way of the believer and the way of the unbeliever (2007, 7-8). “The unbeliever wants to be the kind of person for whom this life is fully satisfying, in which all of him can rejoice, in which his whole sense of fullness can find an adequate object” (2007, 7). He is convinced that the power to reach this fullness lies within him. This power allows him to use reason in an instrumental way, to contemplate the world and human life without illusion, and to find the best possible solution to his flourishing. He feels capable of facing the meaninglessness and hostility of the universe, and of finding a set of rules likely to bring him to the fullness he seeks. Some unbelievers take a slightly different direction, claiming that the power to face the world will not come from autonomous reason but from elsewhere. Other unbelievers hold that human reason itself cannot provide the power to face the meaninglessness of the universe, because such a power does not exist at all; the best that humans can do is to have courage to learn how to face the meaninglessness in this world.

The way a believer understands human flourishing is different. He believes that human fullness requires reference to God or something beyond his life. He thinks that the fullness of life will come to him, most probably through another being capable of love and giving. This relationship might include certain practices like worship, prayer, or acts of charity. In short, he feels the need to be opened, transformed, brought out of the self, and receptive to a power that transcends him.

Both positions, Taylor concludes, have something in common. Believer and unbeliever struggle to justify their position. The unbeliever experiences a certain amount of unease that pushes him towards justifying his claims to unbelief. The believer experiences something similar when he argues for his belief.

Such a distinction between belief and unbelief is nothing new in modernity; every individual, independent of the historical period he belongs to, has to face this crucial question and take a position for or against. Taylor is not the first one to expose this problematic. What is original is Taylor's critical approach to those modern descriptions of human flourishing that are restricted to immanence and deny transcendence.

In effect, the origin of the power ("within" for the unbeliever, or "beyond" for the believer) leading to human fullness and flourishing becomes the criterion by which Taylor distinguishes between the positions of belief and unbelief. With the same criterion, Taylor defines the conditions of human flourishing. However, this criterion taken by itself is not sufficient to provide a complete understanding of the meaning of human flourishing. What is missing is the agent's embodiment in time and space. The agent's identity as un/believer always relates to the historical circumstances that shape his identity and understanding.

Taylor is explicit: we have to put the un/believing agent in the context of his lived experiences. We also have to take into consideration different interpretations of his experiences that model his life and justify his positions. More concretely, we need to look at the whole background of knowledge in which one either believes or refuses to believe in God. Doing so will make it evident why someone can live either "naïvely" or

“reflectively,” or why one or the other option becomes the default position for many, Taylor concludes (2007, 13).

When Taylor analyzes secularization theories, he follows the same logic; he explores them within the framework of their historical embodiment. While discussing three different types of secularity and three different definitions of religion, Taylor always relates the meanings of secularity and religion to their historical context. However, Taylor does not stop at a historical description; he always looks for whether or not people of that moment stay open and willing to accept something else existing beyond their present moment. Similarly, Taylor critically analyzes different interpretations and narratives about secularization -- how, if at all, they relate to the transcendent dimensions.

Taylor’s primary interest is not an investigation or interpretation of a strictly speaking religious or spiritual perspective where the positions are more or less evident. His concern is different. When looking at different narratives about our time, he wants to explore where they are open to something transcendent, or where they adhere to an immanent or closed position. His claim is that, with the modern secularity, we are for the first time in human history in a position where a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely acceptable option (2007, 18). Such a humanism argues that there is no final goal beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond human flourishing. The appearance of this type of humanism and its extension is something new and without precedent in our history.

This does not mean that exclusive humanism automatically became the only alternative to religion or that religion loses all functions. Religion is and most probably

will remain an essential feature of human nature. What is new is that this self-sufficient humanism shapes the frameworks or conditions of the background within which both believer and unbeliever look for new ways to human fullness and flourishing. Taylor states in his introduction to *A Secular Age* that this form of humanism is spreading out in all spheres of human existence to such a degree that we can speak of the end of an era of “naïve” religious faith (2007, 19). However, the same exclusive humanism has opened the door to some new, pluralistic, non-naïve options that requires a more “reflective” stance. Hence, the conditions of belief have changed in modernity, along with the scientific, social, technological structures we live in, and our understanding of these structures. This is the point that Taylor repeatedly makes in *A Secular Age*.

Nonetheless, exclusive humanism would have emerged without its religious roots. After many centuries we in modernity eventually reached the stage in which religious principles do not explicitly present the essential vectors of human life. Religious principles had been the essential vectors at the moment of the birth of this process and throughout its development, and only by virtue of these principles was the whole process viable. Now, at the stage of self-sufficient humanism, religion has lost its previous essential role and become only one possible life-forming factor.

This is the focus of Taylor’s reflection about human flourishing and fullness. Is the modern way to flourishing and fullness of life open to some higher good beyond such flourishing, or not? As usual, Taylor does not provide a direct answer but offers instead a description of different possible positions formed within modernity and exclusive humanism. These positions find their place somewhere between two extreme options: orthodox religion on the one side, and on the other side materialist atheism. The

coexistence of different positions and their mutual supplementing create a culture of cross-pressure, leading into what Taylor calls the *nova effect* (2007, 599), as we have seen. This culture of cross-pressure influences the agent's articulation of choices and his understanding of human fullness and flourishing.

Analyzing this culture, Taylor sees some groups holding similar positions (2007, 597-601). One group has as its starting point an anti-Christian orientation; it defines itself through its resistance to certain expressions of Christian belief. Another group takes utilitarianism as its starting point; the highest value for this group becomes the highest utility of consequences. Nature and the world represent both the instrument and the raw material for human purposes. Another group's starting point is moral order and the importance of being good (Kant). As a reaction to this, we have the Romantic group, emphasizing the importance of human spontaneity, creativity and desires. Nietzsche's critique of modern liberal civilization and religion presents still another starting point, one that opens us new options and reinforces the cross pressure of modern culture.

c. In Search for the Highest Form of Human Flourishing and Wholeness

All these groups have one thing in common: a certain notion of fullness in human life. Each group promulgates in its terms an understanding of human life as livable; life as good, whole, proper, satisfying. In the opposite case, life would leave us in abject, unbearable despair. Each position suggests its own sources of transformative power, driven by what it sees as the proper motivations. This being the case, Taylor concludes, we have to compare these positions and search out the most satisfactory one. "The

swirling debate between belief and unbelief, as well as between different versions of each, can therefore be seen as a debate about what real fullness consists in” (2007, 600).

Such a debate has many facets (2007, 601-604). An unbeliever can argue in favor of an utilitarian position that the real fullness consists in the satisfaction of certain human desires and needs (prosperity, family, health, friendship). Another can argue in favor of a heroic position: the real fullness consists in facing the absurd situation of our life where the very act of accepting the absurdity becomes the highest form of life. Taylor describes the “high” of this life in terms of a self-dramatization:

... we play a drama to ourselves in which are we lonely heroes; it is all a great show. In fact, what it covers over is an inability to find satisfaction in the ordinary human pleasures and fulfillments (2007, 601).

Performing this show, the agent wants to find satisfaction in ordinary human pleasures and fulfillments, even though he is aware that he cannot find them. Self-dramatization consists in the fact that he denies the possibility of satisfaction.

Even though the unbeliever seems to be the main player in this show of self-dramatization, a believer cannot completely avoid this play acting. If a believer claims that fullness exists in a certain lifestyle, for example in a vocation requiring self-denial, he might lose his conviction when he realizes that this position cannot fulfill him completely. Against this view of what constitutes fullness of life, the questions about the genuineness of motivations arise: the motives might be impure, perhaps based on the desire to be superior to others.

Taylor becomes even more specific when he discusses human fullness and fulfillment from the point of view of a believer. The debate here too has many facets; each one justifies the fullness of life in a certain position, which is influenced and modified

through different factors: the process of adopting or rejecting other positions, the cross pressure between different positions leading to the creation of a new position, the possibility of conversion, the attraction to certain values and motives, the ethical dimension, and political identity, or the sense of belonging to a broader society. All these and other similar factors determine the definition of fullness. As a result, Taylor concludes, the possibility of having an explicitly ethico-religious position about genuine fulfillment of life becomes a difficult option, requiring constant struggle. Other motivations which are not ethico-religious are constantly intervening and complicate the definition of fullness.

Hence, Taylor concludes that we should go beyond comparing rival notions of fullness and flourishing of life, and include in our debate the ethical predicament. The concept of the ethical predicament is much broader than the notion of fullness as such, because it includes also motivations behind our choices towards this fullness, obstacles and barriers on the way to it, and the notion of how integral fullness can be achieved. All these aspects have to be considered in the debate, to have a more complete picture of human flourishing, Taylor concludes (2007, 604).

Such a conclusion should not surprise us. At this point we are already familiar enough with Taylor's way of approaching and dealing with different issues; he often simply affirms that human existence is too complex and intriguing to be encompassed by arbitrary conclusions or definitions. As we have seen, this is one of his main arguments against the naturalist understanding of human life. For the same reason, he does not propose any singular definition or description of human flourishing, because there is no

one such sufficient description. He rejects any one-sided strictly dogmatic concept of fullness.

Instead of searching for a dogmatic definition and exact description of human flourishing, Taylor switches the focus of his reflection to provide some general guidelines on how to reach this fullness and flourishing (2007, 609-612). First, he discusses negative guidelines, or what we should avoid. Fullness cannot be reduced to the requirements of the disciplined, rational, buffered, disengaged rational agent, who is willing to sacrifice his spontaneity, creativity, and feelings. Fullness exists neither in the transformation of nor in the subordination of human desires to something that is “higher” sensually, as was the case in the sexual revolution in the later 20th century.⁸⁸ Neither can fullness be built on escaping, taming, or overcoming the opposed positions, whatever they may be.

What Taylor has in mind is a fullness in terms of integration of all human forces, drives, and desires into something that allows a more harmonious and whole life. The rational, emotional, sensual, creative, spontaneous aspects of bodily existence have to find their place in this concept of a harmony and wholeness. In a special way, Taylor emphasizes the importance of violence, sex, and human suffering, which are essential features of human life and which therefore have to find their place in the new harmonious vision. The only appropriate solution to dealing with them is to find a deeper meaning behind them. Briefly, Taylor changes his search for fullness to wholeness and integration.

Proposing the fullness of life in terms of the integration of all human forces, drives, and desires, Taylor enters deeply into the modern controversy about the place of

⁸⁸ “This is one of the deepest unresolved issues of our modern Western culture, which surfaced again in the sexual revolution of the later twentieth century. In a sense its roots go back to the very foundations of this culture. In one way, one could argue that this understanding of wholeness which has to include a crucial place for the body is a legacy of our Christian civilization” (2007, 610).

the deepest human aspirations, which are in their essence spiritual and religious in nature. These aspirations might be seen as denials of ordinary human desires and human flourishing; some interpreters say that these aspirations do not have a place in the modern picture of human flourishing. They point, for instance, to how much must be renounced, if we want to live up to the demands of a sexual ethic.

Taylor's reflection becomes even more acute when he talks about the human body, its desires, and fulfillments in everyday life; all these elements have to find their place in the human aspiration to have a whole and harmonious life. Taylor opposes those narratives which deny that we have to sacrifice our ordinary bodily desires, the fulfillments of everyday life, to reach a higher goal (2007, 640-641). Advocates of such narratives tend to comprehend the Christian religion as requiring mortification of such ordinary desires. Consequently, they favour separating spiritual and religious aspirations from human flourishing, and propose a definition of human flourishing that denies any role for mortification of the flesh. What the costs of their new vision might be, including depravity, they usually ignore. In Taylor's view, their proposal is an illusion. Independent of what our particular interpretation of the highest ideals or human flourishing might be, an element of sacrifice and mortification of our desires is necessary to secure the highest goals of human flourishing.

Nonetheless, we have to ask ourselves whether can we realize this new vision of the wholeness of human life, of the harmony between body and spirit, between bodily desires and higher aspirations, and between all human beings. Is such a vision realizable in our time, without deluding ourselves with utopian solutions? Taylor is aware of too

many revolutionary proposals from the last century (Marxism, Communism,⁸⁹ the sexual revolution), which imposed solutions for creating of a new humanism, that were failures being not only insufficient but cruel. Defenders of other diametrically opposed solutions say that we should abandon the search for solutions as such. Nietzsche would say that the real solution is to face and accept this hopeless situation. Freud would say something similar, claiming that we should abandon the goal of achieving psychic harmony.

Taylor agrees with neither of these radical conclusions about the final realization of human wholeness, harmony and integration. He prefers talking about the ideals we are capable of reaching, about the motivations behind our endeavor, and about the possible cost of this project. From the point of view of Christianity, for example, we might say that the full realization as such is not feasible; nonetheless, we can work for it in view of hope: "...central to Christian faith is the hope of an ultimate reconciliation of humans and God, and that in the (resurrected) body" (2007, 616). Saying this, we are already beyond the domain of this world.

Hopefully, my exposition of Taylor's reflection demonstrates sufficiently why Taylor prefers talking about the wholeness of human life and about human aspirations to it rather than about human flourishing. The discussion about wholeness offers a more

⁸⁹ In one of his first published articles, "Marxism and Humanism," in 1957, Charles Taylor critically analyzes Edward P. Thompson's position on Marxist humanism as the best solution in search for a new definition of humanism. Taylor's critique is based on the same Marxist writing. Marx saw the greatness of humanity lying in man's ability to remake his world and his own nature into a more human world and nature. The "working class" is the center of this creative power which will remake the world. Fascinated by these ideas, Stalin conceived "Socialism" in terms of engineering, which would construct the new and really human society in the same way as we construct a new building following the principle of architecture.

Referring to these ideas of Marxism and Communism, Taylor critically exposes questions about the value of man, about reduced understanding of his nature, the basis of the class morality of the proletariat, the realization of the brotherhood of man. Despite many weaknesses in argumentation, Marxism has to be taken into consideration, if we want to grasp the conditions of the modern world (*New Reasoner* 2, Autumn 1957, 92-98).

appropriately complex approach, one that integrates all aspects of human life into a new harmonious vision. Integration of all aspects of human life is not so evident if we talk in terms of human flourishing.⁹⁰

Therefore, Taylor reshapes his reflection and focuses on what he calls the “maximal demand,” that is: “How to define our highest spiritual and moral aspirations for human beings, while showing a path to the transformation involved which doesn’t crush, mutilate or deny what is essential to our humanity?” (2007, 639-640).

Taylor looks for the answer to this question within the context of the religious history of Western society. It appears that modern Western culture has been losing from its horizon the highest spiritual and moral aspirations, a loss that has led to many of the unresolved issues of modernity. There are many reasons for the loss. Common denominator of these reasons is something that Taylor calls “excarnation,” i.e. the transfer of our religious life from the bodily forms of ritual, worship, practice, to those that are more and more intellectual, residing so to speak in the head (2007, 613). More generally, we are witnesses to an increasing separation between the spiritual and religious, and the non-spiritual, or bodily aspects of human life. When spiritual and religious aspirations cease to be the integrating forces of human life, material reality in general and the human body in particular assume the central power which does not necessarily follow the spiritual and religious aspirations.

⁹⁰ Looking from the Christian perspective, Taylor writes, Christians are often called on to renounce certain kinds of life fulfillments because they are “lower,” because in the final analysis they are not what human life is really about. For many people this becomes a very troubling question because it makes nonsense of the sacrifice of Jesus, which is a complete negation of human flourishing. It would be easy to understand this sacrifice if there were something wrong with human flourishing. This is how unbeliever reads Christian renunciation, as a negative judgment on human fulfillment (2007, 644-645).

From my point of view, this is one of those issues where Taylor does not sufficiently elaborate his position, i.e. separation between the spiritual and religious, and non-spiritual and bodily aspects of human life. He talks rather more generally about the modern search for human flourishing, harmony, fullness and wholeness of life, as expressions of the deepest human aspirations. Recalling our initial description of Hegel's concern with unity, I claim that Taylor's reflection about human flourishing, harmony, fullness, and wholeness reflects the same concern Hegel dealt with. In other words, Hegel's attempt to unite two ideals - the radical freedom and the expressive fullness - finds new dimensions in Taylor's reflection on modernity. Even though Taylor goes beyond Hegel's position, the ideals remain identical: to fully express ourselves and to live freely.

In the last part of *A Secular Age*, Taylor talks about the meaning of life, that is, about one of the most important questions of modernity, post-modernity, or any other historical period. The question of meaning constantly challenges us and demands from us a new answer. The search for meaning intrinsically includes the question of belief, freedom, fullness, harmony and other crucial features of human nature. In the next subdivision, I will talk about Taylor's understanding of these features as part of a new, better, deeper, more meaningful narrative of secularization, as well as part of an answer on Hegel's concern. The concepts of faith, religion, Christianity, incarnation, exarnation, freedom, death, violence, and sex will be the main vectors of this narrative.

4.3 Belief and Faith as a Potential Road to Freedom, Human Fulfillment, and Wholeness of Life

Let us start with a short recap of the fourth chapter up to this point. In the first part we discussed some of those narratives which are deeply embedded in modernity and condition our way of perceiving reality. Through a historical and descriptive approach, Taylor exposes the conditions of belief in modernity; these conditions are different from those that prevailed before modernity.⁹¹ The main stream of secularization theories argues in favor of a secular time, in which religion, religious questions, traditions, and values -- in general anything related to religion -- has or at least looks to have a secondary importance. Taylor opposes such theories. While it is true that we have gone through a time of great change in many areas, religion included, nonetheless, questions related to the meaning of life and questions about fulfillment, integrity, and wholeness, are as vital now as they were in the past. What has changed is the way how we look for these answers.⁹² Hence, questions about the place of religion in life have to be considered seriously. Reformulating the same concern in different words, Taylor is constantly in search of what is meaningful and capable of integrating the deepest levels of human

⁹¹ More than about the conditions, Taylor speaks about the movement which can help us to explain our present situation, i.e. to be conscious of ourselves. This movement is in many points similar to Hegel's phenomenology.

