

# Re-Enchanting The World: An Examination Of Ethics, Religion, And Their Relationship In The Work Of Charles Taylor

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RE-ENCHANTING THE WORLD: AN EXAMINATION OF  
ETHICS, RELIGION, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP  
IN THE WORK OF CHARLES TAYLOR

by

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ABSTRACT  
RE-ENCHANTING THE WORLD: AN EXAMINATION OF  
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In this dissertation I examine the topics of ethics, religion, and their relationship in the work of Charles Taylor. I take Taylor's attempt to confront modern disenchantment by seeking a kind of re-enchantment as my guiding thread. Seeking re-enchantment means, first of all, defending an 'engaged realist' account of strong evaluation, i.e., qualitative distinctions of value that are seen as normative for our desires. Secondly, it means overcoming self-enclosure and achieving self-transcendence, which I argue should be understood in terms of transcending a 'lower' mode of selfhood for a 'higher' one in concern for 'strong goods'.

One of the main issues that Taylor raises is whether re-enchantment requires theism for its full adequacy. He advances – often as 'hunches' – controversial claims regarding the significance of theism (1) for defending strong evaluative realism and (2) for motivating an ethic of universal human concern. I seek to fill out his hunches in terms of a theistic teleological perspective that is centered on the 'telos of communion'. I argue that such a view is important for overcoming the problem of what Bernard Williams calls the 'radical contingency' of ethical beliefs, which seems to undermine their normative authority. However, I argue that if a non-theistic view of cosmic purpose (e.g., Thomas Nagel's view) can be regarded as a viable option, then it could also help to address this problem and support a kind of re-enchantment. Taylor also advances the controversial view that (3) there is an ineradicable draw to 'transcendence' in human life in connection to the quest for the meaning of life. Here he opposes certain mainstream theories of secularization that see it as a process involving the ineluctable fading away of the relevance of religion. I seek to fill out and defend Taylor's view in this matter.

Besides providing a reading of Taylor's work as a whole and advancing further some of the issues he raises, I also examine his general evaluative framework based on his account of strong evaluation. In doing so I show how he provides a distinct and important perspective among contemporary moral philosophers.

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## REFERENCE KEY FOR ABBREVIATIONS OF CHARLES TAYLOR'S WORKS\*

*EB: The Explanation of Behaviour*

*H: Hegel*

*HAL: Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1*

*PHS: Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*

*SS: Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*

*EA: The Ethics of Authenticity*

*PA: Philosophical Arguments*

*CM: A Catholic Modernity?*

*VRT: Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*

*MSI: Modern Social Imaginaries*

*SA: A Secular Age*

*DC: Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays*

*SFC: Secularism and Freedom of Conscience (with Jocelyn Maclure)*

\*See Bibliography for full citation information for these works. Articles by Taylor that are not in any of his volumes of collected essays will be cited like all other works by last name and date of publication with the full citation information found in the Bibliography.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Charles Taylor (b. 1931) is widely regarded as one of the most important philosophers of the last fifty years.<sup>1</sup> He has made significant philosophical contributions to an impressive range of topic areas: viz., ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of action, philosophy of personal identity, philosophy of language, philosophy of the human sciences, philosophy of mind, epistemology, philosophy of history, and secularization theory. In this dissertation I will examine the specific topics of ethics, religion, and their relationship in Taylor's work. It is my view that such an examination is needed in order to properly assess the importance of Taylor's work.

Before explaining why I think such an examination is needed, I must first explain what is meant here by 'ethics' and 'religion'. By 'ethics' (or 'morality'<sup>2</sup>) I mean the broad domain of what Taylor calls 'strong evaluation', which involves qualitative distinctions of worth in terms of good and bad, right and wrong, higher and lower, noble and base, admirable and contemptible, and so on that are seen as normative for our desires rather than contingent upon them. For Taylor, ethics so construed covers not only the question 'What ought I to do?', but also questions such as 'What is the nature of the good life?' and 'What ought I to love and respect?' In fact, he regards these questions as

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<sup>1</sup> In Richard Rorty's estimation Taylor is "among the dozen most important philosophers writing today, anywhere in the world" (from the back flap of Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity*). The wide recognition of the importance of Taylor's work can especially be seen from the number of books that have been published on his work; see: Abbey 2000; Abbey, ed. 2004; Baker 2007; Braman 2008; Costa 2001; Fraser 2007; Garbowski, Hudzik, and Klos, eds. 2009; Heft, ed. 1999; Laitinen 2008; Leask et al., eds. 2010; O'Shea 2010a; Redhead 2002; Rosa 1998; Smith 2002; Tully, ed. 1994; Warner, Van Antwerpen, and Calhoun, eds. 2010. There are also numerous journal articles and book chapters on Taylor's work (see Bibliography; the most extensive bibliography for Taylor's work and for secondary work on Taylor can be found at: <http://nd.edu/~rabbey1/>).

<sup>2</sup> Although some philosophers stipulate different definitions for the terms 'morality' and 'ethics' (see, e.g., Williams 1985), I will follow the common practice of treating them as synonyms, as Taylor himself does (except when discussing the work of Bernard Williams; see Taylor 1995b).

being interrelated. As for ‘religion’, what I have in mind is what Taylor calls the ‘strong sense’ of religious faith, which is defined by “a double criterion: the belief in transcendent reality, on one hand, and the connected aspirations to a transformation which goes beyond ordinary human flourishing on the other” (*SA* 510; cf. 430).<sup>3</sup>

Particular attention will be given to Taylor’s theistic viewpoint, though of course there are non-theistic views that can also fit this description of religion (e.g., certain versions of Buddhism). In regard to Taylor’s theistic viewpoint, it has been said – quite rightly I think – that he is “a Catholic of ecumenical outlook” (Abbey 2000, 31; cf. Morgan 1994, 65). This can be seen when Taylor writes: “I am a believer, and I also find spiritual greatness in the views of unbelievers; rather as I am a Christian, and find greatness in some facets of Islam, Judaism, Buddhism” (Taylor 1991a, 241; cf. 1994b, 226-30).

Now, one reason why I believe that an examination of the topics of ethics, religion, and their relationship in Taylor’s work is needed for properly assessing its significance is because these topics have increasingly been a focus of his work, starting especially with *Sources of the Self* (1989) and continuing to his most recent magnum opus *A Secular Age* (2007) and beyond. Indeed, as Ruth Abbey puts it, there has been something of a ‘religious turn’ in Taylor’s work starting with *Sources* (Abbey 2006, 163; cf. 2010, 8). This religious turn, Abbey says, “refers not only to an interest in religion as a social or historical force but also to the fact that Taylor has become more explicit about his own religious faith and the ways in which it influences his thinking” (ibid., 163).

Taylor also acknowledges that his religious outlook has been an important motivating factor in his philosophical work from the very beginning, such as in his argument against

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<sup>3</sup> See Reference Key for Abbreviations of Charles Taylor’s Works. Articles by Taylor not published in any of his books of collected essays will be cited like all other references with last name and date of publication. See the Bibliography for full bibliographical information.

reductionist understandings of human action in his first book *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, coming to terms with the religious dimension of Taylor's thought is necessary for understanding his work as a whole.