⁹² In his book *Varieties of Religion Today* (2002), Taylor provides a historical overview of the place of religion in modern society, with a conclusion that we live in post-Durkheimian society. Its main characteristic is that individuals make what they can of their religious experiences without too much concern for how it all fits together on the level of society or different churches. One's conformity to some external authority does not seem comprehensible as a form of spiritual life. The religious life or practices that one becomes part of not only must be his choice, but must also speak to him; it must make sense in terms of his spiritual development as he understands it.

existence into a new whole, from which the religious and spiritual spheres will not be excluded.⁹³

We have already seen that Taylor challenges us with his question: why do we like certain solutions and, at the same time, avoid some others? His investigation of the above-mentioned narratives about modernity and secularization shows us the boundaries and limits of certain claims, claims that consequently provide us a peculiar understanding of freedom as well. The modern agent claims to be free and open, and yet he experiences unease and discomfort facing religious solutions, even though they have inspired and formed generation after generation before him. Why now in modernity do these solutions no longer seem sufficient solutions?⁹⁴

We have already found some answers to Taylor's questions. In this section, I again focus on the human search for meaning, this time from the point of view of belonging, religion, belief and faith, i.e., those dimensions of human existence that implicitly require an openness to something transcendent. From here, I go further into

⁹³ In the article "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy," Taylor compares modernity to a forest, which is virtually untracked. On our maps we can see some old tracks, but in the forest we struggle to find them. In the multiplicity of tracks we have to not only find our own but accept in humility that our fellow travelers are on different paths. Common to all travelers is the desire to find the fullness of life, the affirmation of something which matters beyond life, the search for meaning when facing suffering, and death. This modernity is to a certain extent inhospitable to religion, because it does not offer us scientific answers; it is incompatible with sciences (1996e, 18-26).

⁹⁴ "The blindness is typical of modern exclusive secular humanism. This modern humanism prides itself on having released energy for philanthropy and reform; by getting rid of "original sin," of a lowly and demeaning picture of human nature, it encourages us to reach high. Of course, there is some truth in this. But it is also terribly partial, terribly naïve, because it has never faced the questions I have been raising here: what can power this great effort at philanthropic reform? This humanism leaves us with our own high sense of self-worth to keep us from backsliding, a high notion of human worth to inspire us forward, and a flaming indignation against wrong and oppression to energize us. It cannot appreciate how problematic all of these are, how easily they can slide into something trivial, ugly or downright dangerous and destructive" (2007, 698).

Taylor's proposal for advancing on the road to a meaningful life by integrating different aspects of life.⁹⁵

Taylor's concern about the meaning of life remains the main focus of his numerous publications in the recent period. Through the analysis of so-called closed narratives of modernity, he constantly returns to the challenge of how to be open to something deeper and more meaningful. Independent of how good the structure of a certain narrative is, it should not ignore the question of human openness to transcendental dimensions. Trying to avoid or suppress this dimension is the equivalent of taking a closed position. Even when a good solution is found, the search as such does not end but continues in hope of finding an even better solution. In other words, those solutions which seemed to be sufficient in an earlier historical context might not be sufficient in modernity, because present challenges are different from those in the past.⁹⁶

Taylor posits the search for meaning in modernity midway between exclusive humanism and a more spiritual and religious interpretation, primarily based on Christianity. Since Western culture has been deeply embedded in Christianity, we have to take this perspective seriously into consideration. The debate about the meaning between these two positions is not a debate between two clearly opposed and internally self-consistent positions. In Taylor's view, it is rather a debate between two attempts to

⁹⁵ In the paper "Disenchantment- Reenchantment," Taylor describes the disenchanted world as devoid of human meaning. As a reaction to this world, people look for meaning somewhere else, what Taylor calls the process of reenchantment. Human meaning in this case relates to the ends of life, to what makes our life worth living, fulfilled, or brings us to a higher way of being (2011, 292).

⁹⁶ When Taylor speaks about secularization, he does not claim that with a new secularization thesis we can universally explain what are the movements and changes related to religion in different countries. Each trajectory is unique and different. However, talking about movement and changes is necessary because it gives us a general sense of where we are. What Taylor suggests is the following: "...the best way to deal with this is to be as clear as we can about the one [narrative] we are relying on, while being as open as possible to objections to and criticisms of it" ("The Future of the Religious Past" 214).

construe and come to terms with certain common dilemmas, such as how to unite the aspiration to transcendence in the broader sense of the word and the cherishing of ordinary human desires. It is a debate between the demand to understand and respect the biological roots of human violence and the imperative moral demand to end it. It is a debate between our allegiance to the modern moral order, universal human rights and well-being on the one hand, and on the other hand, our aspiration to wholeness by way of the rehabilitation of the body and desire (2007, 676).

Keeping in mind these dilemmas as background, Taylor indicates the road towards possible solutions, without giving us actual solutions. The search for meaning is the main normative aspect. Anticipating his conclusion, Taylor argues that there are certain goals in modernity which engage us more fully than our ordinary ends do; there is a fullness and richness of life in modernity that transcends ordinary life; there are unnoticed domains of modernity in which the human agent seeks for meaning.

The search for meaning in these terms remains a challenging task, because we live in a secular, pluralistic world, where the attractions of immanence are very strong. The loss of meaning is experienced as a real threat, what many people take as a reasonable option. To be able to go beyond these attractions and losses, we need a clearer view of those forces which govern this world and shape our spiritual mindset. So Taylor's reflection about the search for meaning goes beyond the division between belief and unbelief; it is more about the agent's unease when faced with a closed perspective and immanent framework.

I analyse these forces as Taylor presents them, and then focus on those areas and moments wherein people in modernity experience restlessness at the barriers of their life.

Suspended between the positions of exclusive humanism and religion, they look for a deeper meaning. These areas include: experiences of violence and suffering; an uncomfortable perception of sexuality, the human body and ordinary human desires; unease at living only within a secular time, especially when facing death. The list of uncomfortable areas is not complete. Taylor describes these areas in terms of dilemmas, where the modern agent finds himself exposed to different proposed solutions. In any event, they are valuable starting-points, from where we can take a new road to explore meaning.

By examining these issues, we are still in the area that Taylor calls “maximal demand,” looking for a path to realize our highest spiritual and moral aspirations, without crushing, mutilating or denying anything essential to our humanity.

4.3.1 Integration of Violence, Suffering, and Sacrifice

On the way toward having a meaningful life, we have to also deal with violence, suffering, punishment, and the necessity of sacrifices, all forms that seem to be in direct opposition to our flourishing and fulfilment. Taylor’s position is that these forms, which at least apparently negate human flourishing and fullness, will always remain part of our life. Our challenge is how to integrate them and find their meaningful role. With this argument, Taylor opposes exclusive humanism’s claim that human flourishing as such is the final goal of our existence.

In Taylor’s reflection, human violence and suffering seem to be less problematic if we remain within a cosmology in which religion is an essential part, and where sacrifice is regarded as a way to placate the highest spiritual authority. Within this

cosmology, believers perceive destructive forces, such as natural disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes, famines), or destructive actions (invasions, conquests, massacres), as forms of punishment. Suffering becomes an inevitable part of this view, calling for submission and sacrifice. People surrender to an external higher will, purpose, or demand that conditions and shapes their actions.⁹⁷ In this view we can explain different phenomena of so-called sacred violence and killing, in which people perceive themselves as being on the side of the gods, order, and virtue. In order to keep their status, they fight against the outsiders and those who cross their boundaries. To maintain the order of which they are part, they are willing to perform different rituals of killing and offering up of sacrifice, because it allows them a kind of purification (scapegoat mechanism).⁹⁸

Such a cosmological vision bound to religion has been losing its position in Western culture since the 17th century. Taylor calls this change the *anthropocentric shift*, i.e. the attempt to express Christian life in terms of a code of action in the saeculum (as we discussed with Deism). The main aim of this code is to protect basic goods of life like prosperity, peace, and mutual benefit, and find a way to achieve them. In other words, the secular goods become the contents of the whole code. With the anthropocentric shift

⁹⁷ “So religion since way back has been involved with sacrifice and mutilation; through the sense of the obligation to offer something of our substance to God, heightened by our imperfections; and through our strategies for dealing with the deep inner tremors that violence and destruction awake in us, identifying them with the divine, or internalizing their numinous power, or both” (Charles Taylor 2007, 648).

⁹⁸ Taylor does not go deep into the scapegoat theory, borrowed by the Christian anthropologist René Girard and his books *La violence et le Sacré*, *Le Bouc Émissaire*, *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*. However, Taylor uses Girard's theory to explain sacred killing as a form of purification. The more we feel we are somehow involved in evil, or overwhelmed by the chaos and evil of the world, the more tempting is the idea to reach for a mode of projection, in which the evil is concentrated somewhere outside of us. Fighting against the evil, we feel to be on the side of God who is the source of purity. The boundary between order/disorder, purity/pollution is in these cases very clearly drawn. Whoever crosses or erodes this boundary should be expelled, sacrificed, or killed. The advocates of this kind of warrior's action see in sacrifice a higher meaning and purpose. In Taylor's reflection, this mechanism explains certain phenomena (i.e. the Crusades) in the civilizations based on religion. They can also be applied to the modern secular revolutions (French Revolution, the revolutions in the 20th century, wars, violence), (2007, 685-688).

emerges an increasing critique of Christian faith and religion as a false spiritual perfectionism that sacrifices real, healthy, breathing, loving human beings, enjoying their normal fulfillment, on the altars of false gods. Sacrifice and human suffering progressively lose their spiritual dimensions and are more and more excluded, until they become invisible in exclusive humanism.

Taylor is very clear about this result (2007, 648-649). The development of the anthropocentric shift is in many senses problematic, because it takes from us faith that God not only wills our good and human flourishing but wants to ensure it, rather, God becomes a man, lives as we do, and finally dies on the cross. This divine suffering and ultimate sacrifice become incomprehensible in the perspective of exclusive humanism.

When exclusive humanism proposes a new moral order based on mutual benefit, there is no place for divine punishment and reward. Christ's suffering and sacrifice becomes incomprehensible; human suffering has only a negative meaning. If the good that God wills for us consists in our flourishing, what sense does it make to sacrifice some part of our flourishing and life to God? Such a strong reaction to Christianity is partially explained by what Taylor calls the *hyper-Augustinian juridical-penal framework* (2007, 651). Augustine's theological explanation of the human situation became dominant in Latin Christendom. In this framework the believer conceived himself as being in the grip of evil, incapable of helping himself to overcome his condition and become the creature he is supposed to be. The notion of original sin lies at the root of this reading. Next to this notion, Taylor puts the notion of atonement. Because of our sinning, we deserved punishment. We were in debt to God. God has paid this debt for us by his

own son, and opened the way for us to return. These two notions together -- original sin and atonement -- build what Taylor calls the juridical-penal framework.

Though not very explicit, Taylor finds concepts like *original sin*, *paying the debt*, *giving satisfaction*, *punishment of sinners*, challenging, and for many believers problematic. Hence Taylor chooses not to push the logic behind these concepts to their ultimate conclusions (2007, 652). These and other similar concepts seem to be in direct opposition to the image of the merciful Father welcoming his prodigal son.

Nonetheless, Taylor concludes that with the anthropocentric shift some positive benefits emerged as well (2007, 653). First, it allows us to detach ourselves from an obsessive sense of human depravity that consequently leads us towards a re-evaluation of human nature. It also allows us to take a critical distance from the juridical-penal view. Second, modernity breaks with some pre-modern concepts about human suffering and destruction. The idea of God's punishment of our sins is no longer a shaping motive for our actions. Before modernity, believers often perceived themselves as conquerors on a divine mission. In terms of God's punishment, they easily justified their violence against other believers, especially invaders of Christendom – “infidel,” “heretic,” and “wrongdoer.” Now, modernity rejects such terms and others, such as divine violence, mechanism of exclusion, and challenges the very concepts themselves.

Once freed of certain pre-modern hermeneutical views, we can see the mystery of Christ's sacrifice in a new perspective, Taylor concludes. God wants to enter into full vulnerability at the heart of human resistance and be human among humans, inviting us to participate in the divine life. Christ offers no resistance to human resistance; instead he opens the door to his unending action of loving and offering.

On the basis of this initiative, the incomprehensible healing power of this suffering, it becomes possible for human suffering, even of the most meaningless type, to become associated with Christ's act, and to become a locus of renewed contact with God, an act which heals the world. The suffering is given a transformative effect, by being offered to God (2007, 654).

Offered to God, violence and suffering are turned around and transformed.

...being guided by God means some kind of transformation of these [human] drives; not just their repression, or suppression, keeping the lid on them; but some real turning of them within, conversion, so that all the energy now goes along with God; the love powers agape, the aggression turns into energy, straining to bring things back to God, the energy to combat evil (2007, 668).

In this sense, one should also understand natural or human catastrophes, tragedies, tension, and suffering, not as a divine punishment, but as a source of meaning through God's steadfast decision not to abandon humanity. The central truth of Christian faith goes beyond sin, atonement, a hyper-Augustinian juridical-penal reading, the hermeneutics of divine violence and suffering. Moments of human struggling and suffering are in a certain sense privileged occasions of the believer's re-union with God. Taylor describes this re-union as an experience that is higher in the believer's life than a dimension of continuous longing and striving which cannot be resisted. Resistance to this re-union, or the rejection of the possibility of such a re-union, or believing in something other than God is the origin of sin. "Our sin is our resistance to going along with God's initiative in making suffering reparative" (2007, 655).

In Taylor's interpretation of violence and suffering, it is not enough if we take an external stance, and reduce violence to pathology or primitivism (2007, 671). Taylor holds that violence, suffering, and other forms of negation of human life are an essential part of human life. Taylor thus opposes both exclusive humanism and those modern ideas

which claim that imposition of order will end violence altogether.⁹⁹ Such an imposed order would reduce violence to a pathology or primitivism, to be treated in the same way as any other bodily disease. Such a position of exclusive humanism does not stand up to a critical examination because it includes too many contradictions and proposes as the final goal something impossible to attain. The critique comes from exclusive humanism as well, for example, from Nietzsche's affirmation and glorification of violence in the face of the utopian ideal of human flourishing.

Does all this mean that Christianity takes us out of the space of dilemmas that exclusive humanism seems unable to escape? Yes, but not necessarily, Taylor answers (2007, 673). It can, if it leads us into a kind of transformation, in which what Taylor calls the wild dimensions in human life (i.e., sex, aggression, violence, and suffering) preserve their numinous or metaphysical dimension. These wild dimensions of our life had their place from the very beginnings of human existence. It is true, however, that they have an ambivalent function: they are bad *qua* inflections of human nature. At the same time, they are good *qua* responses to God's call. To speak in terms of divine pedagogy, they have their role and function, and we are called to play our roles accordingly. Following the account of divine pedagogy, Taylor explains, that through the existence of evil, and human violence, suffering, God is teaching mankind how to transform these elements from within into something greater (2007, 668-671).

Transformation of the wild dimensions of human life does not mean negating them, or reducing them to pathology, or celebrating them, or taking an uncritical stance toward them. The solution lies not in what Taylor calls the therapeutic approach, through

⁹⁹ "We urgently need insight into the human propensity for violence ... this cannot be a reductive sociobiological one, but must take full account of the human striving for meaning and spiritual direction, of which the appeals to violence are a perversion" (2007b, 12).

which modernity likes to move certain human struggles, questions, or difficulties from the moral/spiritual level to a therapeutic level (2007, 619-620). It is true that modern therapy can deal efficiently with many sicknesses, mental and bodily. Yet when modern therapy presumes to be capable of providing remedies to the human struggle in terms of spirituality and morality, it deprives us of human dignity and offers us only empty solutions that take away from us the chance to face up to moral challenges. Human struggling and suffering should be taken as occasions for conversion, for growth in wisdom, for reaching higher insight. Again, we should think of them in terms of God's pedagogy. In the same way, we should face human error, sin and evil, not as pathological conditions curable through therapy. They are realities that negate certain goods as such. It does not mean that we should not fight against evil, sin, and errors, to protect the innocent and diminish the damage.

It becomes understandable in this perspective why Taylor claims that human flourishing, in the same way as any other good, can be sacrificed to God, should such be necessary or helpful for repairing our breach with God (2007, 655). If we look at the sacrifice of human flourishing from the spiritual-religious perspective of Christianity, renunciation of certain goods then leads us toward purification of our intentions, and consequently towards a transformation of our life, that leads us closer to God. God's will is that we humans flourish. The gospels are filled with different reports about Jesus' teaching, healing wounds, and helping people to return to the way that leads to their flourishing.

Nonetheless, the tension between human fulfillment and flourishing on the one side, and on the other side dedication to God remains very much unresolved in

modernity, Taylor states (2007, 655-656). The development of modern humanism makes for a tension in the Christian's attachment to the central mysteries of his faith. We lack adequate instruments for measuring and verifying the depth of a dedication to God. A hermeneutic based on sociological data is inappropriate in this case. Often it appears that the highest ideal of complete dedication to God remains attainable only to the exceptional individual, while the majority of believers contradict with their actions what they proclaim with words. Nevertheless, it does not follow that we should give up our ideals. The tension between the development of modern humanism and the central mysteries of Christian faith is resolvable not as an achievement but as an act of faith in God's plan. Such a vision may seem to be a sign of weakness for many, but for believers it is what makes it ultimately credible, Taylor concludes.¹⁰⁰

4.3.2 Intriguing Understanding of the Human Body, Ordinary Human Desires and Sexuality in Modernity

The second large area in which the human agent experiences restlessness and uneasiness for Taylor presents agent's intriguing perception of the human body, ordinary human desires, and especially sexuality. This area, too, has undergone enormous changes from the cosmological perception of the world in the 16th century until the present. For Taylor, the modern human agent faces a difficult task of integrating these forces into a new wholeness that will allow him to find new dimensions of meaning for his bodily existence. As in the case of integrating violence, suffering, and sacrifice into the whole of life, even here the human agent feels the pressure of exclusive humanism on the one side,

¹⁰⁰ "...the only way to escape fully the draw toward violence lies somewhere in the turn to transcendence – that is, through the full-hearted love of some good beyond life" (1999b, 28-29).

and religion on the other side. Taylor's analysis includes both sides and in its course points out some under-appreciated positive aspects of modernity. Even though Christianity remains under attack for being against bodily, human pleasures and ordinary desires, it still offers an option that allows a transformation of the purely material, bodily, and sensual aspects of life, that can lead towards integration of them into something more meaningful. Specifically, Taylor tries to rediscover the way in which life in our natural surroundings, including bodily feelings, expressions, and sexuality, can become a channel of contact with fullness (2007, 766).