I will focus particularly on the views that Taylor has advanced with respect to: (1) the significance of a theistic perspective for defending moral realism; (2) the significance of a theistic perspective for motivating an ethic of universal human concern; and (3) the way in which human beings can be said to be 'religious animals' or *homo religiosus*, i.e., how we in some sense have an ineradicable 'bent' towards 'transcendence', especially in connection to our quest for a meaningful life. Not surprisingly, Taylor's views on these matters have been, in my estimation, the most controversial and heavily criticized aspects of his work. However, I think Taylor's views here have often not been adequately

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<sup>4</sup> In an interview I did with Taylor he says that his philosophical work has been "always religiously inspired", as seen from the start with his "anti-reductionistic project" (Taylor 2012a, 293). This religious inspiration is also described in an autobiographical account that Taylor gives of his work entitled "What drove me to philosophy?" (Taylor 2008a). He describes how "wonder and puzzlement" intruded into his life and how they pushed him to where he has gone in his work (ibid., 1). I think it is worth quoting Taylor's account at some length here because it can help to shed light on his work. He writes:

It started when I was very small. I remember a sense of longing for a place full of marvels. But this place was paradoxical. It seemed to be situated in a certain direction outside of the garden where I lived and played; and yet I was aware that it wasn't really situated in ordinary space – though I could never have articulated this at the time. But already I was being nudged towards philosophy, which is all about articulating what has never been properly said. I am aware of course that it is not only philosophy which tries to do this; poetry, music, art can all struggle with the same deep intuitions. But philosophy has its own medium, and I was already being propelled towards it.

Later in adolescence I began to have a sense of this higher place as linked with God, and with a possible transformation of human beings. But the initial moment remained a determining one for me. How to understand human beings and human life, in a way which can show what this sense of a "higher place" comes from, and what it means?

At first, I studied history. This seemed to be the best way. Then I became involved in politics; in the ways that politics could transform human life. But underlying all these was an interest in philosophical anthropology: what were human beings, these beings who can speak and therefore articulate, and in this way transform themselves?

In contact with both history and politics as academic subjects, I began to see how often they are studied in a way which shuts out the questions I was asking. Often one supposes a stripped-down, reductive view of human life. A great deal of my work has been an attempt to combat this kind of reductive, over-simple, one-dimensional understanding. Another impetus was a more immediate practical one: how to articulate the political issues of our time, so that we can actually make headway. And behind both of these was the original search, for that paradoxical place beyond space, for a possible higher mode of being. (ibid., 1-2)

I will return later in this Introduction to discuss Taylor's 'philosophical anthropology'.

understood and when they are adequately understood they can overcome much of this criticism and be seen to offer a compelling perspective. This is then another reason why I believe a deeper examination is needed of the topics of ethics, religion, and their relationship in Taylor's work.

When Taylor puts forward his views on the significance of theism for our ethical life he often does so in somewhat tentative terms, e.g., in terms of 'hunches'.<sup>5</sup> I think this has likely contributed to some of the misunderstanding that I mentioned. It has also given rise to the suspicion that he is just "whistling in the dark", as Quentin Skinner has put it (Skinner 1994, 48; cf. Kitchen 1999, 49; O'Hagan 1993, 81); i.e., offering statements of 'blind faith' (faith without any reasons to support it). However, Taylor does in fact offer reasons for his views and he often gestures in the direction of where a fuller argument needs to go. Hence, he says that such 'hunches' can also be understood in terms of 'anticipatory confidence', which all perspectives – theistic and non-theistic alike – operate upon to some degree.<sup>6</sup> To speak in terms of 'anticipatory confidence' suggests that there are well-founded reasons for our views, even though we cannot offer a full proof and so "our over-all sense of things anticipates or leaps ahead of the reasons we can muster for it" (*SA* 550).<sup>7</sup> As this anticipatory confidence pertains to the issue of the

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<sup>5</sup> See *SS* 342; 515-21; *CM* 30-5; Taylor 2003a, 316-20; *SA* 589, 607-9, 693-703.

<sup>6</sup> See *SA* 550-1; see also *SA* 833, n. 17; Taylor 2011b, 8; 2012a, 281, 285-6; Connolly 2004, 168-71.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the reasons that Taylor cites for his own religious belief include: (1) the lived experience of prayer and other religious practices (Taylor 1994b, 226; *SA* 8, 10-1, 833, n. 17; 2012a, 279-80); (2) exemplary religious lives (Taylor 1994b, 226-7; *SA* 10-1, 729; 2012a, 286); (3) the way that theism can make sense of our strong evaluative experience (*SS* 317, 342, 515-21; Taylor 1994b, 226; 2003a, 316-20; *SA* 10-1, 544-5, 550, 589, 606-9, 692-5; 2012a, 281-3); (4) the implausibility of reductionistic-materialistic understandings of human life (Taylor 2012a, 288-9); and (5) the possible support for theism – or at the very least the compatibility with theism – that is provided by recent 'biophilic' and 'noophilic' theories of the universe (i.e., the view that there is a tendency, and perhaps an inevitability, for the universe to give rise to life and then to intelligence) (Taylor 2012a, 290). Taylor is generally unsympathetic to traditional 'proofs' for God's existence; e.g., he writes: "my account doesn't leave much place for the five ways of proving the existence of God propounded by Aquinas, *provided* (which is by no means unproblematically given) that they are meant to convince us quite independently of our moral and spiritual experience, that one can take

significance of theism for ethics, I think it is important to distinguish between two issues: (1) the assessment of the truth of theism; (2) the assessment of the significance of theism for ethics if it is believed to be true or at least if it is hoped to be true. For Taylor, it is clearly the first issue where a greater ‘leap of faith’ is needed for theists; e.g., in one of the more controversial passages in *Sources* he writes: “Theism is, of course, contested as to its truth. [...] But no one doubts that those who embrace it will find a fully adequate moral source in it” (SS 317). Where anticipatory confidence comes in for Taylor with respect to the significance of theism for ethics is in advancing the claim that a theistic view can offer a *more* adequate ‘moral source’ than non-theistic views (SS 342, 517-8).

One of my central goals in examining the topics of ethics, religion, and their relationship in Taylor’s work is to try to fill out in more detail his claims and hunches about the importance of theism for our ethical life. I fill this out especially in terms of the significance of a certain theistic teleological perspective, which is centered above all on the “telos of communion”.<sup>8</sup> It is my contention that this can be done in a manner that adds

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them as an unbeliever would, as showing the inescapable rational cogency of certain conclusions, regardless of their spiritual meaning to the thinker” (Taylor 1994b, 228; cf. 2012a, 279). In Chapter V I will return to discuss Taylor’s account of the various factors that can draw one to ‘transcendence’.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding this ‘telos of communion’, see, e.g., SA 278-9, 282, 668, 701-3, 764. In filling out the significance of Taylor’s theism for our ethical life in terms of a theistic teleological view I am going beyond the approach of Deane-Peter Baker, who has offered the most extended defense to-date of Taylor’s view of the importance of theism for ethics (Baker 2007; cf. 2000; 2003a-b; 2009). Baker’s approach is to argue that the best account of our experience of a ‘hypergood’ – Taylor’s term for the highest-order good in an account of the good life – is a theistic account that explains this experience in terms of a *sensus divinitatis* (see *ibid.*, 10-5, 124, 143, 158, 190, 198). Baker draws this idea of a ‘sense of divinity’ from the work of Alvin Plantinga rather than from Taylor. He also does not fill out very much what it would mean for a hypergood to evoke a *sensus divinitatis*. However, this approach might be seen to connect up with mine if what this means is that a hypergood may require a theistic teleological view in order to provide a ‘background ontology’ that can make sense of the notion of an ‘incomparably higher’ objective good.

I should mention that my approach also goes beyond those who interpret Taylor’s view of the significance of theism for ethics primarily in terms of an appeal to grace (see, e.g., Connolly 2004, 172; Mulhall 1996, 146-51). While divine grace in the form of God’s *agape* is certainly important on Taylor’s Christian view, this needs to be understood against the background of a theistic teleological view centered on the telos of communion. Finally, advancing this theistic teleological reading is important for overcoming a common misinterpretation of Taylor as endorsing ‘divine command ethics’ (i.e., theological voluntarism), which he explicitly rejects. I will say more on this later.

further support to Taylor's views on these matters. Thus I am taking a largely sympathetic and supportive approach to the religious dimension of Taylor's thought, which contrasts with what I think is a dominantly critical response among commentators.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that Taylor himself often seems more concerned here with opening up what he thinks are overlooked issues for debate than with actually laying out in great detail his own position in the debate.<sup>10</sup> But his own position is certainly behind why he thinks it is important to open up the debate and he does provide some argument for it. What I want to do is to actually take up the debate and advance Taylor's position in a way that I think can be seen as the direction he gestures towards, or at least as where the argument needs to go. I think doing so is needed, first of all, for properly assessing the significance of Taylor's work; secondly, for overcoming misunderstandings of it; and thirdly, for coming to terms with the issues it raises.

A few points of clarification are needed here. First, like Taylor, I will be concerned not with defending the truth of a theistic perspective, but rather with defending its significance for our ethical life if it is believed to be true or at least if it is hoped to be true. One might call this a 'Jamesian approach' since it resembles the approach of William James to the topic of theism.<sup>11</sup> However, like both James and Taylor, I will proceed with the assumption that theism is at least a 'live option', even if it is a strongly contested one.<sup>12</sup> Second, in seeking to fill out and support Taylor's views on the

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<sup>9</sup> For some particularly notable critical responses to the religious dimension of Taylor's thought see: Fraser 2005, 2007; Laitinen 2008; Redhead 2002; and Skinner 1991, 1994. These critical responses and many others will be discussed in due course. While there are also some sympathetic responses, none of them seek to go as far as I do in supporting and extending Taylor's views.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., *SS* 10-1, 521; Taylor 1994b, 226; 1994c, 131; 1995b, 152-3; 1998, 112; *CM* 118-123; 2003a, 320; *SA* 606-9; 2009a, 101; *DC* 302; 2011c, 119.

<sup>11</sup> See James 1956, Essays 1 & 6; 2004, Lectures XIV & XV; 1981, Lecture III.

<sup>12</sup> A similar Jamesian approach can be found in the recent work by John Cottingham in the philosophy of religion; see especially Cottingham 2003; 2005; 2009a. I think Cottingham makes a strong case for



significance of theism for our ethical life it is in no way my intention (just as it is not Taylor's intention) to claim that a non-theist cannot be ethical, or even very ethically admirable. It is obvious that there are many ethically admirable non-theists. The point is rather to show the difference a theistic view can make for our ethical life with respect to the issues of defending moral realism, motivating an ethic of universal human concern, and living a meaningful, fulfilling life.<sup>13</sup>

Along with these issues I will also be exploring Taylor's general evaluative framework based on his account of strong evaluation. In doing so I hope to show how he provides a distinct and important perspective among contemporary moral philosophers. At various points I will explore his differences not only with Kantian and utilitarian views, but also with many neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists, even though his own perspective can be described as 'neo-Aristotelian' given his concern with the question 'What is the nature of the good life?' and given his favorable references to Aristotle's ethical views. In regard to these differences it will be my contention that Taylor's evaluative framework enables a more proper understanding of our ethical life.

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regarding theism as a live option. Because of the many similarities with Taylor's approach I will be drawing on Cottingham's work at various points in this dissertation.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to remember that the wide spread attempt to develop a fully non-religious or secular ethic is a relatively new phenomenon, starting especially in the Enlightenment with thinkers like Hume. I think it is worth enquiring into how successful this attempt is or could be, especially given the content many people want such an ethic to have (viz., there is a broad commitment to an ethic of universal human concern and often to some form of moral realism). Taylor is one of a number of prominent recent moral philosophers who have raised doubts about the project of a completely secular ethic as it is typically conceived (see Anscombe 1981, Ch. 4; MacIntyre 2007; Mackie 1977; and Williams 1985). There are of course others who are quite optimistic about the prospects of secular ethics. For instance, Derek Parfit writes: "Non-Religious Ethics is at a very early stage. We cannot yet predict whether, as in Mathematics, we will all reach agreement. Since we cannot know how Ethics will develop, it is not irrational to have high hopes" (Parfit 1984, 454; cf. Nagel 1986, 186).

*Re-Enchanting the World*

In examining the topics of ethics, religion, and their relationship in Taylor's work I will be taking as my guiding thread something that I believe has been a central concern throughout his writings: viz., his concern to confront the challenges presented by the "disenchantment of the world" in the modern West, which, as Max Weber remarks, is what above all characterizes the "fate of our times" (Weber 1946, 155).<sup>14</sup> I want to outline this issue here because it will be an important background for what follows.

If we are to understand what is meant here by the 'disenchantment of the world' it is necessary first of all to know something about the 'enchantment' that it is said to have done away with. According to Taylor, the pre-modern 'enchanted world' in the West can be characterized at two levels: viz., at the popular level and at the level of elite culture or high theory. At the popular level, the enchanted world is a world of spirits and magic forces – i.e., 'charged objects' with powers to wreak good or ill, such as relics, magic potions, etc. – that can impinge on human agents. The self is understood here to be 'porous' insofar as it is vulnerable to such impingement by spirits and magic forces (*SS* 191-2; *SA* 25-43; *DC* 287-92). At the level of elite culture or high theory, the enchanted world involves a belief in a meaningful cosmic order (or 'ontic logos') in which meaning is placed within the cosmos independent of our responses to it, such as in the idea of the 'Great Chain of Being'. Moreover, this meaningful cosmos is understood to be part of the obvious, taken for granted background to human life as well as something that can be

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<sup>14</sup> For some discussions in Taylor's works pertaining to this issue of 'disenchantment' see: *H*, Ch. 1 & Conclusion; *PHS* 255-73; *SS* 16-9, 26-7, 59-60, 68-9, 93-5, 121-9, 144, 151-2, 160-1, 164, 186-93, 200, 220-1, 274-84, 288, 298-302, 314, 368-90, 416-7, 419, 427-8, 433, 451-5, 492-3, 500, 506-13; *EA* 3-5, 35-6, 40-1, 58, 72-3, 88-91, 94, 120-1; Taylor 1994e, 17-20; 1997b; 2003a; *SA* 25-89, 97-9, 130-6, 150-2, 232-4, 238-9, 268-71, 280-1, 283-4, 299-321, 322-354, 361-8, 375-6, 378-84, 446-7, 539-48, 550-6, 588-9, 613-4, 714, 773; 2009, 93-5; 2010a, 302-4; *DC*, Ch. 12; 2011c; 2012a, 276-86; 2012b.

rationally apprehended.<sup>15</sup> As John McDowell puts it: “In a common mediaeval outlook, what we now see as the subject matter of natural science was conceived as filled with meaning, as if all of nature were a book of lessons for us” (McDowell 1994, 71; cf. 1998, 174). According to Taylor, these two levels of the enchanted world in fact “interpenetrated and strengthened each other”: “The high theory was easier to believe in a world of enchanted sensibility. And the theory itself could draw on some of [the] features of popular lore, giving them a new rationale and systematic form” (*DC* 292).

The process of disenchantment then has involved doing away with these two levels of the enchanted world. Taylor regards the success of post-Galilean natural science as playing a key role in this process.<sup>16</sup> For one thing, post-Galilean natural science made progress by offering mechanistic explanations of empirical phenomena rather than the sort of teleological explanations that were central to the ‘enchanted’ idea of a meaningful cosmic order. This made possible, Taylor says, a wholly immanent order in nature “whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it” (*SA* 15). Second, the success of modern science also made the world seem less mysterious and thus made it difficult to believe in spirits and magic forces that impinged on us. In contrast to the

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<sup>15</sup> See *H*, Ch. 1; *SS* 16-8, 121-9, 160-1, 186-92; *SA* 25, 59-61, 323-31; *DC* 291-2.