Taylor's reflection goes beyond the tension of the sexual revolution in the 1960, when sensuality became a good in itself. This revolution opened up a myriad of questions about the relevance of traditional gender roles, equality of the sexes, recognition of the sexual identity in the public sphere, rehabilitation of the human body and its sensuality, a new search for wholeness by the overcoming of divisions between mind and body, reason and feeling. Behind these tensions, Taylor sees the modern dilemma of how to integrate the Dionysian aspect of human nature into an ordinary way of life, or how to contain the sensual within the ordinary (2007, 502). It seems that the traditional codes of human behaviour do not correspond any longer to the needs of the modern agent. The agent's desire to be authentic also includes the search for different, less traditional ways of self-realization, in which sexual fulfillment and ordinary human desires would find their place of coexistence. As the engine behind these desires, Taylor identifies the agent's search for unity and a new wholeness, in which feelings and bodily desires find their place in the face of the utilitarian and instrumental approaches to life, before which they felt themselves inferior and guilt-ridden (2007, 507).

The search for unity -- in this case, the aspiration to rehabilitate ordinary human desires -- goes, in Taylor's explanation, beyond the polemical divide between Christian faith and unbelief and exclusive humanism (2007, 618-624). This search is not to be seen as an attack on faith, especially the Christian faith, and its offering of asceticism, mortification, and renunciation of ordinary human ends as the highest spiritual goals. Such a reading misinterprets Christian teaching. Nonetheless, it is true that these high spiritual goals can lead towards neglecting ordinary fulfillment and creating a gap between the ideal and the ordinary. The same critical approach has to apply to the positions of unbelief and of exclusive humanism as well; they fall short in their attempts to meaningfully explain the aggressive dimensions of human nature. They leave us empty, unable to face the destructive dimensions of our existence; they underestimate the ability of the believer to transform or transcend these dimensions.

Taylor supports his search for unity and wholeness in part by citing the position of Martha Nussbaum (2007, 625-627). In her books, *The Fragility of Goodness*, and *Love's Knowledge*; she sees the roots of the human desire to transcend the ordinary condition of human life in the unease and fear that humans experience in their finitude, limitations, neediness, and vulnerability. Taylor adopts to a degree her interpretation, especially her notion of "transcending humanity." Transcending means neither to put aside our struggling as human, a struggle that makes our life valuable; nor does it mean to hate or feel disgust for our ordinary human desires and neediness, or to deny our limitations; nor does it mean to return to "immanent" life. In saying this, Martha Nussbaum criticizes the Augustinian interpretation of Christianity for having defamed, and rendered impure ordinary human sensual desire. This view impelled people to embrace exclusive

humanism, on the one side, and on the other side, to approve Nietzsche's position. At this point, Taylor deviates from Nussbaum's position because her interpretation is based too narrowly on a critique of a single specific interpretation of Christianity. Taylor suggests something else: transcending is a profoundly positive experience which involves the rediscovery and affirmation of important human goods in modernity (2007, 628). This statement requires the reconstruction of its historical background.

In the history of religion we know many forms, expressions, modes, bodily rituals, especially those of healing, through which people felt their bodies involved with something transcending their ordinary life. In other words, with their bodies they were in touch with something that transcended their material existence. Taylor's interpretation is that in the last five centuries we have witnessed different factors which have tended to diminish the bodily involvement in religious life: the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, continuous reformation of the Church through elaboration of more cerebral forms of Christian faith and rituals, the contemporary *Kulturkampf* in the United States, when some churches took on the secular world on issues of sexual ethics often narrowly defined, and other changes through which ordinary life has been continuously disciplined and dragged into a disengagement from a secular world (2007, 766-767). Other factors have added to the acceleration of change and diminishment of the bodily aspects of religious life. For example, Calvin's reformation of Christianity rejected sacraments, religious rituals, asceticism, and acts of propitiation (2007, 79-80); Kant proposed a new order based on reason, with no space for human feelings, senses, drives, or recognition of bodily existence. These and other similar restraints imposed on ordinary human life an impediment to bodily contact with fullness.

It is true that every change initially presents a kind of liberation and breaking of boundaries, opening new horizons for the human search for meaning. Nonetheless, it seems that the same changes in due time come to impose the limit on ordinary human life and interfere with the flourishing of bodily existence. In cases when imposition of pressure for renunciation becomes too strong, people react in an abrupt way, moving from acceptance of limitations to an opposite extreme side. Taylor explains in this way the outbreak of the sexual revolution in the 1960s, and the growing popularity of the Pentecostal movement, where bodily components re-occupy much space, and the accusation against Christianity of being hostile to the human body and its pleasures. Such an interpretation of Christianity is partially due to an uncritical identification of Christianity with its monastic tradition, which promulgated asceticism, mortification, and renunciation of ordinary human ends as the highest Christian ideals.¹⁰¹

Within these historical circumstances Taylor also explores the rise of the ethics of authenticity, previously discussed. The modern agent in his search for authenticity wants to overcome the suppression or limitations of his life by imposed codes of behavior. Religious life in terms of abstinence, renunciation, and sacrifice seems to be too demanding, limiting, and idealistic. At the same time, he feels disappointed with explanations of the disenchantment of the world; such explanations he finds unattractive, lacking as they do the capacity of appreciating and expressing the richness of human life in its bodily dimension.

¹⁰¹ Taylor's paper "The Future of the Religious Past" illuminates the struggle of people to express their deepest convictions, as well as the Catholic Church's attempts to reform itself. In both cases, the integration of sexuality, bodily desires, and elements of the festive dimensions of life represent something essential for the culture of authenticity (2011, 246-261).

Taylor's position is very clear at this point (2007, 673). As violence, suffering, and sacrifices have to find their place and right of existence in our life, so do bodily desires, sensuality, and especially sexuality. None of them should be and cannot be suppressed, controlled, fully negated or explained. When any of these happen, they promptly recall our attention to them in a disturbing way.

Taylor pays special attention to sex and human aggression and violence, which he also calls the wild dimensions of human life (2007, 673). There is a *numinous* or metaphysical dimension in them, constantly calling for our attention. They are *numinous* in the sense of being attractive and always present. Attempts at eliminating or banning them only reinforce their power. Therefore, they need to be seen in a larger context, in which they assert their right of existence and, at the same time, the human agent can transform them into something that brings him closer to fullness. Bodily desires, sensuality, sexuality, as with violence and suffering, are present in human life from its earliest beginnings. We should see them as having their place in the divine pedagogy. For this reason exclusive humanism falls short with its claims that we should get rid of religious and metaphysical beliefs. Once this happens, ordinary human life with its bodily desires ends in a trap of meaninglessness.¹⁰²

This rediscovery, reevaluation, and affirmation of the bodily aspects of human life belongs to what Taylor calls the positive aspect of modernity (2007, 628). What is

¹⁰² Taylor argues that from the early beginning of human history, sex and violence present ways of being connected to the spirits/gods or to the higher world. For example, sexual intercourse included certain rituals and institutions, such as temple prostitution and sacred marriage. In the same way, violence was part of sacred rituals and sacrifices. Excitement and inebriation, which participants experienced in performing certain violent and sexual acts, were considered as an entering act into *numinous* dimensions of human existence. These two dimensions are so deeply embedded into our human nature that every attempt to rigidly regulate or eliminate them, fails. For example, a rigid sexual ethic in which much must be renounced, or imposition of the warrior ethic in view of a peaceful society not only failed, but also left humans with newly open wounds (2007, 611-612).

recovered is a sense of the value of unspectacular, flawed everyday love, between lovers, or friends, or parents and children, with all its routines and labors. The satisfaction of love, work, and the enjoyment of natural world -- in general, the value of ordinary living -- becomes one of those significant constitutive elements of modern culture.

The rediscovering of ordinary life has in Taylor's reflection another very powerful aspect:

We live in an extraordinary moral culture, measured against the norm of human history, in which suffering and death, through famine, flood, earthquake, pestilence or war, can awaken world-wide movements of sympathy and practical solidarity (2007, 371).

These aspects of modernity would not be as attractive as they are without the modern rediscovery of ordinary human life, which makes us more sensitive and compassionate toward other people. Taylor states that these aspects of modernity would not exist without their Christian roots.

The willingness to relieve suffering or to face social injustice goes in modernity beyond the culture of Christendom, and seems to be less inspired by "transcendental" religious principles. Taylor talks about the extension of the Gospel ethic to a universal solidarity, to a concern for human beings on the other side of the globe, whom we shall never meet as companions or compatriots (2007, 695). Such a sense of solidarity and sympathy is typical for cultures embedded in Christian roots and values, and less evident in other cultures. Our perception of the value of ordinary life makes us more sensitive to the others' struggle. Our standards of a decent, civilized human life apply much more extensively now than they did in the past. However, our potential for reading and acting

more humanely often falls short because we do not act as we should. This failure can become a source of a growing sense of anger and futility.¹⁰³

This is also the context in which exclusive humanism was born, Taylor points out. “It [exclusive humanism] opened up new human potentialities, viz., to live in these modes of moral life in which the sources are radically immanentized” (2007, 255). This is an achievement because we can be inspired and empowered to beneficence by an impartial view of things. Such a reaction does not occur automatically, and is not given us by nature; it requires training and much work on ourselves. In short, exclusive humanism can become a new moral source, which should not be lightly dismissed.

For all these reasons, Taylor argues that we need a new spiritual account, which will integrate ordinary human desires, sensuality and sexuality, into a new view of the whole (2007, 627-634). This account should recognize the positive forces and value of the ordinary life. This does not mean that the riches of ordinary life are necessarily in conflict with the aspiration to transcendence. Just the opposite is true; once we experience the ordinary simple life, in which the sensual and bodily aspects are integrated and properly valued, we can talk about transcendence. Here Taylor, following Martha Nussbaum’s reflection, distinguishes between “internal” and “external” forms of transcendence, in relation to the immanence/transcendence division. This distinction is artificial and to some extent misleading, but nevertheless helpful here for going more deeply into Taylor’s argument.

¹⁰³ “The tragic irony is that the higher the sense of potential, the more grievously real people fall short, and the more severe the turn-around will be which is inspired by the disappointment. A lofty humanism posits high standards of self-worth, and a magnificent goal to strive towards. It inspires enterprises of great moment. But by this very token it encourages force, despotism, tutelage, ultimately contempt, and a certain ruthlessness in shaping refractory human material. Oddly enough, the same horrors which the Enlightenment critique picked up in societies and institutions dominated by religion” (2007, 697).

By internal transcendence, Taylor means something that finds place inside of our life. Some aspects of our life (sensual desires, sexuality, violence, aggression, domination) are so deep in us that they cannot be removed, negated, or extirpated by therapy. These aspects call us to be transformed and to transcend in the sense that they lead us toward a deeper fulfillment of our life. If we have a vision and desire, in which we invest our whole being, then these wilder aspects of our life can help us to come closer to this vision. Transformation in this sense leads us beyond these problematic aspects; beyond the reach of therapy when it tries to cure them as pathologic or dangerous; beyond the reach of education which can provide us necessary knowledge and skills, but cannot transform us. Therapy, education, bodily drives can help us to become open to something deeper; they can enable us to move toward something greater. However, they cannot provide us with the deepest fulfillment, or meaning, or happiness.

External transcendence imposes on our life ideals and human goods that are high and as such never fully attainable in this life. They help us to transcend certain moments of our life and remain open to new possibilities. They should not be so high that they lead us into despair, and consequently to surrender the same ideals.

It does not mean that we will fulfill our aspiration to transcendence effortlessly, completely, or without conflict. Effort, struggle, dilemmas will remain inseparable from human life. Taylor is realistic; the issue of transcending humanity is not easy to resolve (2007, 630). But one thing is obvious: the aspiration to transcendence cannot be eliminated. The position of exclusive humanism, secular humanism, Nietzschean perspective, or whoever negates the importance of religious dimensions in human life, leaves too much unexplained. What will transform our life, and keep us open to the

transcendental dimension, is the full-hearted love of some good beyond life. Christianity offers here the possibility of a transformation based on hope and faith. In modernity this offer is easily dismissed as an unreal optimism, or substituting hope for reality, or propagating a comforting myth about the human conditions that obscure the hard truth. Taylor disagrees with such a reading of Christianity, because it is based on the assumption that Christianity cannot accept our sensual nature (2007, 636).

4.3.3 Search for Meaning in Secular Time

An additional factor pushing the human agent in modernity into the search for a deeper meaning is the sense of unease experienced within secular time. Even in this case, Taylor examines those forces of modernity which are moving the modern agent in his search for something deeper within secular time (2007, 712-720). Taylor concludes that we need to rediscover a time lived beneath or beyond the secular time, that will allow us to connect our present with our past and open ourselves to the future. Again, a religious interpretation based on our Christian tradition can offer a meaningful answer.

Earlier in this chapter we spoke about Taylor's description of the disenchantment process and about the mainstream secularization theory. We also mentioned Taylor's shift from living in a world ordered by a higher time which coordinates the agent's daily routines, to a world of a secular time, where the agent's awareness of the higher time lost its ordering function. Once society was organized in a hierarchical fashion, with privileged persons (i.e., kings, priests, churchmen), whose position was founded on a higher level and in some regular time. What followed was that the whole society was based on this hierarchical order. With modernity, the hierarchical perception of society

and people's life gives its place to a horizontal perception of time and social life; a perception that becomes the main characteristic of secular time. Time becomes a homogenous container, indifferent to its content, with no place for alteration or complementarity between the opposed values, without relation to anything higher. Time is an instrument, which can be managed and regulated for certain pre-established purposes. Time, as well as human life, is measured by the accomplishment of these pre-established purposes.

When the agent lives purely within a horizontal dimension of time, his life becomes burdensome because it is too homogeneous and empty. He starts looking for something higher and more satisfying than common action in secular time. He imagines a new whole, shaped through cycles, routines, recurring forms, times of heightened and lesser activity, holidays; all these help him to a new orientation. He creates new narrations, stories, feasts, memories, commemorations, through which he moves beyond a purely horizontal perception of time. To this end, modern society involves narrations about birth, growth, development, revolutions, or important changes of the same society. Through these narrations, the members of that particular society revitalize their hidden potentials and open new horizons for their further development. Celebrations and memorials of important events or commemorations become the essential features of that society, as well as powerful sources for revitalizing and strengthening the uniting forces of that society. In other words, they represent the opening and transcending of the horizontal perception of time.

Taylor in his description of modern society mentions some peculiar narratives about human self-realization, for example stories about progress, Reason and Freedom, or

about Civilization, Decency, Human Rights, in the coming to maturity of a nation or culture (2007, 716). These stories include elements of invention, creation, and innovation. These story-elements find their place within a larger story - the narrative of human self-realization, which gives a sense of unity to fragmented modern life. Thus, the routine-filled life of dedicated doctors, engineers, agronomists, scientists can find a place within the larger, more inspiring narrative. Somewhat surprisingly, this narrative of progress and significance has come under attack in the post-modern world, which questions these narratives aimed at changing the landscape of emptiness and flatness. These narratives, too often fail to provide the fullness and meaning that they promised, Taylor ascertains (2007, 717).

The actual results of an industrial civilization include the creation of industrial wastelands, capitalism, mass society, and ecological devastation that makes even more problematic the role of the narratives about rise and growth of civilizations. The order and disciplined routines of everyday life seem to come challenging and meaninglessly repetitive. In short, these attacks and the correlated modern unease are expressions of the search for meaning, which is in Taylor's view the central preoccupation of modernity.

As a possible answer to this craving, Taylor claims we need to acknowledge this uneasiness within secular time. The modern agent is sensitive to the emptiness of secular time. As a possible road out of his unease and sense of meaninglessness, Taylor suggests a look back into our tradition, where we can rediscover the patterns, cycles, and routines of our forebears. This rediscovery should be much more than a meaningless revival of certain traditional habits left behind when they lost their inspirational power. What Taylor offers is rediscovering, respecting and following the repeatable cycles of our

forebears, so as to be able to enter into a kind of continuity with them and knit together different facets of our present life with those who came before to tell a larger unbroken story. What they handed on to us as their life patterns will become in this way part of our life; our re-enactment of these patterns will become an expression of our honoring and remembering them. Consequently, we experience a longer time-frame and a larger cycle to oppose the discontinuities of our life and to show us an exit from the emptiness of secular time. “That the repeatable cycles of life connect over time, and make a continuity, is an essential condition of a life having meaning” (2007, 719).

Taylor defines this as the need to rediscover a lived time beneath or beyond the secular time, and the need to be in connection with it. Such a rediscovery will bind our present time to the past, and open the door out of what Weber describes as an iron cage (2007, 719-720). Taylor finds this image very appropriate to represent a life of imprisonment in the routine, banality, and endlessness, shutting us off from the meaning of life. Even in this case, a religious interpretation can offer us a meaningful answer. In the case of our civilization, this is the Christian tradition.

In his reflection about the search for meaning within secular time Taylor includes also the agent’s experiencing of unease when faced with death. There is no way to escape this fact about our life, which seems to deny a sense of meaning to our life and happiness. Questions about the meaning of death and life after death inevitably have to be addressed. Taylor takes the experience of death as the privileged site from which the meaning of life can be grasped, and in which the scattered moments of our life can be gathered into a new whole.

The question of death is so significant – especially when the deceased is our beloved – that it makes us more sensitive for eternity. Keeping the beloved person’s memory alive and returning to the joyful shared moments can be seen as expressions of our striving for eternity. The very act of holding something in memory makes the present and the past more alive. The visual arts and literature can become another form of the agent’s desire for eternity. Even the membership in the clan, the social group, or the family, can become a link to eternity; in this allowing humans to recall their origins and to see the continuation of life in their children. Funeral rites have always presented a special way of connecting the deceased to the eternal. With these examples Taylor shows that the yearning for eternity is neither trivial nor childish as it is often depicted in modernity; it is a serious, unquenchable longing, in the face of which even a committed atheist has to take pause before rejecting it. Even more: avoiding or negating this longing can undermine the meaning of life, and have an ethical impact on it (2007, 722).

As the answer to where to find the meaning of death, Taylor rejects the epicurean solution, namely to celebrate a continuous enjoyment of the present moment as the deepest, most powerful kind of happiness and meaningfulness. Such a solution does not pass critical examination because it subordinates too rigidly the meaning of life to happiness and temporary enjoyments, which lose their meaning in the face of death.