<sup>16</sup> This is the most typical explanation of disenchantment and it is the one we find especially emphasized by Weber. However, Taylor argues that the original impetus for disenchantment in fact came from Christianity, specifically from the continued efforts of reform that began in Latin Christendom (see *SA*, Part I). Such efforts of reform were initially conducted by religious elites who sought to cultivate higher levels of piety in greater conformity with the high demands of the Gospel and also to do away with ‘magical’ or ‘superstitious’ beliefs and practices that were focused on promoting ordinary human flourishing and took away from the sovereignty of God. These efforts of reform then continued in the early modern period in political forms that sought through certain ‘disciplinary’ practices to reduce violence and disorder and to create an immanent moral/political order based on cooperation for mutual benefit.

I focus here on the effects of post-Galilean natural science because, as we will see, this is especially the issue that has to be contended with in seeking re-enchantment insofar as post-Galilean natural science gave rise to a ‘projectivist’ account of meaning/value.

‘porous’ self of the enchanted world, disenchantment brought with it a ‘buffered’ self where there is a clear boundary between self and world: “For the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my response to them” (*SA* 38; cf. 30-1, 42). In other words, whereas in the enchanted world the most important locus of meaning is in the cosmos, in the disenchanted world it is ‘in the mind’ insofar as for us meaning depends on our responses to the world. The crucial question is what we should make of such responses.<sup>17</sup>

For Taylor, the process of disenchantment so understood clearly constitutes an improvement in our understanding of the world. However, it also brings with it difficult challenges related to how we are to understand our experiences of meaning or value (used equivalently here). On one view of disenchantment, which we can call extreme, total, or complete disenchantment, the loss of the pre-modern idea of a meaningful cosmic order entails that all human experiences of meaning or value are to be regarded simply as subjective projections onto a meaningless or value-neutral universe (*DC* 293-4). The most extreme version of disenchantment in fact combines such projectivism with a mechanistic view of human beings whereby our experiences of meaning or value are explained reductionistically in terms of our genes, or our brain ‘wiring’, or a stimulus-response mechanism, or something else of the sort (see *DC* 292-302). Taylor wants to argue against such views of total disenchantment, and doing so, he says, can be

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<sup>17</sup> Although Taylor believes that the meaning of things arises for us on the basis of our human responses to the world, nevertheless, it does not necessarily follow that the world does not have any meaning independent of our human responses. He writes: “Obviously the [theist] will not consent to the notion that there is no meaning in reality in abstraction from human agents; and I myself am not accepting this” (*DC* 294). But even if this is the case, for us as human beings we can only come to affirm this on the basis of our responses to the world.

understood in terms of seeking a kind of ‘re-enchantment’ of the world (see *DC* 292-4; Taylor 2009, 93-5; 2011c, 115-9). For Taylor, seeking re-enchantment does not mean a return to the pre-modern ‘enchanted world’<sup>18</sup>; rather, it primarily means defending a realist, non-projectivist account of meaning or value. He writes: ““re-enchantment” [...] doesn’t undo the “disenchantment” which occurs in the modern period. It re-establishes the non-arbitrary, non-projective character of certain demands on us, which are firmly anchored in our being-in-the-world” (2011c, 117). Thus, he says,

[...] the issue about re-enchantment can be put this way: when we have left the “enchanted” world of spirits, and no longer believe in the Great Chain, what sense can we make of the notion that nature or the universe which surrounds us is the locus of human meanings which are “objective,” in the sense that they are not just arbitrarily projected through choice or contingent desire? Put another way, the attribution of these meanings counts for us as strong evaluations. (ibid.)

For Taylor, then, seeking re-enchantment above all involves defending the validity of strong evaluations, i.e., qualitative distinctions of worth that are seen as being normative for our desires rather than as contingent upon them. Otherwise stated: it means defending the validity of the ‘enchantment’ – i.e., the objective ‘human meanings’ or normative ‘demands’ or what Taylor calls ‘strong goods’ (each used equivalently) – that can already be found in our ‘being-in-the-world’ against the total disenchantment view.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This is an important point because some commentators have misinterpreted Taylor as having a sort of nostalgia for the medieval enchanted world (see Flanagan 2010; Smith 2009; Robbins 2011).

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that the language of ‘re-enchantment’ is potentially misleading insofar as it might suggest that the world *is* completely disenchantment (i.e., devoid of meaning) and so we must create or bring about the meaning or ‘enchantment’. However, Taylor clearly sees re-enchantment as first of all requiring us to *discover* something that is already there to be discovered: viz., objective human meanings/normative demands/strong goods. Hence I said that for Taylor re-enchantment involves defending a realist, non-projectivist account of meaning/value (which strong evaluation presupposes). On Taylor’s view then the world is *not* completely disenchantment and so re-enchantment is a matter of defending the validity of objective meaning/value against the total disenchantment view. This includes overcoming the ways in which objective meaning or value has been neglected, as we will see below in Taylor’s critique of ‘naturalism’ (i.e., ‘scientism’) and his defense of an ‘engaged’ approach to philosophical anthropology, which is alluded to with the use of the Heideggerian phrase ‘being-in-the-world’.

Closely connected with defending the validity of strong evaluations, for Taylor seeking re-enchantment, I think, also involves aspiring to ‘self-transcendence’, where this means transcending a ‘lower’ mode of selfhood for a ‘higher’ mode of selfhood in concern for strong goods that are normative for our desires (i.e., ‘objective demands’). According to Taylor, one of the chief worries regarding disenchantment has been that with the loss of the pre-modern idea of a publicly available cosmic moral order in which individuals found their place and function there would be a corresponding loss of a sense of a higher and larger purpose for human life (*EA* 3-4). Moreover, this is often linked to “a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society” (*EA* 4).<sup>20</sup> Thus, we can say that if the process of disenchantment – especially in its most extreme forms – pushes towards self-

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<sup>20</sup> Taylor also connects this up with the rise of the dominance of instrumental reason, which is another important Weberian concept (*EA* 4-8). This arises when we do away with the strong sense that there are objective demands upon us. The sole question then becomes how we can most effectively attain the desires we happen to have. Taylor sees this expressed in the technological and economic mindset that regards the natural world merely as raw material to be used for our various purposes. One of his central goals in seeking re-enchantment is to counter such a mindset by recovering certain non-anthropocentric strong goods, such as natural world as understood from a deep ecological perspective (see *SS* 102-3, 383-4, 506-7, 513, Chs. 20-3; *EA* 35, 40-1, 58, 72-3, 88-91; *PA* 100-1, 125-6; *SA* 9, 221-4, 317, 345-50, 599, 789-90, n. 69; cf. Kerr 2004, 84). In doing so Taylor is following in the Romantic tradition, which he sees as a response to the dominant Enlightenment tradition that tends towards a utilitarian technological and economic mindset (Taylor 2012a, 277; cf. *DC* 292-3). For theists, another important example of a non-anthropocentric strong good is of course God.

For Taylor, the concern for non-anthropocentric strong goods is an important part of achieving self-transcendence. But there are also anthropocentric strong goods – e.g., ideals of our own human potential and the worth or dignity of other human beings – that are important for achieving self-transcendence. Self-transcendence can be achieved in concern for any strong good – whether anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric – since all strong goods are seen as normative for our desires rather than contingent upon them. The self-enclosure or “centring on the self” that “flattens and narrows our lives” and makes our lives “poorer in meaning” and “less concerned with others” arises once we lose a strong sense of objective demands that are normative for our desires and we are left only with the contingent desires we happen to possess and the instrumentalizing pursuit of satisfying them.

enclosure, then re-enchantment must involve a move towards greater self-transcendence in concern for strong goods.<sup>21</sup>

Now, it is only recently that Taylor has begun to use the language of ‘re-enchantment’ to describe his response to the challenges presented by the process of disenchantment. However, I think this is in fact an apt way to describe one of the main concerns throughout his work: viz., his concern to defend the validity of strong evaluation and the higher form of life it enables, which the process of disenchantment has called into question.<sup>22</sup> As mentioned above, Taylor has been concerned with addressing the challenges posed by disenchantment throughout his work. This has been explicitly the case going back to his book on Hegel (1975). However, I think it is also implicitly the case going back to his first book, *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964). This is because Taylor’s effort of seeking re-enchantment is integrally connected to his central project of articulating an adequate ‘philosophical anthropology’, which began in *The Explanation of Behaviour*.<sup>23</sup> I would like to explain this connection in some detail.

In *The Explanation of Behaviour* Taylor describes ‘philosophical anthropology’ as “the study of the basic categories in which man [*sic*] and his behaviour is to be described and explained” (*EB* 4). Along the same lines, but more recently, he says of the

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<sup>21</sup> We will see in Chapter III that Taylor in fact seeks to recover – through the route of ‘personal resonance’ – something of an analogue to the enchanted world idea of a meaningful cosmic order. I will seek to show how for Taylor this takes the form of a certain theistic teleological conception of life.

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that Taylor first introduced the term ‘strong evaluation’ in an essay in 1976 (see Taylor 1976; cf. *HAL*, Ch. 1). However, the basic idea can be found in his first book, *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964). The “study of human nature and its fundamental goals” is there said to be important for an Aristotelian form of ethical reflection in which the central premise is that “there is a form of life which is *higher or more properly human than others*, and that the dim intuition of the ordinary man to this effect can be vindicated in its substance or else corrected in its contents by a deeper understanding of human nature” (*EB* 4; my emphasis).

<sup>23</sup> The centrality of this project for Taylor can be seen in the “Introduction” to his *Philosophical Papers* where he describes the collection of essays as the work of a ‘monomaniac’ (or a ‘hedgehog’, to use Isaiah Berlin’s term), insofar as “a single rather tightly related agenda underlies all of them”, which he says falls in the domain of ‘philosophical anthropology’ (*HAL* 1). See also n. 4.

task of philosophical anthropology: “it tries to define certain fundamental features about human beings, their place in nature, their defining capacities (language is obviously central to these), and their most powerful or basic motivations, goals, needs, and aspirations” (Taylor 2005, 35). Before describing Taylor’s own positive views in this domain it is important to first understand what he takes to be the main opposition to his position and against which he seeks to argue: viz., the view of human life and action found in an influential ‘family of theories’ in the human sciences that are united in their allegiance to what he calls ‘naturalism’ (*HAL* 1-2). It is precisely this ‘naturalism’ that is behind views of total disenchantment.

Although the term ‘naturalism’ can be used in different senses, Taylor primarily uses it in a sense that is synonymous with ‘scientism’. By ‘naturalism’ Taylor says he means “not just the view that man can be seen as part of nature – in one sense or other this would surely be accepted by everyone – but that the nature of which he is a part is to be understood according to the canons which emerged in the seventeenth-century revolution in natural science” (*HAL* 2; cf. *SS* 80-1; Taylor 1995b, 137, 141).<sup>24</sup> One of the most important of these canons is that we must avoid ‘anthropocentric’ properties, i.e., properties that necessarily refer to our experience of the significance of things for us as purposeful human agents (*HAL* 2; *SS* 81; cf. *HAL* 48-54). One should instead seek to

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<sup>24</sup> The term ‘naturalism’, Taylor says, “could have a number of other equally justified uses, some of them designating doctrines that I heartily concur in; just as there are anti-naturalist views which deserve to be rejected. But I need some short handy term for this particular view about science and human nature” (*SS* 531, n. 47). It seems that ‘scientism’ is a better, less misleading term for Taylor’s purposes. But this would have to be understood with reference to a narrow sense of science, viz., natural science, rather than a broad sense of science that denotes any domain of knowledge, including both the natural and the human sciences. There is perhaps no fully adequate term here that would avoid all possible misunderstanding.

Sometimes such ‘scientism’ is referred to as ‘scientific naturalism’ or ‘strict naturalism’, which is contrasted with ‘liberal naturalism’ or ‘broad naturalism’, which is not scientific, i.e., reductionistic (see De Caro and Macarthur, eds. 2004; 2010; Goetz and Taliaferro 2008). This liberal or broad naturalism is what Taylor sometimes refers to as ‘sophisticated naturalism’ (see n. 25 below).



describe things in ‘absolute’ terms, i.e., without reference to the significance of things for us. In other words, the attempt here is to understand human life from a third-personal perspective rather than a first-personal perspective, or as Thomas Nagel puts it, from the ‘view from nowhere’ rather than the ‘view from somewhere’ (Nagel 1986).

One of the classic examples of such ‘naturalism’ in the human sciences is the theory of behaviourism in psychology, which Taylor argued against in *The Explanation of Behaviour*. According to behaviourism, we can explain human action merely by appealing to a stimulus-response mechanism and thus without reference to the conscious purposes or goals of human agents. When behaviourism fell out of favor there then came into vogue various ‘computational’ theories of the mind that sought to account for human intelligence by explaining it on the model of computer ‘intelligence’, i.e., in terms of a kind of data-processing mechanism that again prescind from our experience of the significance of things for us (see, e.g., *HAL*, Ch. 8). More recently, with the rise of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology there are now attempts to explain human emotions and desires and the actions to which they give rise as the by-products of our evolutionary past, i.e., of the mechanism of natural selection. Once again this prescind from our experience of the significance of things for us (see, e.g., Taylor 2005).

What is striking about these different theories, Taylor remarks, is their reductive nature: “they are all trying to avoid recognizing some important and obtrusive aspect of human life, and purport to explain the phenomena we normally understand in terms of this aspect by other factors”, viz., by some underlying mechanism (*HAL 2*). In doing so they depend upon a ‘disengaged’ model of reasoning, which means that “we cease to rely on our engaged sense, our familiarity with some domain, and take a reflexive turn. We

put our trust in a method, a procedure of operation” (*DC* 6). This implies a certain view of ‘objectivity’ that seeks to eliminate all reference to our experience of the significance of things for us as purposeful agents. In other words, it aspires to ‘neutrality’ with respect to such experience (*HAL* 4-5; *SA* 283-5). However, Taylor argues that those who embrace such theories are in fact themselves often motivated by a sense of the freedom and power that arises from this disengaged, ‘objectifying’ stance (*HAL* 4-6; *SA* 286; *DC* 6). Indeed, he claims that the epistemological weaknesses of ‘naturalism’ are often made up for by the draw to the ideal of disengagement with its sense of freedom and power (*HAL* 6).

The attraction towards this ideal of disengagement can also be seen in what Taylor describes as the ‘naturalist temper’ apparent in much of modern thought. This naturalist temper, he says, “is a much more diffuse thing, stopping short frequently of explicit espousal of full-blooded naturalism, but tending to be suspicious of the things that naturalism cannot accommodate” (Taylor 1995b, 137). Thus it seeks as far as possible to achieve an understanding of human beings and the world that is continuous with the methods and ontology of the natural sciences (*ibid.*). This naturalist temper and its ideal of disengagement can be seen in a number of influential views in different philosophical domains, such as: (1) in ‘mediational’ views in epistemology that maintain a distinction between ‘inner’ mental states and an ‘outer’ world that abstracts from our ‘engaged’ or ‘embodied’ sense of involvement in the world (see *PA*, Ch. 1; Taylor 1993; 2004c); (2) in ‘designative’ or ‘enframing’ views in the philosophy of language that regard language as an instrument that we apply to our already existing mental representations rather than as being expressive and constitutive of our understanding of things (see *HAL*, Chs. 9 & 10; *PA*, Chs. 5 & 6); (3) in ‘punctual’ views of the self in the

philosophy of personal identity where the self is understood to be constituted merely by momentary self-awareness rather than by any fundamental concerns regarding the significance of things for us (see *SS*, Chs. 2 & 9); (4) in ‘atomist’ views in political philosophy that abstract from common meanings held between persons and focus on individual preferences (see *PHS*, Chs. 1 & 7; *PA*, Chs. 7, 10, 13); and (5) in ‘moralities of obligatory action’ (e.g., Kantianism and utilitarianism) in moral philosophy that depend upon a decision-procedure rather than on substantive views of the good life and in projectivist views of morality (see *PHS*, Ch. 9; *SS*, Ch. 3; Taylor 1995b; *DC*, Ch. 1).<sup>25</sup>

The important point to see is that each of these positions involves some stance of disengagement from our ordinary sense of the significance of things for us. It should also be noted that Taylor often seems to use the term ‘naturalism’ in an inclusive way that can refer to both strict versions of naturalism, where there is an attempt to reduce the human sciences to the natural sciences, and less strict versions, as expressed in the ‘naturalist temper’, which seek to model the human sciences to some extent on the natural sciences. I will also use the term in this inclusive sense, unless otherwise stated.