However, Taylor uses the epicurean’s struggle to justify his position as a further example of how important the question about death and eternity is, and how those locked within secular time cannot find a meaningful answer to it. So Taylor’s conclusion that “...death, in particular the moment of death, is the privileged site from which the meaning of life can be grasped” (2007, 723), finds the normal site because it pushes us to

go beyond unbelief, confusion, and the distraction of life and opens the door to something transcendent, beyond human flourishing, a life beyond this life. Taylor calls this paradoxical idea “immanent transcendence,” which we have seen in the discussion of the Immanent Counter-Enlightenment.

Even in the case of this paradoxical idea, explanations based on religion remain valuable sources of exploration, because they can point to new sources for life. Death and the moment of death have an ineradicable place in religious traditions:

...death as the giving up of everything, of one’s very self, in Christianity; the hour of death as a crucial moment, therefore (“pray for us now and at the hour of our death”); a status it has as well in most Buddhist traditions. In Christian terms: the locus of death, as the place where one has given everything, is the place of maximum union with God; and therefore, paradoxically, the source of most abundant life (2007, 725-726).

Summarizing these points, we have seen how Taylor’s interpretation of certain experiences (violence, suffering, sexuality, perception of the human body, ordinary human desires, life within secular time, and the experience of facing death) stimulate the agent’s search for a deeper meaning, which goes beyond the domain of exclusive humanism and remains open to a possible answer from the religious domain. With each one of these experiences, Taylor challenges the modern search for meaning with an interpretation based on religious dimensions, especially those of Christianity. If Christianity belongs among the formative forces of Western civilization, then modernity has to take into consideration its interpretation; otherwise, the modern search for meaning remains in its search inexplicably selective, if not ideological.

4.3.4 Incarnation and Excarnation as Two Modes of Living Christianity

The question of the role of Christianity in modernity, as Taylor interprets it, demands our additional attention. Taylor is far from either uncritically rejecting or rigidly approving Christianity, and Catholicism in particular, in modernity. His reflection about Christianity is much more than a historical overview; it is also an evaluation of those modes which seem too rigid in their interpretation of the right way of living religious life, as well as those social regulations and religious institutions which are exclusively rooted on religious principles. Taylor's position is that with a narrow-minded and rigid understanding of religious principles, we risk overlooking the domain of human freedom and the agent's struggle to find meaning.

Why Christianity is one of the main formative sources of our Western identity, Taylor explains in his book *Sources of the Self*. In *A Secular Age*, he takes a step forward and develops two modes or ways of living out the deepest religious convictions of Christianity: the way of incarnation and the way of excarnation. In both cases, Taylor uses more descriptive definitions of these terms than dogmatic and normative, always tying them up to specific historic circumstances. He comprehends these two ways as two complementary poles of the believer's struggle to express what he believes; therefore, they should not be held separately. They present two vectors shaping the religious and spiritual life of the believing individuals and the functioning of religious institutions. At the same time it is also true that one of the two poles normally prevails over the other, and correspondingly marks more distinguishably the nature of religious life. For the sake of our understanding, I will analyze these two poles separately.

a. The Way of Incarnation

Without going into a deep theological discussion, Taylor delineates the meaning of incarnation concisely (2007, 278). Incarnation is the core notion of Christianity: God became a person in order to reestablish the communion of humans with God. This communion also allows transformation of the human, his emotions, body, history, and integration of a person into his true identity. Taylor challenges exclusive humanism to accept the notion of incarnation as a possible meaningful answer to the human search for meaning; at the same time, Taylor challenges believers to find a new language through which the notion of incarnation will become a more attractive concept.¹⁰⁴

Following the biblical account, God created the universe. Throughout human history, God constantly and in different ways intervenes in human life. Finally, God entered into the human drama in a very explicit way. The Incarnation first and then the Crucifixion took place in a very specific time and place, in which Jesus with his body, heart, emotions, entered into communion with humans. God invites us humans to be partakers in a loving personal communion. Reinforcing the importance of a personal relationship between God and humans, in the 4th century the notion of the highest being as a personal being, a “person,” became a central element of belief, particularly stressed by the Cappadocian Fathers. This notion has remained for centuries up to modernity at the center of theological reflection, especially as Christianity relates to the pagan ideas of deity. This central notion also causes immense intellectual problems for non-Christians.

¹⁰⁴ “[E]motions have their proper place in the love of God, where love describes the nature of the communion. But it also underlines all the other changes: communion has to integrate persons in their true identities, as bodily beings who establish their identities in their histories, in which contingency has a place. In this way, the central concept which makes sense of the whole is communion, or love, defining both the nature of God, and our relation to him” (Charles Taylor, 2007, 279).

Faith in God's incarnation is the main theme of Christianity, which has constantly stimulated the theological and philosophical reflection and at the same time, shaped the faith of individuals, different traditions, ethical teachers, and the whole organization of societies. For example, the medieval idea of bringing Christ to the people, especially to the poor, shifted the center of spiritual gravity from a monastic life to a more apostolic life, and became an aspiration for many Church movements (2007, 93). Since the High Middle Ages, Taylor argues, Western society has repeatedly attempted to integrate faith more fully into ordinary life. Inspired by the notion of incarnation, many believers attempted to combine their faith in the incarnate God with their everyday life on the personal and social level. However, the same need to make God more fully present in the everyday life, paradoxically led to the movement of faith in a purely immanent world, as we have seen this in the discussions of Disenchantment and Deism (2007, 144-145).

The gradual deviation from the traditional Christian position led to a modern moral order characterized by unbelief and exclusive humanism, which claimed to be superior to Christianity on the basis that: (1) exclusive humanism rewards benevolence now and here, and not in the hereafter; (2) Christianity seems sometimes to exclude heretics and unbelievers from its domain, while humanism seems to be more universal (2007, 361).

The move away from Christianity should not necessarily be seen as a negative move or as an explicit rejection of Christianity. Taylor is explicit at this point, as we have seen already in his interpretation of the mainstream secularization theory. There is something positive in the move toward a more ordinary life in which the personal relations matter, in the rehabilitation of the sensuous and the material, in the personal

search for meaning. These changes are less an attack on Christianity, than a challenge for Christianity to provide newer and deeper meaningful answers.

Besides this historical deviation from Christianity, Taylor sees other factors confronting the same religious interpretations of the world and pushing them away from less mature forms of understanding into a new search for greater depth and meaning (2007, 363). These factors include: the scientific explanation of the world, nature, and of our human nature (for example: Darwinism) and Biblical criticism calling into question the sources of the Bible. The impersonal universal order based on scientific principles and disengaged reason creates a new universal perspective, more all-inclusive and integrating different interpretations. This perspective creates a moral demand to rise above and beyond our particular, narrow, biased view, to a more universal view from everywhere, or for everyone, the analogue of the “view from nowhere” that natural science strives to occupy. This impersonal universal order challenges Christianity with a new call for universalism, requiring a new interpretation of the meaning of God’s intervention in human history.

Taylor redefines this dilemma in a slightly different manner with less religious terminology when he talks about the notion of fullness of life in terms of the maximal demand.

How to define our highest spiritual or moral aspirations for human beings, while showing a path to the transformation involved which doesn’t crush, mutilate or deny what is essential to our humanity? (2007, 639-640).

With this question, Taylor does not differ much from the question of the first Christians when they tried to comprehend the meaning of God’s intervention and incarnation in human history. Taylor’s interpretation of the maximal demand overlaps

with the meaning of God's incarnation. The final goal is the same in both cases: transformation of humans toward the end of their being fully human. The difference lies in the starting point, which is more anthropological in the case of the maximal demand, and more explicitly religious in the case of the incarnation.¹⁰⁵

Taylor likes, with his critical analyses, to confront exclusive humanism in its closedness to some possible solutions. At the same time, Taylor also likes to challenge certain theological points and practices of the Christian tradition.¹⁰⁶ The notion of incarnation is supposed to be the principle which indicates the underlying road towards the sought-for wholeness and fullness of life, that is, union with God. This union integrates all aspects of life into a new whole. Therefore, this notion of incarnation has to remain even in modernity as part of the aspiration toward the meaning and fullness of life. But at this point Taylor sees a gap between the human search for meaning and the Church's struggle to articulate persuasive answers to the role of the incarnation. We have

¹⁰⁵ Do I interpret the notion of the "maximal demand," i.e. the notion of the fullness of life as Taylor understands it, as an un-baptized assimilation of the notion of incarnation? Is Taylor secretly reintroducing some of the Christian dogmas into modernity through the back door of exclusive humanism? My answer is negative. Taylor's primary intention is neither to find a substitute for the Christian position, nor to uncritically accept modern positions, even less to merge secretly or mysteriously both of them into something new. Taylor's intention is to indicate some possibilities that Christianity is offering us meaningful answers for a modern search for flourishing. It is true that from the point of view of exclusive humanism, the Christian answer with its notion of God's incarnation remains a hardly acceptable option. If exclusive humanism is really as open and willing to explore all possibilities of human flourishing as it claims to be, then it has to take seriously into consideration Christianity as well. Even more, if we take Christianity as one of the essential factors that has formed the Western civilization in the last 2000 years, then its offerings by Christianity have to be explored seriously.

¹⁰⁶ In his paper "A Catholic Modernity?", Taylor explains what he means by Catholicism, referring to the Greek word *καθόλου* in two related senses: universality and wholeness. Human lives are different, plural, and irreducible to each other; however, there is oneness of diverse beings who come to see that they cannot attain wholeness alone; their complementarity is essential and does not destroy their identity. *Καθόλου* therefore means unity-across-difference, as against unity-through-identity. From this description Taylor deduces that there is no widening of the faith without an increase in the variety of devotions, spiritualities, liturgical forms, or other responses to Incarnation. The advantage of modernity is that we have this vast field of spiritualities already there before us, which remind us that we need to complement our own partiality on our road to wholeness (1999b, 14-15).

already seen that this gap is partially the result of the same tradition gradually distancing itself from its religious basis.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, Christianity remains confronted by the challenge of how to expose and interpret the principle of incarnation in a way that is acceptable and meaningful to modernity.

Keeping in mind this tension between Christianity and modernity, and trying to find a satisfactory answer, Taylor suggests reintroducing the meaning of God's incarnation and Jesus' suffering and death on the cross as the transformative power for us in modernity. Despite human resistance to God, God continuously enters in full vulnerability among humans, offering them the possibility of participation in the divine life. Jesus' life and his final sacrifice offered on the cross provoked even greater resistance, to which he answers with love, submission, limitless self-giving, and infinite openness. Jesus' action transformed violence into its opposite, and opened a whole new path, limitless selflessness, and infinite openness.

On the basis of this initiative, the incomprehensible healing power of this suffering, it becomes possible for human suffering, even of the most meaningless type, to become associated with Christ's act, and to become a locus of renewed contact with God, an act which heals the world. The suffering is given a transformative effect, by being offered to God (2007, 654).

¹⁰⁷ "My claim in the earlier chapters was that [...] mainline Christianity in the West was deeply affected by this narrowing of the gap [the gap between "this world" and "next world"], especially but certainly not only in Protestant societies. And the gap in some ways narrowed even further in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the sense of civilizational superiority, which grew with Western colonial power, became interwoven with a sense of Christendom as the bearer of this civilization. Missionaries brought Christianity to the non-Western world, often with the sense that they were also bringing the bases of future prosperity, progress, order, and (sometimes also) democracy and freedom. It became hard for many to answer the question, what is Christian faith about?" (2007, 736).

"In other words, the ideal of Christendom has tended to evolve since the age of Dante. Then there was a strong sense of the gap and inescapable tension between the ultimate order of the Parousia, which is in the gestation today, on one hand, and the established order of civilization as we live it, on the other. In many Christian milieux in modern times, that gap has narrowed, and the tension lost sight of" (2007, 736-737).

Our accepting of this initiative opens to us new horizons of meaning. For example, a catastrophe, involving human suffering, or violence, or human sin in general, can be seen not as punishment, but as an occasion for the working out of God's steadfast promise not to abandon humanity in its worst distress.

When Taylor speaks of God's love for humans, he is aware that he is speaking of a kind of mystery. For some this mystery is equal to non-sense, because of the difficulty of the matter. Yet its mysterious nature can not diminish the relevance of incarnation in modernity. To put it differently, incarnation remains a possibility calling us to search for a deeper meaning in it. Taylor formulates this question as a dilemma in terms of which approach we should take either : (1) an approach based on right/wrong issues, in which every change includes a gain or loss of truth; or (2) an approach to faith from very different ways of life (2007, 753).

Taylor is inclined to the second approach, which can enlarge our horizons and free us from the narrowness of the first approach. Taylor explains this figuratively, saying that none of us has a complete grasp of the whole picture. In the same way, none of us grasps completely our alienation from God or has an adequate sense of God's universal love and plan to bring us back. What we can do is to live together in this drama.

Together we can live it [this drama] more fully than any one of us could alone. Instead of reaching immediately for the weapons of polemic, we might better listen for a voice which we could never have assumed ourselves, whose tone might have been forever unknown to us if we hadn't strained to understand it. We will find that we have to extend this courtesy even to people who would never have extended it to us. [...] in that respect, perhaps we have made some modest headway towards truth in the last couple of centuries, although we can certainly find precedents in the whole history of Christianity. Our faith is not the acme of Christianity, but nor is it a degenerate version; it should rather be open to a conversation that ranges over the whole of the last 20 centuries (and even in some ways before) (2007, 754).

Put simply, we should move outside of the established order, which is not the same as returning to an earlier formula; it means discovering of new ways of moving beyond the present order to God, or looking for new and unprecedented itineraries.

Taylor's reflection about the meaning of incarnation is not original.¹⁰⁸ He pretends neither to offer the last word about this mystery of Christianity, nor to venture into a theological investigation. Taylor exposes the concept of incarnation, together with faith and belief, as the coordinates of the path to human fulfillment. If the modern agent is sincerely searching for meaning, and if Christianity offers a possible answer, then the modern agent has to seriously take into consideration the answers it offers. Is Taylor shifting now from philosophy to theology? The answer is negative because his intention is not to impose a new explication of the incarnation as such; his intention is to open philosophical reflection to the possibility of accepting the incarnation as a meaningful option. His writings can help Christian theologians who have a difficult task to find a new and more attractive language in which to explain the meaning of incarnation.

Our comprehension of incarnation will become more complete when we analyse Taylor's reflection about exarnation as the second way of living religiously. This word, unknown to the English dictionary, represents the opposite pole of incarnation and as such challenges its meaning.

¹⁰⁸ It is not too difficult to ascertain that Taylor's solution appears to be similar to Hegel's interpretation of *Geist* and its appearance in the world. Hegel's concepts such as interpretation of history in terms of constant tension, movement, dialectical relation; being part of a greater or deeper reality, which is in the present moment unreachable; unsatisfactory human notions of what is self-subsistent; movement from a lower stage to a higher stage, fit very well into Taylor's reflection about modernity and the meaning of incarnation. If it is true that Taylor is under the influence of Hegel's writings, then we have also to say that it is true that Hegel is deeply influenced by the Christian theology.

b. The Way of Excarnation

The meaning of this word varies according to the contexts in which Taylor uses it. We can say that the common denominator of its various meanings is a closed or rigid way of living religion, in which religious principles hinder the human spirit on its way towards new horizons of deeper meaning by deterring the possibility of transcending the present situation. That is, they close off the believer in a position from which he struggles to find meaning and new horizons. Such a closed way of living religiosity leads the believer and religious institutions as well from the place where they are into something that prevents them from being fully in touch with themselves, holding at something that is losing sense. The Latin meaning of the word *ex-carnation* is “out of flesh.” Taylor’s position is clear: such actualization of the religious principles in modernity calls for the revision and integration of the principle of incarnation. This will allow us to open the door to better actualize our aspiration to wholeness.

The concept of *excarnation* has in Taylor’s reflection apparently a function similar to the concept of alienation, as Hegel uses it. In Taylor’s interpretation, Hegel is referring to this concept when he talks about *Sittlichkeit*, as we have seen in the first chapter (“Embodiment, Hierarchical Structure, and Ethical Life”).¹⁰⁹ In Hegel’s philosophy, we are who we are by virtue of participating in the larger life of our society, in being immersed and embedded in this society with all its cultural background, norms, rules, values, practices, and institutions. These elements are maintained only by human activity in conformity to them, even though they precede this activity.

¹⁰⁹ Taylor writes about this issue in his article “Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit* and the Crisis of Representative Institutions,” published in *Philosophy of History and Action*, Yirmiahu Yovel, ed. (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978, 133-54).

The alienation arises, as Taylor interprets Hegel's concept of alienation, when these norms begin to seem irrelevant, or even monstrous, or when the norms are redefined so radically that the practices appear to be a travesty of them (1978, 141). In this sense, certain practices go unobserved or even die out in subsequent generations. For example, many people of Western society struggle to accept certain democratic practices, such as election of representative bodies, as the best way for the individual to participate in the decision-making process about larger social issues. In short, when certain norms cease to hold people's allegiance, they are seen as irrelevant, and people start looking elsewhere for what they define as centrally important to them.

When Taylor uses the term *excarnation*, he basically refers to alienation in the religious sphere. As we have noted, the meaning of this term depends on the context wherein Taylor uses it. When he speaks of Deism, and in particular modern Deism, he uses *excarnation* to mean the move from an understanding of human life in relation to God, to an understanding of life with no God (2007, 288). History, the place of individuals, contingency and the emotions in the human body – the essential dimensions of our understanding of human life – were once integrated into the human relationship to God, which is not the case in modern Deism. Modern Deism proclaims the eclipse of God and the highest norm in human life becomes a morality based on reason. Focusing solely on reason makes the body with its feelings and emotions suddenly a disturbing dimension. For instance, Kant expounds the idea that bodily desires and emotions have to be set aside when acting morally, and Hume bases morality primarily on emotions. In either case, the feelings are no longer a medium by which we relate to what we recognize as a higher being; only reason has such a function.