The positive or constructive task of Taylor’s philosophical anthropology therefore consists in defending an alternative to the disengaged stance of naturalism: viz., the ‘engaged stance’ or the perspective of ‘engaged agency’ (see *HAL*, Ch. 2; *PA*, Ch. 4;

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<sup>25</sup> Taylor acknowledges that there are more ‘sophisticated’ forms of naturalism in ethics that “understand our evaluations as among the perceptions of the world and our social existence which are inseparable from our living through and participating in our form of life” (*SS* 67). In other words, this version allows for the importance of a first-personal perspective for properly understanding the moral life, though it still does not depart far from the ontology revealed by natural science insofar as it “still can balk at the full “reality” of the intrinsically higher, in the name of a naturalistic, evolutionary account of the human animal and its life form.” Taylor remarks of this sophisticated naturalism: “we have not discharged our entire debt to phenomenology once we have laid the ghost of microreductionism to rest. There remains the tension between the phenomenology of the incommensurably higher and a naturalist ontology which has difficulty finding a place for this” (Taylor 2003a, 316). I will come back to examine this issue in more detail in Chapter III when discussing the differences between the views of Taylor and John McDowell.

Taylor 1989b; 2011b). In other words, Taylor seeks to show the difference it makes for our understanding of our selves and the world if we properly take account of our experience of the significance of things for us as purposeful agents. He maintains that features of the world “have meaning for an agent because he has purposes, goals, aspirations, and because they touch him in various ways. That one is touched, concerned, non-indifferent is a primitive fact about subjects” (Taylor 1989b, 2). Although Taylor thinks the process of disenchantment has done away with the ‘porous’ self that is vulnerable to impingement from spirits and magic forces, nevertheless, we can see this engaged standpoint as a kind of analogue to the porous self and as key for seeking re-enchantment. However, in this case the impingement has to do with the meaning that arises for us through our activities as purposeful agents.<sup>26</sup>

Taylor also describes his alternative as a ‘hermeneutic’ approach. Although the term ‘hermeneutics’ is often understood with reference to the interpretation of the meaning of texts, for Taylor –following the post-Heideggarian tradition – it is understood with reference to the interpretation of our experience of the meaning of things for us as purposeful agents which arises from our ‘being-in-the-world’, to use Heidegger’s phrase.<sup>27</sup> The need for such interpretation follows from the fact that this experience is

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<sup>26</sup> One commentator, Karl E. Smith, appears to conflate the porous self with the engaged standpoint and the buffered self with the disengaged standpoint (Smith 2009; cf. Bilgrami 2010, 152). However, this confuses two separate issues. For Taylor, all modern persons are some variant of the buffered self and cannot go back to the porous self. While it is true that the buffered self can tend towards the disengaged stance (and indeed it is enabled by our capacity for disengagement), it does not preclude the engaged standpoint. For Taylor, if we seek re-enchantment, we do so as buffered selves attempting to defend the validity of the significances that arise for us from the engaged standpoint (see Taylor 2009, 93-5).

<sup>27</sup> Some of the key figures in the ‘hermeneutic’ tradition of philosophy, besides Heidegger, include Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Habermas (*PHS* 15). Although Taylor generally takes Heidegger to be a founding figure in this tradition he does acknowledge that the hermeneutic tradition can be seen as going back to Dilthey (*ibid.*). It should be mentioned here that the philosophers to whom Taylor is most indebted in advancing his ‘engaged-hermeneutic’ approach to philosophical anthropology and whose work he sees himself as developing are Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein (see *PA*, Chs. 1, 2 & 4; Taylor 1989b; 1993; 2004c). Although the latter two are not typically considered to be a part of the ‘hermeneutic’

often part of our implicit or pre-reflective (or not fully reflective) ‘background’ understanding as human agents engaged in pursuing our various purposes. Thus, in order to better understand this implicit experience of meaning we need interpretation (i.e., articulation) to make explicit what is implicit.

One of the central theses that Taylor seeks to defend with regard to his ‘engaged-hermeneutic’ approach is that human beings are ‘self-interpreting animals’ (see *HAL*, Ch. 2; see also *HAL* 3-4, 189-91; *SS* 33-4). What he means by this is that our ‘sense of self’ or identity is constituted by our interpretations of the significance of things for us:

We are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me. And [...] these things have significance for me, and the issue of my identity is worked out, only through a language of interpretation which I have come to accept as a valid articulation of these issues. To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn’t in principle be an answer. (*SS* 34; cf. *HAL* 3)

In other words, contra naturalism, this means that the self cannot be understood in ‘absolute’ terms, i.e., independent of our interpretations of the significance of things for us as purposeful agents (*HAL* 3-4). The reason for talking about a ‘sense of self’, as Taylor often does, is due to the fact that our self is constituted by interpretation of what is important to us (see *SS* 32-3; Taylor 1994a, 209). The self thus cannot exist apart from a sense of self, i.e., apart from self-interpretation. For Taylor then it is a crucial fact about the self that it is not an object of study of the sort studied by the natural sciences:

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tradition, nevertheless, their approaches are essentially on the same track. One need only consider Merleau-Ponty’s view on ‘embodied agency’ and his claim that we are ‘condemned to meaning’ in *The Phenomenology of Perception* and Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘forms of life’ in the *Philosophical Investigations*. For a good discussion of Taylor’s relationship to the hermeneutic tradition see Smith 2004. In his book *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals and Modernity* (2002) Smith takes Taylor’s hermeneutic approach to be the guiding thread of his philosophical project. This basically concurs with my reading of Taylor in terms of the theme of re-enchantment, which seeks to recover a non-projective view of human meanings; however, I put greater emphasis on responding to the challenges of disenchantment.

We are not selves in the way we are organisms, or we don't have selves in the way we have hearts and livers. We are living beings with these organs quite independently of our self-understandings or –interpretations, or the meanings things have for us. But we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find orientation to the good. (*SS* 34)

The last sentence here points to a stronger claim about the specific nature of the sense of significance operative in our self-interpretation: viz., our self-understanding inescapably involves seeing ourselves against a background of strong evaluation (*HAL* 3). As we will discuss in Chapter III, for Taylor strong evaluation is 'inescapable' in that it is necessary for properly functioning human agency; i.e., without it we would fall into a disorientating, despairing condition involving a sort of 'identity crisis'.