In another context, Taylor uses the word *excarnation* to describe the transfer of religion out of embodied, “enfleshed” forms of rituals, worship, and practices, to those that reside more “in the head” (2007, 554, 613-615). In such a transfer, Taylor does not argue that we move from belief to unbelief, but from a relationship in which the highest good is based on belief, to a position marked by a less personally engaged and intimate relationship to the highest. People’s relationship to the highest, that is, for believers God or for unbelieving Enlightenment morality, once was experienced in embodied and enfleshed forms like rituals, religious feasts, ceremonies, pilgrimages, relics. After the move, the relationship to the highest exists primarily in the human mind rather than in the disenchanted material or bodily world, and is expressed in terms of calculation, impersonality, Enlightenment ethics, and an abstract theoretic world.

As a reaction to this kind of *excarnation*, Taylor describes a second move or transfer, this time within modernity itself. This move presents a kind of resistance and opposition to the first form of *excarnation*, and takes place in different forms: yoga, new collective rituals, rites of passages, rediscovery of traditional Church rituals in individual and small group devotions of prayer, fasting, new ways of living a conjugal sexual life, the search for Nirvana, and new forms of healing and sharing (2007, 613-614). Through these and similar forms, the modern agent tries to go beyond the “*excarinating*” forms of his life. He follows his aspiration to wholeness and looks for new ways of integrating different levels of his life, especially the non-rational level (body, emotion, sensation).

Looking at these movements, transfers, changes, or reforms from the point of view of Church history, Taylor argues that they are nothing novel to modernity (2007, 614). Church history is full of attempts to merge the *incarnation* and *excarnation* modes

of living religion. These two modes create a peculiar dynamic. When certain forms of religious life become too rigid and suffocating, people look for changes and reformations. For example, the Reformation in the 16th century is a reaction to the pre-Reformation period. Protestantism abolished the central ritual of the Mass, suppressed Carnival, and music, dance, and drama were banished from the churches. Similarly Descartes argued the need to distance ourselves from an embodied understanding of things, in order to have a clear and distinct knowledge of them. Such a disengaged stance of rational analysis and self-control introduced another facet of excarnation. As a reaction to the original Protestant critique of Catholicism, there emerged various forms of emotion-based Protestantism, Methodists and Pietists in the 18th century, and Pentecostals in the 20th.

These and many other similar shifts represent the incarnation-excarnation dynamic that is one of the main points of Taylor's *A Secular Age*. His thesis is that the Church itself as the embodiment of Christian faith takes part in this movement of excarnation, especially in its institutionalized and structural forms of living faith. Whenever the Church becomes too worldly, institutionalized, or bound to rules, or when it loses agape as its *raison d'être*, then the Church itself provokes this reaction, which is a genuine expression of the human search for deeper wholeness (2007, 739-740).

In talking about excarnation, Taylor extends his analysis beyond the domain of religion and indicates other phenomena of excarnation in modernity. The first such example he points to is the field of modern medicine, which treats the human body primarily in terms of medicalization, what Taylor calls the "medicalization of the body" (2007, 740-741). It considers the human body to be a set of chemical processes and tracks

the way the organs work. Physicians are trained to see the human body from the outside, as an object of science, divorced from the patient's lived experiences. They devalue and diminish the significance of the lived body. In general, life is no longer seen as a whole, but the focus is on certain specific experiences that require the elimination or suppression of symptoms of an underlying malfunction. Excarnation in this case means that we perceive ourselves as users of tools, that is, of the body. Medicalization alters the phenomenology of lived experiences, suppresses certain facets of those experiences, and makes others more recessive. In doing this, the human agent sees and feels as an object, and believes that humans have always experienced themselves in this way.

As another example of excarnation in modernity, Taylor cites the exaltation of disengaged reason as the royal road to knowledge (2007, 746-751). Objectification is the key principle on this road, and means grasping the studied matter as something quite independent of us, where we do not need to understand it all through our involvement with it, or the meanings it has in our lives. We simply objectify it as an objective reality. The study of history and human affairs can also be objectified in this way. The past becomes an objective reality to be grasped by anyone, independent of his relationship to particular historical periods. We can in effect have a grasp of history that is *a view from nowhere*.

This kind of excarnation of our knowledge has been already rejected by numerous philosophers and poets of the last two centuries. Taylor refers largely to Charles Péguy and through him to Henri Bergson, Emmanuel Mounier, and Martin Heidegger. Each underlined the importance of bridging the gap between the past, the present and the future, because this is how we can grasp the meaning of our actions in the present.

Charles Péguy points out the relevance of a Christian idea of eternity, in which all moments of time are reconnected in the same moment. When past and present time are connected in a chain, then even the carnal finds its place in this chain which cuts across time periods. Without this connection, we slip into the mechanical and habitual present which is determined by the past but no longer in a living relationship to it. Objectification of the past leads toward excarnation of life.

Toward the end of *A Secular Age*, Taylor further explores the notion of excarnation, now as the way modernity relates to its past and Christianity (2007, 770-772). Many modern narratives advance the idea that we have already left behind certain forms of our past. For example, some Christian and mainline secularist narratives relegate certain features to a religious past, e.g. polytheism or paganism. In the same vein, Protestantism holds that with the Reformation humans moved beyond old relics of paganism and idolatry. Some secularist stories go a step further, claiming that religion is like an old skin that should be cast off in the sunlight of reason. Similarly Marxism and socialist theories see the abandonment of religion as a necessary step toward building a better world.

Taylor disagrees with these narrations that put distance between us and our past. His point is that earlier forms of expressing spiritual life, or certain forms of human flourishing in a time of paganism and polytheism do not cease to exist with the passage of human history, nor can we read human history in terms of a dialectic setting up oppositions. By so doing, we could never be able to capture the whole phenomenon. For example, the spiritual life in a time of paganism was highly embodied, tied to the human body. In the following centuries influenced by Christianity, the embodied spiritual life

went through alterations, becoming repressed or marginalized, moving between excarnation and incarnation, until it came to reside primarily “in the head.” Now people look anew to de-emphasizing the head and to reaffirming the body. In general, certain facets of spiritual life, for example paganism, flourish in a given historical time, but with the passage of time, these facets are repressed, crushed, or marginalized, but they never entirely cease to exist. Some of these marginalized facets of spiritual life indeed might come to the fore again in modernity.

In analyzing these movements and changes, Taylor defines *excarnation* as the steady disembodiment of spiritual life, so that it is less and less embedded in meaningful bodily forms, and more and more “in the abstract or theoretical forms.” It does not follow that Christianity in modernity became regarded as inferior to paganism. Rather, Christianity always has to be mindful of earlier forms of embodied spiritual life, including those that it has displaced. The displaced forms do not entirely disappear but return at some point and again challenge Christian thought. It follows that Christianity as a faith in the Incarnate God would be denying something essential in itself if it were wedded to forms that excarnate (2007, 771).

Without saying so explicitly, Taylor suggests that Christianity take a more dynamic role in the process of incarnation/excarnation of spiritual life. This somehow enigmatic idea becomes more concrete and understandable when Taylor deals with questions of sexuality and sexual identity. Excarnation in this case means fear and repression of sexuality, or overly cautious treatment of sexual identity. These topics must not be repressed, avoided, or treated timidly, but clearly addressed in defense of integration and incarnation. Another example of excarnation is the tendency to

homogenize, or to bring all people under a single principle or demand. Against this tendency, some religions invoke polytheism as a better option, for allowing integration of different modes of belief.

The solution for Christianity is neither homogenization by nor eliminating of different practices, nor a return to earlier forms of faith expressing, but looking for new frameworks of co-existence. In saying this, Taylor is suggesting that the differences and divisions can both find places in efforts at reformation, eliminating the need to impose the principle of homogenization. The Church despite its history is meant to be a place in which human beings with all their differences and disparate itineraries come together.

The lesson that Taylor draws from all this is that the Church should, full of hope, see all these moments as signs of God's pedagogy. These moments can take us higher, even though they may look in their historical form to be highly ambiguous. This indispensable reaching higher will bring some losses and some gains, and require some sacrifices. In any case, we should be wary of the narratives of simple, cost-free supersession, whether narrated by Christians or by protagonists of the Enlightenment (2007, 772).

Transition: Keeping in mind Taylor's challenge for Christianity, and incarnation and excarnation as two ways of living religion, let us apply them to Taylor's analysis of the modern search for meaning in the face of violence, suffering, an uncomfortable comprehension of the body, sexuality, life in secular time, death, or anything else when in search for meaning in any other aspect of modernity. Taylor remains prudent about providing clear answers; he remains rather on the level of descriptions. However, he

identifies some possible ways of searching for meaning as unacceptable: a more dogmatic approach to religion is not acceptable because we would lose many positive aspects of modernity. Imposition of a certain historically embedded order of Christianity into our life is not acceptable because the modes of living faith today have to be different from those in the past. The solution is not refusal to deal with modern dilemmas (2007, 766), but instead to search for new modes of living Christianity in a way that will connect to our past and ease our restlessness, and thus allow for an authentic flourishing. These models can help us in recovering the central Christian notion of communion with God as the goal of God's action in creation. When necessary, we should move outside the established order, not by imitating an earlier order, but by discovering a new way of moving beyond the present order to God.¹¹⁰

Such a statement calls for additional explanation. In Taylor's view, living faith can be too easily transformed into certain codes and loyalties that can become criteria for making judgments about classifying those who are "true" Christians and those who fall outside that definition. When Christianity is reduced to codes and loyalties, and when it

¹¹⁰ At the conclusion of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor very clearly states that the dilemma of modernity is not between a commitment to various traditional religious visions, or to an Enlightenment naturalism or exclusive humanism. These alternatives will not provide a solution. The solution is not adoption of a secular look, without any religious dimensions or radical hope in history; the secular look is a way of avoiding the dilemma (1989, 520).

In his "Catholic Modernity?", Taylor states that one path out of the dilemma is provided by Christian spirituality, which can be described in two ways: "either as a love or compassion that is unconditional – that is, not based on what you the recipient have made of yourself – or as one based on what you are most profoundly, a being in the image of God. They obviously amount to the same thing. In either case, the love is not conditional on the worth realized in you just as an individual or even in what is realizable in you alone. That's because a being made in the image of God, as a feature of each human being, is not something that can be characterized just by reference to this being alone. Our being in the image of God is also our standing among others in the stream of love, which is that facet of God's life we try to grasp, very inadequately, in speaking of the Trinity" (1999, 35).

operates on these criteria, it denies something essential to itself, i.e. the meaning of the incarnation, because as we have seen, it remains wedded to forms that incarnate.

In a similar way Taylor criticizes exclusive humanism and any kind of modern ethics and morality that tend to reduce human life to moral codes and principles. As with religion, moral codes and principles cannot adequately and completely capture the nature of the human spirit, which is always reaching toward transcendence or going beyond the limits of the normative principles of behaviour.

4.3.5 Living Morality and Faith beyond Codes and Loyalties

When Taylor talks about codes of behaviour based either on faith or on moral principles, he comes to a similar conclusion: there is a point at which we have to look beyond the question of what the code of behaviour ought to be, whether minimalist, or based more on solidarity, or altruism, or common interest, or something similar. We have to raise the issue of the deeper motivation needed to carry out the code (2007, 703). For Taylor, this is a crucial question both in morality and in religion. If we do not pay attention to deeper motivations, we can easily slide into patterns of life based on codes and sets of rules, which incarnate. In this case, Taylor talks about *moralism* that reduces our spiritual life to certain codes and our conformity to these codes (2007c, 13). Taylor thus investigates morality and faith in modernity, and challenges both exclusive humanism and Christianity to transcend their codes. They are important but insufficient to express the fullness of life.

As we already know, Taylor speaks positively about exclusive humanism within the framework of modernity. For example, exclusive humanism fosters the development

of philanthropy, universal solidarity, sympathy, benevolence, and many other forms of outreach toward others (2007, 697-703). World society has never in its history exhibited such solidarity and compassion as it is the case nowadays. Solidarity and sympathy are qualities that stimulate and challenge humans to create a better social and moral order, by establishing universal moral codes, rules, and institutions. Nonetheless, the same positive energy can easily transform itself into misanthropy, pessimism, violence, and other forces of destruction -- all the while, ironically, remain calling our interest, applause, prizes and media attention. Therefore, Taylor poses the question of what codes and rules modernity and exclusive humanism base their moral reflection on. What are the grounds for the spread of solidarity and sympathy on a universal level? These questions can become especially challenging when they provoke a conflict of interest. Can the establishment of certain codes and rules provide a sufficient ground for peaceful coexistence?

The solution cannot be found as Taylor points out if our reflection remains simply at the level of codes and rules; we have to uncover the motivations behind these codes and rules, motivations which promote the establishment of these codes and rules. In the case of a conflict of interest, the motivation behind the establishment of codes and rules can lead us to the common ground needed to solve conflicts.

Here Taylor adopts the main thesis of Ivan Illich as presented in *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich*. Among other things, Illich argues that modern civilization is the historical creation of “corrupted” Christianity, meaning that the modern secular world is emerging out of the more and more rule-bound and norm-governed Reform of Latin Christendom (2007, 742). “Corruption” of Christianity in this case means that Christianity failed in its attempt to sufficiently explain the mutual

coming together of people and God. Instead, it constructed a system of codes, rules, disciplines, institutions, and organizations based solely on rational grounds.

From the earliest beginnings of modernity, rules and norms have been important. The search for an alternative principle to the transcendental religious principle, on which the whole structure would be founded, started off in different directions. For Kant, the main principle became regulation through reason; all other codes and rules followed from this single principle. For Rousseau and his disciples, the single principle was self-interest, solidarity, amour-propre versus the general will, and the will to govern human inclinations. For some scholars of modernity, the highest principles are calculations of greater utility. In opposition to these, we have those who opt for universality in terms of universalizable maxims, such as a code of what actions are obligatory and what forbidden. Another group claims that the right actions can be determined by those who are affected (Habermas). Common to all these positions is the identification of morality with a unified code, generated from a single source. Taylor concludes that these positions are problematic because moral/ethical life cannot be captured in a code, for the following reasons (2007, 704-706). First, situations and events are unforeseeably various and no formula or pre-fixed code can take every element into account. Second, there is a plurality of goods that may conflict in certain circumstances, for example: liberty vs. equality, justice vs. mercy. Third, when the first and second reasons clash, we have an unprecedented situation, calling for even more *phronesis*. A particular dilemma could be resolved in different ways. Additionally, expectations of people involved in the dilemma might vary as well, making the process of seeking a solution unique to each individual case. Thus Taylor concludes that there is no “right” solution for all cases.

As the direction to be taken, Taylor suggests that we understand our dilemmas in a kind of two-dimensional space, where the horizontal space provides us the dimension in which we find the point of resolution, and the vertical space opens the possibility to rise to a higher level (2007, 706). As an example, Taylor cites the conflict in Bosnia. The tripartite state with separate cantons and a triune presidency presents the solution on the horizontal level. Over time, some trust and reconciliation can be re-established between the parties, which might allow people to move toward a more normal federal system (vertical level). In other words, when dealing with a dilemma, we ought not remain on the level at which the dilemma takes place in its time; our dealing with a dilemma should raise us to another level.

With the introduction of the vertical dimension, Taylor emphasizes that we cannot identify morality with a unified code generated from a single source because every situation is unique and requires a different strategy. The “code fetishism” is potentially very damaging, especially when it tends to put aside the variety of goods that the rules and norms are meant to realize. Furthermore, modern moral philosophy too easily misses the point of the vertical dimension that refers us to the motivations behind the codes and rules. For example, motivations such as reconciliation and trust encourage us to move beyond the present level of dilemma to a higher level based on the horizontal level.

Inspired by Ivan Illich’s writings, Taylor suggests that we should dismantle our code-driven, disciplined, objectified world (2007, 743). This does not mean that we should live without codes, rules, laws, especially moral laws. They remain important; however, we have to recognize that the nomocratic-judicialized-objectified world is not all there is. This kind of world is in many ways dehumanizing, alienating us, and creating

dilemmas with which the same world cannot cope. Even the best codes are not as innocent as they seem to be. They may seem to present at the first glance an answer to our deepest search for meaning. However, they can also too easily induce us in a sense of moral superiority. They can become idolatrous traps, which tempt us to complicity in destructive choices. Even the best codes of a peace-loving, egalitarianism, and liberalism can easily become violent. As the way out, Taylor suggests that:

We should find the centre of our spiritual lives beyond the code, deeper than the code, in networks of living concern, which are not to be sacrificed to the code, which must even from time to time subvert it (2007, 743).

In other words, the codes and rules as such are necessary but insufficient as the sole bases for a moral life.

Taylor applies a similar conclusion about the need to go beyond codes, to the Christian faith, in which morality cannot be reduced to fixed codes or rules of behaviour. Taylor looks on a living Christian faith as always having two dimensions: the first one is the dimension of right action, placed in a merely intra-historical perspective; the second one is the eschatological dimension, which points us beyond the intra-historical perspective and challenges us to transcend and interpret the same action in a different, eschatological perspective (2007, 706-707).

It follows that in our living out of faith we are called to act on two levels: (1) being in touch with immediate reality and working within it (for example, defending the innocent, punishing crimes, ending wars): (2) deciding how to be collaborative with God's pedagogy and turn in the direction of God's plans (2007, 673-674). Observing our reality from the perspective of divine pedagogy, we believe that everything, including death, violence, suffering, catastrophes, has a meaning. The meaning does not originate

from the action involved, but from a larger and transcending dimension in which this act takes place. Access to this dimension cannot be coded or programmed, because we act in the realm of faith with a sense of “anticipatory confidence” (2007, 674), following the path to be undertaken in faith and hope.

The walk on this path involves not only the need to transcend codes and rules but the need for our own transformation as well. This happens through our being in touch with the present situation and, at the same time, transcending the present situation through being in touch with a deeper reality. Such a path leads us to a higher level of spiritual existence, wherein a different perception of the world allows us growth in wisdom.

In this sense, Christianity offers us a pattern of acting that shows us a way out of dilemmas where exclusive humanism falls short. Saying this, Taylor does not claim that Christianity offers clear solutions, attainable through a new general organization of things. At the moment when Christianity claims to have “answers,” it falls prey to the same kind of blindness that reductive humanism suffers from (2007, 675). Both Christianity and exclusive humanism must remain humble, aware of their fragility and limitations. The search for a convincing answer to the most profound dilemmas remains a never-ending process.

Taylor explains the difference between Christianity and exclusive humanism searching for answers (2007, 768). In the religious perspective, we are responding to a transcendent reality, about which we have a certain sense. We identify with it, recognize in it some modes of fullness, and consequently, we seek to attain it. Being in touch with this reality, we feel ourselves breaking out of a narrow frame into a broader field, where

the same reality receives a different meaning. Such a breaking out of the narrower frame is not an act but a process of constant conversion, through which the first sense of fullness acquires a newer and deeper meaning. In this sense, Christianity does not offer definitive solutions as such, but points us in a direction that cannot be demonstrated as the right one, but can be taken as right in faith.¹¹¹ In addition, Christians can never fully grasp the meaning of this direction and lay it out in a code or a fully detailed life form. They can only look for the exemplary lives of certain people and communities.

In contrast to Christianity, exclusive humanism, remains within the immanent frame, trying to be responsive to the transcendental reality as well, but they fail to recognize, or are unable to accept, the transcendental reality as the highest source of human fullness. Even though they may in many aspects be breaking through the horizons of immanence, they shut out crucial features of the transcendental reality, i.e. those that carry the meaning of fullness, Taylor concludes (2007, 769). Exclusive humanism persists in the position that the ground of fullness lies in the immanent sphere of human life, feelings, and achievements, and it excludes the possibility of fullness in the transcendent reality. In this lies the main difference between exclusive humanism and Christianity.

This being the case, Taylor concludes, Christianity as the “elder brother” inherits the task of caring for exclusive humanism. Taylor refers particularly to Christianity in Europe, where we have a special situation in that the deepest roots of European culture are based in Christianity. We have seen how Christianity on the one side and exclusive

¹¹¹ “Christianity offers no global solution, no general organization of things, here and now which will fully resolve the dilemma, and meet the maximal demand. In can only show ways in which we can, as individuals, and as churches, hold open the path to the fullness of kingdom” (2007, 643).

humanism on the other side offer two different paths to fullness. Modernity with all its facets (subjectivism, objectivism, liberalism, secularism, exclusive humanism) springs from the same roots as Christianity. As we have seen, modernity presents a reaction against the order imposed by Christianity. This provokes a tension in Western civilization between two orders, with Christianity offering the form that modernity wants to supersede. This superseding can in some cases go so deep, for example, in the case of subjectivism and denial of the modern world's moral roots, that the proposed new order becomes disorder. European culture is facing self-indulgent subjectivism, leading to an emptiness in modern civilization, that sees "the final triumph of the Hollow Men, who, knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing, had lost the ability to *feel* and *think* deeply about anything" (2007, 734). In this situation, Christianity has to assume the role of "the bulwark against a menacing disintegration and disorder" (2007, 734).

When the immanent frameworks are too confining, shallow, flat, preventing deep feeling and thinking, Christianity becomes essential for breaking through this immanence and showing possibilities for reshaping the present order. Otherwise something vital is lost, something that was present in the process of formation of this culture and order. Christianity thus has the difficult task of breaking through this immanent order and introducing a new paradigm of thinking and acting, perhaps even for the sake of the survival of exclusive humanism itself. This is an emergency call, requiring acting on political, cultural, intellectual levels to create a new order that can transcend the present disorder. However, Taylor concludes, this approach applies primarily to the Western civilizations, while the challenges in Africa and Asia require a different approach (2007, 734).

In the title to this sub-section, I used the phrase “beyond codes and loyalties.” An explanation is required for what goal this “beyond” is directed to. In the perspective of Christianity we speak of agape; in the perspective of exclusive humanism we speak of human flourishing, fulfillment, generosity, solidarity, altruism, humanism.

4.3.6 The Meaning of “Beyond” or What is the Goal of our Search?

My analysis of Taylor’s writings remains to a certain degree incomplete without mention of another crucial element for understanding Christianity and exclusive humanism that figures in Taylor’s writings. Every time when we talk about transcending a certain situation or way of thinking, or when we try to grasp something beyond our present comprehension, we are oriented to a certain direction or goal, in which the act of transcending finds its realization. Even the process of our transformation is always directed to a certain goal. How does Taylor describe the goal of transcendence in Christianity and exclusive humanism, and how can we reach this goal?

In the case of Christianity, the goal is agape, that is, the love which God has for us and which we can partake of through his power to reach the fullness of life. Transformation in this case takes us beyond “merely human” perfection (2007, 20). In saying this, Taylor explicitly distinguishes between the goal of transcendence in Christianity and the goal of exclusive humanism. In the case of exclusive humanism, the final goal is human flourishing and perfection that finds its realization in different expressions. The common characteristic of all these expressions is their immanence; that is, flourishing and perfection remain in the domain of the human.

The Christian understanding of agape does not deny the importance of this kind of human flourishing and perfection; however, beyond human flourishing and perfection, agape also includes goods that take us beyond human perfection. Access to these higher goods is possible only in the context of belief in a higher power, or the transcendent God of faith. In view of this higher good, believers are invited to go beyond the affirmation of the good life, their own good and their own life. They are invited to live the certain religious practices and become part of a religious institution for flourishing and, at the same time, without only belonging to them. In theological terms we speak of *theiosis*, or the raising of human life to the divine. Such a view of agape requires from Christians that they see their life as running beyond the bounds of its “natural” scope between birth and death; our lives extend beyond “this life.”¹¹²

The believer’s participation in this agape and his extension beyond “this life” has a transformative aspect as well; it opens new dimensions of transcendence that bring about the transformation of the believer’s life. Taylor illustrates this point again with help of Ivan Illich’s reflection on Christianity (2007, 737-739). Let us take the parable of the Good Samaritan as the presentation of God’s love for humans. This love has a transformative power for us. It makes us capable for loving and helping our neighbors beyond the boundaries of the group, tribe and nation we belong to. This love goes beyond to a new moral universal rule, applicable anywhere and everywhere. This love cannot be

¹¹² When speaking of the transcendent, Taylor defines it as being “beyond life.” This expression means something like: life goes on after death, there is a continuation, and the point of things is not exhausted by life, the fullness of life, even the goodness of life. Against an egoistic view of fullness of life, the fullness of life must involve striving for the benefit of humankind. Even suffering and death can be seen as much more than negation or undoing of fullness of life; they are a place of affirmation of something that matters beyond life. Briefly, human flourishing as the unique focus of our lives is something that is insufficient (1999b, 20-22). However, it does not mean that we see human flourishing and “beyond life” as two opposite poles, or that we can reach fullness only after death. The fullness of life is just following God, which is what the gospel means by “eternal life” (1999b, 109).

contained within codes or rules, and no organization can completely contain it. Even so, it can transform us. The Good Samaritan is not bound by the tradition, customs, and other boundaries of the “his” world. He frees himself from the principle of “ought-ness”. He frees himself from the externally constructed sense of the sacred, or of the demons, of various modes of “right” acting, imposed by certain cultural, social, or religious organizations. He acts because he is moved by the wounded man and wants to respond to him. He acts out of his freedom, which is not something he generates out of himself; it is freedom to respond to a specific person.

With this parable and Illich’s argumentation, Taylor stresses the importance of belonging together – Taylor calls this fittingness – realizable only because of God’s love for humans and his incarnation. The extension of this belonging together is the network we call the Church. Taylor describes the Church as a network, not as a categorical grouping. It is a skein of relations which links particular, unique, enfleshed people to each other, not in view of common features, such as property, tribal kinship, or the like, but in view of the love which God has for us that we call agape (2007, 739). Elsewhere, Taylor describes the Church as an unparalleled “quintessentially network society” that transcends all other categorical societies.¹¹³

¹¹³ At the heart of orthodox Christianity, seen in terms of communion, is the coming of God through Christ into a personal relation with disciples, and beyond them others, eventually ramifying through the church to humanity as a whole. God establishes the new relationship with us by loving us, in a way we cannot unaided love each other (John 15: God loved us first). The lifeblood of this new relation is agape, which can’t ever be understood simply in terms of a set of rules, but rather as the extension of a certain kind of relation, spreading outward in a network. The church is in this sense a quintessentially network society, even though of an utterly unparalleled kind, in that the relations are not mediated by any of the historical forms of relatedness: kinship, fealty to a chief, or whatever. It transcends all these, but not into a categorical society based on similarity of members, like citizenship; but rather into a network of ever different relations of agape (2007, 282).

This network society is such a high ideal that the church itself fails to live up to its principles; nonetheless, this is to be expected. Its success is not a matter of guarantee, but of faith. Taylor argues that its success can be described in two ways (2007, 701): as a love/compassion which is unconditional, that is, not based on what the object of such love has made of himself. Or its success can be based on a believer's most profound faith, a being in the image of God. In either case, God's love is not conditioned on the worth realized in an individual; God's love goes beyond the individual, enclosing him in the stream of love that embraces every human being.

Of course members of the Church are invited to live an ethical life in terms of rules, but at the same time, they are invited to be entirely free, unconstrained by authority, in a personal relationship with God who enables them to know themselves better and be more completely themselves. This is the highest mode of being, which goes beyond any kind of impersonal order, whether it be natural, political or ethical.

Taylor is very clear: a Christian conception of the highest way of life, rooted in a personal relation to God, is entirely off the screen of the dominant philosophical ethical system today (Utilitarianism, post-Kantianism), conceiving morality as they do as determining criteria for what actions may be deemed "right" (2007, 282).

The final goal and fulfillment of exclusive humanism is not as evident and comprehensible as is the case with Christianity. Taylor offers a descriptive formulation of it, including different aspects and variations of the meaning according to the context in which this terminology appears (2007, 245). Its final goal can be expressed in terms of the creation of an order of mutual benefit that has to be realized as far as possible and the

creation of which remains within the power of its participants. The existence of such an order is not only the goal to be reached but it is also the highest moral source, energizing its participants to act in view of its realization. The participants feel confident that they can re-order and reshape their lives while being active in transforming nature and society. Instrumental and functional reason offers them guidelines for acting. This idea of order further motivates them to realize it for the benefit of all: "...the new humanism supposes that we are motivated to act for the good of our fellow human beings" (2007, 245). They are inspired by an ideal of benevolence and the aspiration to universal justice, goals that become the highest moral capacities. Something in human nature motivates people to act for the good of others, just by virtue of their being fellow humans, independent of any perception of common interests or purposes.

Benevolence, the aspiration to universal justice and altruism, emerges out of human nature and becomes the source of its energy. This highest moral capacity resides in the "human nature" that makes human flourishing exclusive, meaning that this flourishing makes no reference to anything higher that humans should reverence or love or acknowledge. There is no role left for the old religious and metaphysical beliefs, but only for purely human moral motivations. Taylor emphasizes this point, saying that exclusive humanism immanentizes the capacity for beneficence (2007, 247). Philosophical statements based on a pure and universal will as depicted by Kant further reinforce the immanence of exclusive humanism, stressing the importance of the disengaged reason which is capable of acting by universal law. Rousseau's notion of pity takes this idea a step further, asserting that the deepest source of our universal love is not

dispassionate reasoning but the human emotional make-up, which has been suppressed and distorted by the false claims and denaturing conditions developed in recent history.

With this description, Taylor does not contradict himself in his previous argument that the ideas of active re-ordering, instrumental rationality, universalism, and benevolence have their roots in Christian faith. These ideas emerge out of a religious background and resemble in many ways the Christian agape. As we have seen at different points of our analysis, Taylor claims even more: the ongoing transition to exclusive humanism would not have been possible without the idea of agape in the background.¹¹⁴

Once the idea of an ordered society, consisting of good social order, mutual benefits, and beneficence, becomes strong enough, its proponents reject the Christian aspiration to transcendent flourishing and the Christian understanding of agape, and remain content with the idea that the power to create such an order resides solely in us. They create new modes of moral experience based exclusively on the moral law within human nature. Consequently, even the motivations inspiring people within exclusive humanism are different from those of agape (2007, 252-253). Taylor understands this to be an achievement of exclusive humanism, one that has to be taken into serious consideration, even though it cannot be equated with the Christian agape.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ “My supposition here is that the transition built on the confidence acquired in effecting orders in life and society, which at least began to approximate closer the ideal model of mutual benefit. But agape or beneficence was built into this ideal model at three levels. Charity was part of the ideal of personal conduct; good social order must involve taking care of all members of society; and the proper inward dispositions of a decent man included charitable ones. The basic move in the transition was the recognition that the power to create this order resided in all of us; and since the order is constituted in part by agape or benevolence, then this power must reside in us” (2007, 247-248).

¹¹⁵ “It is an achievement, because getting to the point where we can be inspired and empowered to beneficence by an impartial view of things, or a sense of buried sympathy within, requires training, or inculcated insight, and frequently much work on ourselves. It is in this respect like being moved by other great moral sources in our tradition, be they the Idea of the Good, or God’s agape, or the Tao, or humanheartedness. These things are not just given to us by birth, as is our fear of the dark, or of falling, or

Conclusion

As the conclusion of this dissertation, I would like (1) to present a summary of the findings in my interpretation of Taylor's work; (2) to say some words of evaluation of Taylor's writings; and (3) to present directions for my further research.

1. Summary of the Findings in my Interpretation of Taylor's Work

My dissertation is founded on the thesis that Hegel's concern, i.e. how to unite two ideals: radical freedom and expressive fullness, became Taylor's concern as well. I claim that Taylor adopts Hegel's concern, but does not re-propose Hegel's solution. He looks at Hegel as the one who teaches us how to find our answer to the same concern. In his earliest publications Taylor refers to Hegel explicitly. Later on, Taylor shifts his focus to other areas, from natural sciences to human language, secularization, spirituality, and others; nonetheless, Hegel's concern remains ubiquitous throughout Taylor's philosophical research up to his latest publications. This might not be evident from reading Taylor's books and papers separately, but it becomes obvious when taking a view of Taylor's philosophical opus as a whole. Hence my main thesis that the search for unity of freedom and fullness represents the key to the interpretation of Taylor's writings, as well as that factor which brings Taylor's philosophy into an organic whole.

How is Taylor's search differentiated from Hegel's? Taylor does not propose his answer in the same manner as Hegel does; Taylor does not suggest a new philosophical system with *Geist* or anything similar to *Geist*, as the principle of unification of the whole. He rather indicates a path or a strategy to be undertaken. Through a critical

our response to a parent's smile. Making the new sources available was thus a step in an unprecedented direction, something not to be dismissed lightly" (2007, 255).

analysis of the prevalent ways of thinking in modernity (scientific interpretation of the world, instrumentalism, modern epistemology, social sciences when they claim neutrality and objectivity, atomistic politics, liberalism, utilitarian and normative ethics, secularization theories, independence of human language), Taylor points out those aspects that are missing or treated inadequately (reduced understanding of human agency, the importance of the agent's embodiment and intentionality, moral sources of modern identity, multiculturalism, the agent's openness to transcendence), as well as those aspects which are emerging and novel in modernity, containing something original, fresh, and appealing, but not yet sufficiently explored (the agent's desire to be authentic, the question of self-defining subjectivity, new ways of coexistence, the agent's search for meaning in modernity). In following this path -- as I read Taylor's philosophical writings -- the human agent living in modernity will discover deeper meaningful answers and touch new horizons of freedom, which will allow him to express himself in a more authentic mode. In this way, Taylor opens up the possibility of finding new answers to Hegel's concerns.

Taylor's arguments as they are organized in this dissertation confirm the validity and coherence of my main thesis. In the first chapter I show how Taylor explores Hegel's philosophy and to a certain extent appropriates Hegel's reflection about his time. There are many parallels between the challenges of Hegel's time and modernity. Hegel dealt with the Enlightenment and Kant's rational approach on the one side, and on the other side, Herder's investigation about freedom, the romantic desire of finding new ways of expressions, and the provocative ideas of the French Revolution. All these challenges find in a parallel way their place in modernity as well, as show my second, third, and

fourth chapter. The Enlightenment principles shape the modern patterns of thinking in utilitarianism, positivism, atomism, liberalism, pragmatism, instrumental conceptions of man and nature, and the organization of modern society when grounded on the principles of increased production, technology, and continuous development. The Romantic desire to be free and to express oneself in an original way modifies the modern way of thinking as well, especially the modern mindset that argues for the principles of relativism. The same desire also shapes certain attempts of secularism to distance the believer from his traditional religious practices; it triggers new spiritual movements and deepens the agent's search for meaning; it strengthens the agent's desire to create his identity in a more authentic and original way. At the same time, this desire demands from us respect and recognition of individual cultural differences; it fuels the politics that advocate the priority of individual rights, especially the right to freedom.

Taylor's description of similarities and differences between the two periods are relevant only to a certain extent. As we saw in my first chapter, by exposing the similarities and differences of two periods, Taylor explores the agent's desire to define his identity anew and to be free. This desire, or to be more specific, the motivations behind this agent's acting, are identical in Hegel's time and in modernity. To put it differently, the agent's aspiration to be free, and his desire to define his identity and express himself in a new way, are identical in both periods; however, the ways to their realization are different. For this reason I state that Taylor learns from Hegel how to coherently recognize challenges, dilemmas, illusions, distortions, and solutions, arising from the perspectives shaped by the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Hence my conclusion in the first chapter that the agent's desire to be free and to create his identity,

as well as Hegel's example about a new unity of radical autonomy and expressive fullness, remain the main source of Taylor's inspiration throughout his philosophical research.

Following this line, in my second chapter I analyze three recurring themes (moral sources of modern identity, human agency, and human language), to which Taylor continuously refers in his research. I handle these themes as a group because Taylor recurs again and again to them throughout his work. In a certain sense they transcend the agent's search for freedom and expressive fullness in a particular area (for example, scientific interpretation of the world, multiculturalism, the quest for authenticity, secularization). The agent's search for freedom is always and everywhere based on certain principles and goods, which are hierarchically organized (2.1 "Moral Sources of Modern Identity"). Every search for freedom and fulfilment always depends on a certain understanding of the human agency (2.2 "Human Agency"), and unconditionally includes human language (2.3 "Human Language").

In the third chapter I refer to some more specific areas of Taylor's research, starting with his critical reflection on modern epistemology and its foundational enterprise. Taylor disagrees with human sciences that claim neutrality and objectivity; he disapproves the naturalist approach to human existence in behaviorism, mechanistic psychology, and atomistic theories. After examining different schools of thought, I argue that Taylor comes to conclusions similar to Hegel's, that is, behind all these and other similar theories in modernity stands an identical desire and inspiration, i.e. the agent's desire to reach a higher level of knowledge and control over nature, better organization of

society, a deeper understanding of human nature or, in short, a higher level of freedom and self-fulfilment.