What Taylor is identifying here is a 'human constant'. In his philosophical anthropology he in fact identifies a number of human constants; e.g., human beings are: (1) embodied agents who are purposefully engaged with the world and thus experience the world as having significance for them; (2) expressive language animals whose experience and identity is constituted through linguistic self-interpretation; (3) social animals who are drawn to interpersonal communion and whose self-interpretation is dialogically constituted; (4) strong evaluators who are orientated in 'moral space' as they seek fullness or meaning and whose identity is constituted by a narrative understanding of their sense of 'placement' with respect to their view of the good; and (5) religious animals who have a natural bent towards 'transcendence'.<sup>28</sup>

To return to the claim that our self-understanding 'inescapably' involves seeing ourselves against a background of strong evaluation, we should note that if this is true it entails that it would be difficult for us as human beings to actually live life as though it

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<sup>28</sup> In delineating this list of 'human constants' for Taylor I have benefited from Abbey 2000, 56-72, 212; Smith 2002, 87, 100-1, 133-5, 140, 235, 237-42; and Laitinen 2008, 75. It should also be said that this list is not intended to be exhaustive, but it does highlight central human constants for Taylor.

were totally disenchanting. This would mean being in a sort of identity crisis. Moreover, it suggests that, at least pre-reflectively, we do live life as though it were in some sense ‘enchanted’. But even if it is true that it would be practically difficult to live in a totally disenchanting world, there remains the important question of whether we can defend the validity of strong evaluation (i.e., the realist, non-projectivist account of value that it implies) in the face of the challenge presented by a view of total disenchantment.<sup>29</sup>

As will be discussed, in defending a strong evaluative or moral realist position Taylor wants to chart a ‘middle path’ between projectivism and a ‘Platonism’ where values are claimed to exist in complete independence of our responses to the world, as with the enchanted view of a meaningful cosmic order discussed above. This middle path for Taylor involves defending a realist view that is seen as arising out of our ‘engaged’ responses to the world as purposeful agents. Hence, above we saw that Taylor describes ‘re-enchantment’ as consisting primarily in the effort to re-establish “the non-arbitrary, non-projective character of certain demands on us, which are firmly anchored in our being-in-the-world” (Taylor 2011c, 117). However, Taylor also maintains that in order to make sense of our responses to strong goods we must articulate an ‘ontological background picture’ that can make sense of these responses. In other words, we need a ‘moral ontology’ that can make sense of our ‘moral phenomenology’.

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<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting here that there are a number of thinkers, such as Jane Bennett, Bruce Robbins, and William Connolly, who want to challenge the standard ‘disenchantment tale’ that sees us as moving from an enchanted religious world to a disenchanting secular world. According to these writers, what is wrong with the standard disenchantment tale is that the world can still be experienced as being filled with meaning and things at which to wonder (see Bennett 2001; Connolly 1999, 14-7; Robbins 2011; cf. Jay 2009; During 2010; Bilgrami 2010; Jager 2010; Sheehan 2010). While I think this is of course in some sense true, nevertheless, it seems to miss the major challenge of the ‘disenchantment tale’: viz., even if we may experience the world as objectively meaningful, can this be sustained when subjected to scrutiny or must these experiences ultimately be understood in projectivist terms? The age of disenchantment is precisely the age in which projectivism becomes a challenge to be addressed and when people can find it to be the most convincing account of our experiences of meaning or value.

One of the key issues that Taylor wants to raise is whether part of the ontological background picture that may be needed for making sense of our strong evaluative responses (or moral phenomenology) is a theistic perspective. If this is the case then it entails that re-enchantment requires theism in order to be fully adequate. This seems to be suggested all the more if there is also, as Taylor maintains, a natural ‘bent’ towards ‘transcendence’ in human life in connection with our quest for a meaningful life. However, it is noteworthy that many of the contemporary thinkers who have sought a kind of ‘re-enchantment’ have done so from a non-theistic perspective.<sup>30</sup> One of the benefits of Taylor’s work then is that it enables us to assess the viability of such views by presenting them with a forceful challenge.

#### *Overview of the Chapters to Follow*

Now, with this discussion of the guiding thread of the dissertation in place, I would like to give a brief overview of the chapters that will follow.

In the next two chapters I examine Taylor’s general evaluative framework, which, as previously mentioned, is centered on his account of strong evaluation. In the first section of Chapter Two I explore what is involved in Taylor’s distinction between strong evaluation and weak evaluation, focusing especially on the way in which ‘strong goods’ are regarded as being normative for our desires and incommensurable with ‘weak goods’. I also explore what is involved in being a strong evaluator: first, I discuss how it enables greater articulacy and explain the connection between being a strong evaluator and a

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<sup>30</sup> One of the most influential non-religious attempts at re-enchantment is found in the work of John McDowell (McDowell 1994, Lectures IV-VI; 1998, Essay 9). I will return to discuss McDowell’s view vis-à-vis Taylor’s view in Chapter III. For other non-religious attempts at a kind of re-enchantment see, e.g., Bilgrami 2010; Connolly 2010; Costa 2011; Dreyfus and Kelly 2011a-b; Ferry 2002; Flanagan 2007; Fraser 2007; Gordon 2008; 2011; Guignon 2004; Hart 2012; Kitcher 2011; Laitinen 2008; Levine 2008; 2011; Nagel 2010, Ch. 1; Smith 2009. For other theistic attempts at re-enchantment see Cottingham 2003; 2005; 2009; Graham 2007; Scruton 2012.



‘language animal’; second, I respond to the charge that Taylor’s view of human beings as strong evaluators is overly intellectualist; third and finally, I seek to show how being a strong evaluator is compatible with there being a place for weak evaluation in human life, which might be called into question by the way in which strong goods override weak goods. In the second section I examine Taylor’s two-tiered account of strong goods in terms of ‘life goods’ and ‘constitutive goods’ and discuss how this offers a unique and important perspective vis-à-vis the prominent contemporary ethical frameworks of Kantianism, utilitarianism, and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (at least in its most common form). I also explain how Taylor’s account of strong goods embodies an ‘internalist’ view of moral psychology and discuss how this is connected to his view of the importance of ‘articulation’ in our ethical life. Next, I examine Taylor’s affirmation of a plurality of constitutive goods and life goods and discuss what is involved in reconciling these goods when they conflict in our pursuit of the good life. Finally, I discuss the criticism of Taylor’s account of strong evaluation, especially his account of constitutive goods, as being too closely connected with his theism to be acceptable to non-theists. I argue that when properly understood his account can be seen to apply to the ethical experience (broadly understood) of theists and non-theists alike.

In Chapter Three I examine the two key arguments that Taylor makes with respect to his account of strong evaluation, which are central to his effort of re-enchantment. In the first section I examine his ‘transcendental argument’ for the claim that properly functioning human agents are inescapably strong evaluators, which involves exploring his account of ‘the self in moral space’. While I think there are difficulties with demonstrating something as strong as the claim that strong evaluation is *inescapable* for

properly functioning human agency, I argue that strong evaluation is at least very difficult for human agents to avoid entirely and also that Taylor can be said to be exploring “the limits of the conceivable in human life” (SS 32). In the second section I examine Taylor’s argument for strong evaluative realism in which he seeks to establish a middle path between ‘Platonism’ and projectivism. As mentioned, Taylor’s defense of strong evaluative realism depends upon articulating an adequate moral ontology, i.e., an ontological background picture that can make sense of our strong evaluative responses or moral phenomenology. Taylor puts forward ‘hunches’ about the importance of a theistic moral ontology, but he does not fill this out in much detail. I seek to fill out these hunches by arguing for the importance of a theistic teleological perspective for supporting strong evaluative realism. I also contend that there are good reasons to believe that Taylor holds such a view. However, I maintain that if a non-theistic cosmic teleological view can be made viable then it could also support strong evaluative realism.