Likewise, I interpret Taylor's statements about multiculturalism, based on the politics of recognition, acceptance, and respect for differences among individuals and cultures. All people seek a peaceful life that fosters individual and collective flourishing, and leads towards realization of their deepest aspirations. Taylor hesitates to accept solutions based on principles which would be universally applicable or, more concretely, principles of modern liberal society, such as neutrality, universality, impartiality, and a difference-blind application of rules. Taylor is very firm in his belief: universal solutions do not exist. What exist are individuals, groups, nations, cultures, who look for new ways to actualize their deepest aspirations and desires. Consequently, those solutions and values based solely on normative ethics are not acceptable, unless they recognize, respect, and take into consideration what is really important and substantial for individuals, groups, and nations.

Taylor does not assert that every desire and inspiration in the human agent should be realized either. If the human agent really wants to be free and fulfilled, he has to examine his desires and aspirations as well and earnestly verify his search for authenticity. Hence, Taylor investigates modern claims about self-fulfilment, self-realization, flourishing, and the agent's desire to be authentic. If these claims prevent the human agent from transcending his narrow comprehension of reality, or impede him from exploring new horizons, then these claims cannot provide him sufficient answers to his deepest desires and inspirations. They keep him in a closed world of self-sufficiency as for example, in the case of modern individualism and political atomism. They keep the

human agent from exploring the horizons of new meanings. If this is the case, the agent's search for freedom, his desire to be authentic and to construct his identity, remain constraining, and deprive him of real fulfillment and self-realization.

From this perspective, I explore Taylor's interpretation and understanding of human language (2.3 "Human Language"). An appropriate understanding of human language is possible only within a larger context in which the human agent constantly and dynamically interacts with other agents. Those theories which argue in favor of the independence of language and claim that the monological subject can unveil the meaning of language by himself are misleading. Creation of language and understanding of its meaning are possible only within a larger public space. In the same way, the deepest concerns of an agent's life, and consequently the agent's search for meaningful answers, come to light only through those activities that involve collective awareness and articulation, realized only in the creation of a public space. All this is unconditionally necessary if we are to understand adequately the agent's articulation of his deepest concerns. In a similar way, for an adequate understanding of language we need to take into consideration even those domains that exceed the existence of language as such (2.3.3 "Taylor's Triple H-Theory of Meaning").

As I understand Taylor's writing, there is only one place in which the human agent can find his fulfillment, realization, self-construction, and freedom, and this is the place of his embodiment and of his engagement with the world (2.2.3 "Necessity of Agent's Embodiment"). From the position of his concrete temporal and spatial embodiment, the human agent perceives the world around him, directs his actions, relates to other agents, and opens himself to the world and unexplored horizons. In this

perspective I place Taylor's critique of the procedural and normative ethics which reduces the subject to his rationality and which ignores the specificity of the agent's embodiment (2.1.1 "Normative Ethics Lacks Sufficient Foundations for Morality"). The nature of the good can be defined only in the context in which our life takes place. Accordingly, the realization of the good is possible only in the particular time and place of an agent's embodiment.

Finally, in my fourth chapter, I analyze some segments of Taylor's extensive reflections on secularization, religion, and spirituality. These and other related areas are extremely important because they touch the deepest levels of the agent's existence, where the most meaningful answers can be found. Even in these cases, Taylor remains firm in his approach: if we are to reach deeper, more meaningful answers in our search for freedom and fulfilment, we need to critically examine every horizon, and in a special way the closed horizons of modernity, religion and spirituality being no exception. To put it differently, the human agent must be understood from inside. His faith and belief should help him on his way to greater freedom, fulfilment, and wholeness; his faith and belief should assist him in integrating every aspect of his life, including the most challenging such as violence, suffering, sacrifice, and all other bodily dimensions, especially sexuality. Through his faith and belief, everything should yield its deeper meaning and help him ultimately to live more freely and fulfilled. This requires the human agent to create the ability to operate, when necessary, outside the border of familiar codes and loyalties. However valuable they are, as such, a rigid application of them to every aspect of daily life can reduce our ability to comprehend the full dimensions of freedom and fulfilment.

If asked to summarize Taylor's extensive philosophical opus in one sentence, I would say that Taylor, inspired by Hegel's example, continuously and critically explores all the various types of closed-readings of reality as it is understood in modernity, in order to reach a deeper level of the agent's freedom and fulfilment. His critique is not criticism for its own sake; it is a critique in search of neglected or rejected horizons of human existence, either in the domain of the natural sciences, or the human sciences, or religion and spirituality, or elsewhere. Taylor's comprehension of reality remains a process of continuous formulation. For him, the human mind can never reach a final formulation and complete comprehension of reality; neither can it reach either the absolute level of self-comprehension, which is simply beyond the capacities of the human mind. Therefore, the striving of the human mind and the agent's search for meaning will remain a never-ending process of continuous re-formulation. For this reason, I conclude that Taylor does not elaborate a clear answer to Hegel's concern, which is also his own concern; he rather teaches us how to find anew a meaningful answer for ourselves.

No wonder then, that Taylor preferentially writes in a descriptive and hermeneutical way, in which he includes complex and extensive syntheses, historical overviews, references not only to other philosophers but to other sciences, and avoids strong formulations and dogmatic or normative statements (2.4 "Taylor's descriptive approach"). Consequently, it is difficult if not impossible to categorize systematically Taylor's writings or place him as a member of a specific philosophical school or current in philosophical thought.

2. Some reflections on and evaluation of Taylor

Why do I believe that studying Taylor's philosophy is a rewarding task? In answering this question, I do not want to explore in more detail Taylor's philosophy, or touch on some of the specific claims. I offer rather a kind of general evaluation, a critique, and appreciation of his philosophy, as I have found it in my present research. To some extent, I have already answered this question at the end of the first chapter analyzing the reasons for Taylor's integrating of Hegel's philosophy into his own reflection. Taylor states that Hegel helps us to better understand our present situation, i.e. modernity. He teaches us how to criticize the illusions and distortions originating from certain modern perspectives. With his constant engagement, with his exceptional depth and penetration of insight, Hegel has something important to say (1979, 72).

In a similar way to Taylor's arguing for Hegel's importance, I assert Taylor's relevance for us in modernity. Taylor's philosophical reflection about different horizons of modernity provides us an outstanding tool for a more complex comprehension of our time. It helps us to be critically aware of the way we live. Like Hegel, Taylor teaches us how to avoid the illusions and distortions dwelling in modernity, and how to see our reality in a more meaningful perspective. Beyond this, he points the way to re-discovering untouched horizons, critically examining closed readings of reality, and enlarging the human agent's perspective of freedom. This achievement constitutes a remarkable contribution to contemporary philosophical reflections about modernity.

Let me list some of my further insights in support of my evaluation of Taylor. I consider all these insights (Taylor's all comprehensive approach, Taylor as a modern

humanist, Taylor's inquiry in respect to transcendence, Taylor as a systematic thinker) to be important and I treat them below, not necessarily in order of their importance.

a. Taylor's All-Comprehensive Approach

Taylor with his philosophical approach does not limit his reflection to one or few specific areas of modernity; he rather includes in his reflection various disciplines of modern philosophy. His reflection offers us a complex and comprehensive vision of modernity that includes a new anthropological understanding of the human agent in which the seemingly incommensurable dimensions of the agent's life merge into a new whole.

For this reason I call Taylor's approach an *all-comprehensive approach*. By *all* in this case I mean those areas of modernity or those philosophical challenges that commend Taylor's attention and concern. In his earliest period he preferentially focuses on topics important in analytical philosophy, such as political and social issues, Marxism, behaviorism, and materialism. In his middle period, he becomes more interested in human agency, language, modern psychology, ethics, epistemology, modern identity, authenticity, multiculturalism, or human sciences in general. More recently Taylor focuses on spiritual and religious issues. In other words, he addresses a wide range of topics from an equally wide range of perspectives, and develops a comprehensive philosophical perspective that describes the conditions of the contemporary age. To put it differently, he faces the leading challenges of the humanities, in a special mode of philosophy, featuring pluralism of values, languages, cultures, and forms of reflection. To borrow Ruth Abbey's description of Taylor's philosophical opus, I would say that the most remarkable aspect of Taylor's work is its range of concerns (Ruth Abbey 2004, 1).

Taylor integrates into his all-comprehensive approach even unspoken premises and assumptions, unreflected-upon influences modifying our way of thinking and living, unconscious patterns of thinking and acting, collective memories and awareness, assumptions about the objectivity and neutrality of sciences, images of the goods and values we strives for, as well as our self-perception and comprehension of who we are as human beings. Taylor instructs us that our way of living, as well as our way of thinking, is an extremely complex process which conditions our feelings, beliefs, hopes, or lives.

Following the same line, Taylor stresses the fact that our reflection has to be framed within our history as well. Only those reflections which take into consideration an agent's temporal and spatial embodiment in his own time can offer a coherent background for understanding where and who he is the present. Once deeply rooted in our past and aware of the present, our view of the future will become more enlightened. Taylor's reflection, substantially embodied in temporal and spatial coordinates, does not necessarily point us towards a conclusion that our statements are by their nature always relative, and that we are unable to comprehend any absolutes. Rather, Taylor's reflection emphasizes that certain factors condition our comprehension of reality.

Why is Taylor taking such an all-comprehensive approach to reality? His approach is open to criticism, often justified. With an approach to reality in which everything is important and relevant, one can easily conclude that it lacks depth or thoroughness, remaining at a superficial level.

To a certain extent I agree with this kind of critique of Taylor's extensive and all-encompassing reflections. Nonetheless, I assume that Taylor has good reasons for choosing such a complex and intriguing approach: life itself is complex and intriguing.

Behind Taylor's far-reaching approach lies his concern about one of the most essential questions: what is the foundation of the agent's existence? This is an inevitable question, in the face of which the human agent, willing or not, has to take a stand. With an unquiet mind he repeatedly searches for new forms of understanding of the structures of reality, a question related to the very foundation of his existence. The agent's tension and his unquiet mind become visible in different ways, i.e. in how he expresses himself, relates to other people, dominates nature, opens himself to the unfamiliar. All these and other similar expressions are the field of Taylor's concerns. He carefully includes them in his reflection because they direct us to the essential levels of human existence. Uncovering these levels is not something that occurs automatically or effortlessly; it is a process of struggle to unveil new horizons. This process requires continuous modification and correction of one's present understanding, without having the guarantee that the final goal, i.e. an absolute understanding, will ever be reached. The only assurance, which is at the same time the highest reward, is the hope of discovering new dimension of freedom that will quiet the unrest of mind, open new horizons of meaning, satisfaction, and fulfilment, and correspondingly make the agent's struggle worthwhile. As Taylor teaches us, in order to reach this level, the human agent is finally required to take an active role in modifying his attitude toward the foundation of his existence.

b. Taylor as a Modern Humanist

I fully agree with Sir Isaiah Berlin's interpretation of Taylor's philosophical opus that in Taylor's view a comprehensive reflection on modernity is not impossible. Taylor is not someone who can simply accept the plurality of cultures, values, and disciplines as an irreducible condition lacking any possibility of a common denominator. In Berlin's

view, Taylor's reflection on modernity invites us to a philosophical conversation with the diverse voices of modernity, their respective sources and traditions. The aim of this conversation is to see if the seemingly incommensurable values, conceptual frameworks and other characteristics of modernity can be articulated and, to some extent, reconciled in a more comprehensive account (James Tully 1994, xiv).

Up to this point I completely share Berlin's evaluation of Taylor's philosophy; nonetheless, I find that something important is missing in such an evaluation. Philosophical conversation with the diverse voices of modernity, and articulation of a more comprehensive account which would reconcile the incommensurable, are definitely two important features of Taylor's philosophical reflection about modernity, especially if we look at modernity from the point of view of pluralism. What is missing in Berlin's interpretation are the reasons and motivations behind Taylor's reflection. With *conversation, articulation, and reconciliation* Taylor aims at enlargement of modernity in its way of thinking, and at relief for the human agent from the bonds of a narrow and one-sided comprehension of his existence. With *conversation, articulation, and reconciliation*, Taylor strives to make our existence more human. For this reason I describe Taylor as *a modern humanist*. My dissertation aims to show how Taylor places an inestimable value on the agent's search for freedom and fulfilment. This search has to be protected and secured by the one hand and the other hand, to permit the agent's further development and flourishing.

To be more specific, Taylor -- as I present him in this dissertation -- repeatedly stresses the importance of the agent's desire to improve the society in which he lives, and of his contacts with nature and his relationships with other human agents. So Taylor does

not hesitate to cross cultural, linguistic, and religious borders, if necessary. As we in our cultural milieu, following our principles, values, and religious convictions, try to actualize our deepest beliefs and ideas, so do people who do not share with us our cultural background. All of us share the same desire and longing to live in freedom and flourishing. In our globalizing world we need a new humanistic vision which will allow different cultures and individuals to recognize this common longing. In this perspective, I consider Taylor to be a modern humanist who is creating new frameworks in which individual human freedom and flourishing might find their actualization from a more universal perspective.

As an illustration of my evaluation of Taylor as a modern humanist, let me refer to Taylor's recent writings, in which he preferentially talks about religious and spiritual issues. I hold that Taylor's shift of interest to these topics does not happen by chance. It is true that secularization, religion, spirituality, and everything else that is connected with these topics, are in the foreground of people's concerns in modernity, and as such excite Taylor's interest. However, Taylor does not dwell on them because they are simply in the foreground of people's attention. Taylor gives them consideration because they reflect in themselves the deepest and the most crucial levels of the agent's existence. The manner in which the human agent believes, trusts, and orients his hope, reflects in itself the manner in which he searches for satisfaction, freedom, and meaningfulness in his life. For this reason, Taylor carefully explores these manners and meticulously examines the religious and spiritual dimensions of modernity; they mark the place where the most meaningful answers about human existence are to be found. Following in the same vein, Taylor sees in interreligious and intercultural exchange a huge unexplored potential. The

way others live and express their deepest convictions can enrich our way of living and believing as well. In my personal opinion, modern western society, starting with the main trends of contemporary philosophy, does not sufficiently emphasize the importance and richness of these facts. For this reason I like Peter Steinfels' evaluation of Taylor's *A Secular Age*. Our time is in many aspects similar to the "axial age" – the notion with which Karl Jaspers described the centuries around the middle of the first millennium B.C. Confucius, Buddha, Zarathustra, the Hebrew prophets and the Greek thinkers from the pre-Socratics to Plato, brought new visions of universal ethics, individual salvation, and personal quest for higher meaning. The challenge of modernity is in many aspects similar to their challenge, and thanks to Taylor's *A Secular Age*, we have a much better idea of the terrain, the impasses, the perils, and the possibilities (Peter Steinfels, 21). Robert Bellah, one of the eminent sociologists of our time, describes in the blog discussion *The Immanent Frame* Taylor's book as a "breakthrough book," in which Taylor succeeds in no less than recasting the entire debate about secularism.

c. Taylor's Inquiry in Respect to Transcendence

In the previous subchapter I stated that modern humanism has to include the spiritual and religious dimensions, because with them we touch the foundational questions of our existence. Taylor's contribution at this point to the philosophical reflection in modernity is outstanding because he teaches us how to become and remain open in the face of transcendence. For this reason I have to say a few words about this point.

When speaking about freedom, meaning, flourishing, self-realization, and fulfilment, Taylor touches those horizons of human existence which challenge us to be

open to something that transcends our immediate comprehension. Therefore, Taylor critically examines various narratives about secularization, their interpretations of religion, faith, spirituality, and especially the way they settle these dimensions into an agent's daily life. Some narratives about secularization tend to push aside the importance of the spiritual dimensions or/and reduce their relevance to the individual's sphere, as if religion had no social relevance. Taylor disagrees with these narratives. Belief and faith have to be explored as potential roads to freedom, fulfilment, self-realization, and wholeness of our life; they have to be seriously taken into consideration because they can alleviate the human search for meaning; they present an enormous potential for a more peaceful coexistence or a better social life. Even so, not every form of belief and faith is acceptable in Taylor's mind, only those that help the human agent to integrate various aspects of his life into a new and meaningful whole, both on the individual and on the social level. For the same reason, Taylor does not hesitate to critically examine certain forms of spirituality and religion, including Christianity, when he feels that their dogmatism or their traditional actualization of religious practices hinders their members from an expansion of their freedom, flourishing, fulfilment, or attainment of their final goal. How particular religions represent their final goal as either redemption or nirvana or illumination or eternal happiness or realization of the highest Truth, is not Taylor's primary focus. His intention is not to enter into a theological discussion about final goals, nor to offer a comparative theological study of them. Rather, he challenges modernity with its process of globalization to find new guidelines for how to coexist in a peaceful manner, despite substantial differences in religions and modes of expressing the deepest spiritual convictions. Taylor warns us away from those interpretations of religious

matters, and from those applications of religious, spiritual, or theological statements that are too narrow or rigid. Instead of helping us to coexist in a more peaceful way, or to find a deeper meaning in our daily life, or to integrate different aspects of our life into a new whole, they present obstacles to those desired ends.

In writing this, I do not claim that Taylor proposes a kind of pragmatic, instrumental, or utilitarian view of religion (i.e. religion is as good and necessary as far as it helps us to reach our goals). In Taylor's reflection, religion means much more; through religion we are in touch with reality before which we cannot remain indifferent, as if nothing matters. Religion makes a difference in the agent's life. For this reason, religion is more than right information or a message that is delivered to the believing agent. This information or message has to be perceived in a way that affects and changes the agent's existence. From this, it does not follow that the believing agent always fully and completely understands/knows what he believes. There are many things he simply accepts in faith and hope. Nonetheless, he is always challenged to perceive himself and the reality around him as being part of a larger project he does not comprehend. He is challenged to see himself as being immersed in a process through which he only gradually comprehends the truth. Taylor talks about this process as the divine pedagogy, i.e. the process in which we gradually learn more from God and about God.

If my comprehension of Taylor's thought is correct, then his reflection about religion and spirituality asks how we can integrate religion, spirituality, and all that relates to them, seriously into our life. Taylor's hope is that these matters will make a difference in our life. They should help us to find better solutions, whenever and wherever we apply them to our life.

Faced with those who reject and negate the relevance of religious/spiritual reality, Taylor points us to search into the reasons and motivations behind their opposition. At the least, their reaction should not preclude us from posing the question of St. Augustine, taken from his comments on John's Gospel: "Why are you still speaking to me?" [about revelation, religion, and spirituality] (*In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus XIX*, 14).

d. Taylor as a "Synthetic" Thinker

This title might seem pretentious or misdirected because Taylor's philosophy, at least at first glance, is far from being synthetic. It is true: Taylor does not offer a new system in which different elements find their place in a larger structure; he is far from thinking in terms of the "objective spirit" as Hegel did in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Nonetheless, I firmly believe that Taylor's search offers us guidelines by which we can synthesize his thought.

These guidelines are based on two principles: differentiation and homogenization (i.e. combining singular parts into a new whole). In the first chapter of this dissertation, I explored Taylor's interpretation of these two principles so important in Hegel's system. Taylor adopts them and repeatedly applies them to his reflection, first excavating the differences, particularities, singularities, and contradictions of the matter in question, and then homogenizing and synthesizing all these elements together in a way that will expand our way of thinking, and through that our horizons of freedom.

When Taylor reflects about social, political, anthropological and other aspects of modernity, he is careful to try to comprehend thoroughly the position of the analyzed subject and retain the differences among the partners in dialogue. For example, while reflecting about multiculturalism, he elaborates some outstanding principles based on

recognition and respect of differences among the agents, principles necessary to a peaceful coexistence in our globalizing world. Even so, the cultural, religious, linguistic, spiritual and other differences do not present invincible or unbridgeable gaps in Taylor's vision. Once aware of what divides and separates us, Taylor immediately takes the next step and looks for what we have in common, what binds us, and what allows us to actualize our common desires and inner longing. In this sense, the principle of homogenization finds its place as well. This principle should not be taken as a supplementary option, but as a mandatory requirement in our globalizing world.

As much as Taylor tries to bring together different and even opposed positions, he does not naïvely claim to be the one to have found the complete solution. My impression is that Taylor prefers rather to be one who opens the door and indicates the directions in which new and better solutions might be found. In his words from his *Sources of the Self*, we should look for the best possible account (1989, 69). Once we find a better one, we will leave behind the previous one.

There are few pages in Taylor's writings in which he insists on the rightness of his theories and principles. Doctrinaire, rigid, and inflexible statements rarely find a place in his reflection. In Taylor's mind, such statements are usually too narrow and often missing what might be more important. So he prefers to create new narratives, which are as such more open to further investigation and creative imagination, and less insistent on the absoluteness of a given argument.

At times, this very flexibility in Taylor's writings presents problems in his approach. Taylor's language is often loose and imprecise. His descriptions are extensive, sometimes without a clear focus or obvious conclusion. The reader might have

difficulties in defining and comprehending correctly the terminology used in his narratives and imaginaries. Even when I thought that I had grasped the meaning of a certain term, I was surprised to realize that the same term used in a different article took on new shades of meaning. This became especially clear to me when I was creating a glossary of some of the most frequently used terms in his writing.

In saying this, I move from a deeply appreciative stance toward Taylor's work to a somehow more critical one. Taylor's extensive reflections are not always easy reading. Beyond the before mentioned issues with his terminology, Taylor's writing style includes extensive summaries with frequent references not only to philosophy but to literature, poetry, music, history, sociology, economics, religion, spirituality, and other languages and cultures. In some articles he mingles terms from English to German or French. He likes to think in terms of ideal figures who exists nowhere in human history. His major books run to hundreds of pages. The reader might legitimately become impatient in reading even his most important works, wondering what the main point of his extended reflection is. It is not always easy to follow the course of his developing and arguing a thesis. Taylor's articles and some of his shorter books are more inviting to the reader, being more to the point. For example, his *Hegel*, *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age* might be more positively received if they were shorter and structured more rigorously.

Nonetheless, these difficulties confirm my primary intuition that in trying to understand Taylor's thought, it is more essential and rewarding to grasp the intentions behind a specific work, rather than to be concentrated on particular passages of extensive reflections. A strictly analytical approach does not seem to be the most fruitful way of studying Taylor.

Hopefully, the validity and coherence of the main thesis of this dissertation, as well as of the other arguments supporting the main thesis, are at this point sufficiently demonstrated. I hope as well that the synthetic unity of Taylor's thought has been made more evident. My selection of Taylor's arguments has been based on how well they support my main thesis. This fact should also explain why my reading of Taylor is not primarily critical. The reason is quite straightforward. In interpreting Taylor, I want to stay as close as possible to his own formulations and comprehend his positions as accurately as possible. Once I feel that this has been achieved and that the argument selected fits into the structure of this dissertation, I move forward, without being concerned about what other philosophers would say on the same topic. To this extent I am intentionally bypassing an in-depth critique of Taylor's work. This present study would take on vastly different dimensions if I had attempted to deal with the immense amount of the secondary literature.¹¹⁶ By all means, a more critical approach to Taylor's work is something to be undertaken in my future research.

3. Direction for Further Research

Familiar now with Taylor's reflections, I would like to continue my research on those issues that have most attracted my attention in this present project. Some of the challenging issues that would reward exploration in the future include the following. What are the limits and boundaries of tolerance in societies that claim to be based on

¹¹⁶ Thanks to Ruth Abbey, one can find an extensive secondary bibliography of Charles Taylor on <http://www.nd.edu/~rabbey1/secondarybib.htm>

liberal principles (i.e. some countries in Europe)? How can the fruition of so-called traditional values at the same time foster a relationship with other cultures and their “different” values? How do Taylor’s notions of the politics of recognition, strong-evaluation, moral sources of modern identity, and the question of virtues, find parallels in other cultures and philosophies? As a part of a larger project, I would like to explore how other cultures and religions face questions like secularization, the agent’s desire to be authentic, and the nature of self-fulfilment? Can these factors become the common ground of a new interdisciplinary, intercultural, and interreligious dialogue? Our political discussions are often locked into divisive terms such as “socialist,” “republican,” “democrat,” “conservative,” “liberal,” and other such description. This terminology is in Taylor’s view often more an impediment than a stimulant to a fruitful conversation in the search for new solutions. In contrast, Taylor challenges modern philosophy to focus more on specific topics which directly concern our life (our relationship with the environment, the question of solidarity, the role of bodily experiences such as suffering, violence, and sexuality, the importance of daily life, and the role of technology in it, modern openness to transcendence, and others).

To be more specific, I would like to compare Taylor’s position on these and similar topics with another eminent thinker of modernity, Jürgen Habermas, who prioritizes a philosophical reflection based on a Kantian approach, emphasizing the primacy of reason. In many aspects I find Taylor’s position similar to Eric Voegelin’s reflections (1901 – 1985), especially when he interprets history, politics, and the meaning of truth, and faults Gnosticism in the education of human reason.

The recently published book “Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age” (2010), edited by Michael Warner and others, offers an insight, review and critique of Taylor’s re-interpretation of secularism. Many leading scholars about secularism reflect on Taylor’s particular notion of secularism, including the conditions of belief and unbelief, and the striking tension between the spiritual and the material in modernity. The possibility of reconnecting these two opposite levels raises a host of further unanswered questions.

In short, I would like to explore deeply some of the topics which Taylor opens in his reflection, but leaves unresolved there, ready for further exploration. A comparative study of his reflection with that of some other modern philosophers might reveal the limits of Taylor’s theories on the one hand, and on the other, enrich our understanding of how we have become what we are.

At the end of this concluding chapter and of the whole dissertation, let me emphasize one more aspect that permeates Taylor’s writing: the optimism and hope, radiating from his view of the future. Taylor’s reflection is far from being nihilistic, or pessimistic, or simply given to resignation. Just the opposite: he firmly believes that new and better solutions are always possible, i.e. solutions that will open to us new horizons of freedom and fulfilment. Taylor challenges us with the question of whether we are willing to open ourselves to them and to search them out. With this in mind, events such as the madman’s massacre of young people in Norway in July 2011, or social and political revolts in the North African countries in Spring 2011, or more generally, the discomfoting presence of Islam in Europe, with challenging reminders of “the others” who are “the different from us,” or the struggling efforts of Christianity to be in open

dialogue with liberal Christians, non-Christians and non-believers, or threats of global warming, connected with our irresponsible exploitation of nature – all these and a host of other challenges call us to find new solutions. Taylor’s way of thinking seems to me a promising starting point for our search for new “connections.”

Glossary

The following terms are my selection of Taylor's numerous topics as I have reiterated them in this dissertation.

AUTHENTICITY: Authenticity or being authentic represents in modernity a very powerful moral ideal of being true to oneself. By this moral ideal Taylor refers to what is a better and higher mode of life, where the "better" and "higher" are not defined in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we ought to desire ("The Ethics of Authenticity").

BEHAVIORISM: In the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, published in 1967, Taylor explains the meaning of the term "Psychological Behaviourism." Even though this term has taken a number of forms and gone through a number of transformations, it has some basic elements. Behaviorism attempts to explain the behavior of men and animals by theories and laws couched in concepts designating only physical things and events. There is no place for concepts involving purpose, desire, intention, feeling, because they are unobservable things and events, whose locus is inside the organism. There is no reference to mental events or activity, such as thinking, expectation, understanding, and bafflement. In the name of science, and sometimes also of metaphysical simplicity, psychological behaviourism suppresses the inner activities of the mind and tries to relate the features of the environment to directly overt behavior.

CONSCIOUSNESS: This is the crucial factor defining a person, and what distinguishes a person from other agents. Consciousness means the power to form presentations about a person as well as representations of the world. Consciousness "transforms" the person by the significance a person lives by. In this case, consciousness – perhaps we can say language – is like the medium within which the significances and concerns arise (purpose, goals, ends, quality of human life). The medium here is in some way inseparable from the content.

DISENGAGED AGENT / DISENGAGED REASON: It is vision of agency or its reason as freeing itself of the perspective of embodied experience. Descartes as the founder of this vision claimed that the thinking activity of the mind is essentially non-bodily and free from the distorting senses and imagination. His underlying belief was that we need to attain this perspective in order to do justice to a mechanistic universe. Disengaged reason claims to produce a “view from nowhere,” i.e. as disengaged, not embedded in a culture, or a form of life, or a “world” of involvement, that is, disembodied.

EMBODIED AGENT: By embodied agent, Taylor means the subject who is engaged in activities and in a world that is his world. Such an engagement is essential and inescapable for the human subject, which means that we cannot understand the subject if we do not take into consideration the meaningful features of the world which surrounds him. The meaningful features are those in the face of which the human agent cannot remain indifferent or neutral. Another term for embodied agency, Taylor talks about embodied subjectivity.

ENGAGED AGENT: The engaged agent is a particular aspect of the embodied agent. By engaged Taylor means that the world of the agent is shaped by his form of life, or history, or bodily existence. So the agent’s experiences are shaped by his perceptions and hence his world. In short Taylor says that agent’s experiences are shaped by his bodily constitution. This has two meanings: (1) our bodily constitution conditions our experiences. Taylor talks about a “contingent causality”; (2) the nature of a particular experience is formed by the agent’s bodily constitution. The terms with which the experience is described have thus their sense only in relation to this form of embodiment. Here Taylor talks about the condition of intelligibility of certain terms, where body, culture, and form of life shape our world (“Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger”).

HUMAN AGENT: To be an agent means to be a being that encompasses purposes and goals, goes after them and attains them. These purposes have to be intrinsic to the agent, which means they have an intrinsic significance for the agent. Beyond the purposes and goals, even his desires, aspirations, feelings, aversions, emotions represent different ways in which things have significance for the agent.

The main characteristic of the human agent is being in constant search of the significance, i.e. in search of depth, richness and meaning in his life. In other words, the human agent is a being to whom things matter. This search presupposes in the human agent a sense of inwardness, i.e. the sense of oneself as a being with inner depths, a sense of freedom, and individuality, of being embedded and engaged in a world which is his world. The human agent as a being immersed in moral issues is for Taylor a genuinely essential fact for human nature and hence a universal phenomenon.

HUMAN SIGNIFICANCES: They are the objects of interpretations and valuations, which can be judged as adequate or inadequate, distorting or true, superficial or profound. They are the object of assessments, where we try to determine what is really shameful, or what one should really feel guilty about, in what consists real dignity, what is truly admirable, what contemptible, and so on. Human significances involve strong evaluation of different ways of living. For this kind of evaluation and assessment we need criteria or standards, which might vary from culture to culture. These criteria are intrinsically tied up with language (“The Person”).

PHILOSOPHY: Philosophy is an activity which essentially involves the redescription of what we are doing, thinking, believing, assuming, in such a way that we bring our reasons to light more perspicuously, or else make the alternatives more apparent. In this way we can make our action, thought, belief, assumption, more justified. Philosophy involves a great deal of articulation of what is initially inarticulated. It follows that the task of philosophy is to sweep away the past, to liberate us from the dead weight of past errors and illusions, and to give us an understanding of things that is entirely contemporary. For this reason, philosophy is inherently historical activity, a

manifestation of a more general truth about human life and society (“Philosophy and its History”).

PERSON: The person is a human agent who holds a sense of himself as an agent having the capacity for consciousness and self-awareness, and can make plans for his own life, has a notion of the future and the past, can hold values in virtue of which different plans seem better or worse (capacity of evaluation), and who is capable of choosing between them (capacity of choice). Being a person means being open to different significances, especially those human ones. This openness involves a person’s ability to make evaluations. To be capable of making strong evaluations and to be open to the peculiarly human significances make the person something more than just an agent. In the power of his consciousness, the person is in touch with what is significant. So consciousness goes along with a transformation of the significance the person lives by. A person is a being with a certain moral status.

Being who we are as persons also involves our being persons only as interlocutors, i.e. in a relationship with others. In addition, being properly human means being in contact with some privileged space of disclosure, to which we have contact through reason and contemplation (“The Person”).

LANGUAGE: Language is a symbolic activity through which we can have an articulated grasp of what we are focusing on. Language enables us to be aware of what we discourse about in a way which has no analogue for non-linguistic animals. This articulate focusing makes it possible for linguistic beings to be aware of standards qua standards, and thus to be capable of the feelings and perceptions which depend on this. So language becomes an activity by which we express our being in the world.

The second crucial feature of language is creation of a public space. Language creates a peculiarly human kind of rapport, of being together, the sense that we are in conversation together. To express or formulate something also means to place it in the public space, and thus to bring us together qua participants in a common act of focusing. Language as creation of public space is essential for some human significances, e. g., shame.

Language is not an activity of the individual primarily, but of the language community. This includes that the individual can never fully dominate or be in control of the language-activity. Language always discloses itself in public space. This space of disclosure can be identified with human language, some region of the cosmos, a physical or mythical region, a sacred place, a space of social intercourse. With the space of disclosure, Taylor means the locus where things emerge at their fullest, clearest, and most salient. This space of disclosure is neither outside of the person, nor somewhere in real or mythological or metaphysical space, in the structure of things; the disclosure is considered to be *inside*, in the “mind,” having the power of transformation of the person (“The Person”).

NATURALISM: In his description of modernity, Taylor introduces the term “naturalism” as a narrow way of interpretation of the whole reality, which adopts the natural science model of interpretation as the primary model for interpretation of human existence. This model emerges out of the 17th century scientific revolution, promulgating the development of the natural sciences in the search for a new common ground of human knowledge. This model opposes the Platonic-Aristotelian conception of the universe as the instantiation of Forms, which defined the standards by which things were to be judged. The universe is now considered to be a neutral universe, with no place for intrinsic worth or goals that can make claims on us. Out of the naturalist vision of reality develops utilitarianism, driven by the aspiration to build an ethic that would be compatible with the scientific vision.

THE SELF / A SELF: For Taylor, this is a very important concept in modern philosophical language. Earlier people did not speak of “the self” or “a self,” that is, they did not use an article before “self.” With this concept, Taylor describes people in a certain context by what is morally significant to them. So we talk of ourselves as “selves” in a culture in which certain practices of radical reflexivity are considered central to human life and important human achievements. Self-understanding partially constitutes us.

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS: Self-consciousness means being aware of oneself (different life plans, options, possibilities), which includes also having a hierarchy of values or criteria for evaluation of different options. Self-consciousness does not offer representations of the significance; rather it is a partly constitutive factor of the significances, which create standards for defining a person qua person (“The Person”).

STRONG EVALUATION: Strong evaluation means recognition of some goods which are seen to be intrinsically worthy, that is, goods or ends which are not valued insofar as they are objects of choice or desire, but are rather seen as ends we should seek. They are ends such that our not choosing them reflects on us rather than undermining their status as ends. Shame, guilt, and our sense of dignity belong to these ends. Strong evaluation is essential to human identity, and refers us to the qualitative *worth* of human desires.

SUBTRACTION STORIES: These are the stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain modernity and secularity as human beings having lost, or souged off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. These stories subtract something that was essential to humans in the past, and replace it with something else. Some of these stories are: disenchantment, naturalism, deism, exclusive humanism, and anti-humanism. These stories are in Taylor’s perspective important because through contrasting them with our present time, we can better understand our historical situation, i.e. where we come from. At the same time, the act of contrasting and comparing them shows us what the underlying features of human nature are, features that were there all along but submerged by what is now in modernity cast off.

TRANSCENDENTAL / TRANSCENDENCE: This word has more than one meaning. It can designate something like a “going beyond” the human world or the cosmos; it can mean the discovery or invention of a new standpoint from which the existing order or society can be measured; it can refer to something in which the first two meanings are linked (for example, the Hebrew prophets condemned practices of Israel in

the name of God). *Transcendental* can introduce the second-order of thinking, in which we critically examine our descriptions of and operations in the world. With *transcendental* Taylor describes “implied globality” -- the notion that the transcendent being, or the principles of criticism, may be seen as relevant not just to our society but to the whole of humanity.

These linked meanings of *transcendental* and correspondent changes in society challenge the individual to find anew his place in the society, and to discover new forms of religious or philosophical life. So *transcendental* refers to the process of the disembedding of the individual from his social order, cosmos, and understanding of human good, and turning to the search for a new way of fulfilment and flourishing for the individual (“What Was the Axial Revolution?”).

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