In the last three chapters I explore the other connected aspect of seeking re-enchantment mentioned above: viz., the aspiration to ‘self-transcendence’. In Chapter Four I examine Taylor’s account of ‘fullness’ and his discussion of some important versions of it found within religious and non-religious perspectives. The main objective of this chapter is to explore the way in which these different versions of fullness all involve some form of self-transcendence, where this is understood not as a denial or loss of self, but rather as the transcending of a ‘lower’ mode of selfhood for the sake of a ‘higher’, more fulfilling mode of selfhood. Taylor himself uses the language of self-transcendence and other related or equivalent terms in connection with his account of fullness. My task here is to fill out what this involves since at first sight this connection

might seem paradoxical. I also take issue with Taylor's attempt to distinguish between religious and non-religious views of fullness in terms of whether the 'source' of fullness is 'external' or 'internal' to us. However, I contend that this external-internal distinction is helpful for distinguishing between two main types of self-transcendence, either or both of which I maintain are operative in all experiences of fullness: viz., (1) self-transcendence through the actualization of strongly valued capacities; (2) self-transcendence through love or concern for constitutive goods (e.g., other persons, the natural world, God) external to one's own person. Against some misunderstandings of what 'self-transcendence' involves, I seek to show how these forms of self-transcendence can be understood – per Taylor's account of strong evaluation – in terms of transcending a 'lower' mode of selfhood for a 'higher' mode of selfhood.

In Chapter Five I examine Taylor's view of the place of 'transcendence' in human life, which he understands in three key dimensions: first, as a good beyond and higher than human flourishing; second, as a transcendent creator God; and third, as a life beyond death. In the first section I examine the first dimension of transcendence. I discuss its background in what is known as the 'Axial age' and then consider how Taylor thinks 'exclusive humanism' arose as part of the aftermath of the Axial age. Next, I examine Taylor's alternative formulations of this first dimension of transcendence – viz., in terms of a good 'beyond life' and a good 'beyond the exclusively human' – and discuss how they allow for certain non-religious or 'horizontal' forms of transcendence. In fact, I discuss how when transcendence is understood as a good beyond and higher than *ordinary* human flourishing it can be seen that *all* ideals of fullness – including exclusivist humanist ideals – are forms of transcendence, or 'self-transcendence' as

understood according to my account. This responds to what is perhaps the most frequent criticism of Taylor's account of transcendence, which is that he does not adequately account for non-religious forms of transcendence. However, while Taylor acknowledges non-religious or 'horizontal' forms of transcendence, he still wants to maintain the fundamental importance of 'vertical' transcendence, i.e., the second and third dimensions of transcendence, especially as either or both are connected to the first dimension. In the second section I examine and support Taylor's case for the claim that – contra certain mainstream secularization theories – there is an ineradicable draw to vertical transcendence in human life. In other words, his view is that the draw to vertical transcendence is in some sense a 'human constant' such that human beings can be described as '*homo religiosus*'. This does not mean that everyone will want to embrace religious faith. Rather, it means that the draw to vertical transcendence is something that can 'impinge' on anyone due to another human constant: viz., the search for a meaningful life. In the third section I consider three important objections to vertical transcendence: the first claims that it threatens our wholeness as human beings; the second claims that it threatens human autonomy; and the third claims that it threatens the 'modern moral order' that aims at peace and prosperity. I respond to these objections, drawing on Taylor's work where it is applicable.

In Chapter Six I examine a key issue where Taylor explores the significance of religion – especially Christian theism – for ethics: viz., the issue of what moral sources can best enable us to make sense of and motivate action on behalf of an ethic of universal human concern. In the first section I argue that in contrast to Kantians, utilitarians, and most neo-Aristotelians, Taylor offers a unique and important perspective that enables us

to see how to combine an ethic of universal human concern with an ethic of the good life. I also discuss how my account of self-transcendence is important for making this combination intelligible. In the second section I examine Taylor's argument for the claim that "great as the power of naturalist sources might be [for an ethic of universal human concern], the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater" (SS 518). Here I examine Taylor's critique of exclusive humanism, which he claims has certain tendencies towards self-enclosure. I then consider why he claims that Christian *agape* and the view of human beings as made in the 'image of God' are important for overcoming self-enclosure and achieving self-transcendence in unconditional love and concern for others. I seek to show how Taylor holds a profoundly 'personalist' view of life that is centered on the 'telos of communion', which can be seen to make an important difference for an ethic of universal human concern in contrast to 'impersonalist', disenchanted views of life. I believe this 'personalist' aspect of Taylor's thought has yet to be fully appreciated. In the third section I address three important objections to Taylor's argument: the first questions the supposed inadequacy of non-religious sources compared to theistic sources for an ethic of universal human concern; the second questions whether an ethic of universal human concern, or at least high aspirations with respect to it, is in fact desirable; and the third questions whether Taylor's argument for the superiority of theistic moral sources is compatible with his political commitment to pluralism. In each case I will seek to defend Taylor's position.

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From this outline we can see that this dissertation has two main parts, which correspond to the two main aspects of seeking re-enchantment: the first part is concerned with strong evaluation and defending its validity; the second part is concerned with themes related to self-transcendence and how it is best achieved.

## CHAPTER TWO: TAYLOR'S EVALUATIVE FRAMEWORK, PART I

In this chapter I explore the basic contours of Taylor's account of strong evaluation. In the first section I examine the distinction between strong evaluation and weak evaluation. While Taylor initially discusses this distinction in terms of two different ways of evaluating our desires, it can be seen that this depends upon understanding the distinction ultimately in terms of two fundamental types of goods: viz., *weak goods*, which are judged to be good simply in virtue of being desired, and *strong goods*, which are judged to be good according to qualitative distinctions of worth that are normative for our desires and incommensurable with weak goods. Next, I explore what is involved in being a strong evaluator: first, I discuss how it enables greater articulacy and explain the connection between being a strong evaluator and a 'language animal'; second, I respond to the charge that Taylor's view of human beings as strong evaluators is overly intellectualist; third and finally, I seek to show how being a strong evaluator is compatible with there being a place for weak evaluation in human life, which might be called into question by the way in which strong goods override weak goods.

In the second section I explore Taylor's two-tiered account of strong goods in terms of *life goods*, which define for us 'the good life', and *constitutive goods*, which constitute life goods for us and motivate us to realize them. I try to highlight the ways in which I think Taylor's two-tiered account of strong goods offers a unique and important perspective vis-à-vis the prominent contemporary ethical frameworks of Kantianism, utilitarianism, and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (at least in its most common form). I also explain how Taylor's account of strong goods embodies an 'internalist' view of moral psychology and discuss how this is connected to his view of the importance of

‘articulation’ in our ethical life. Next, I examine Taylor’s affirmation of a plurality of both constitutive goods and life goods and discuss what is involved in reconciling these goods when they conflict in our pursuit of the good life. Finally, I discuss the criticism of Taylor’s account of strong evaluation, especially his account of constitutive goods, as being too closely connected with his theism to be acceptable to non-theists. I argue that when properly understood his account can be seen to apply to the ethical experience (broadly understood) of theists and non-theists alike.<sup>1</sup>

My main goal in this chapter is to provide what I think is the best interpretation of Taylor’s account of strong evaluation, which will also show it to be a fitting description of our ethical experience. This will involve clarifying points where Taylor is unclear or misunderstood and defending my interpretation against rival interpretations. It will also involve defending Taylor’s account against important criticisms.

## I. STRONG EVALUATION AND WEAK EVALUATION

### *Two Kinds of Second-Order Desires*

Taylor first introduces his distinction between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ evaluation as a development upon Harry Frankfurt’s account of ‘second-order desires’ (*HAL*, Ch. 1; Taylor 1976).<sup>2</sup> As Taylor puts it, a second-order desire is “when I have a desire whose object is my having a certain (first-order) desire” (*HAL* 15). For example, I may have two

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<sup>1</sup> In the next chapter I will seek to fill out and defend Taylor’s view that theism offers an important ‘moral ontology’ for making sense of our ‘moral phenomenology’. But this issue of specifying an adequate ‘moral ontology’ is separate from the characterization of our ‘moral phenomenology’. It should be recalled that when Taylor uses the terms ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ it is typically in the broad sense of covering all forms of strong evaluation, unless otherwise noted. This also means that the terms ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ are synonymous and I will use them as such (see Introduction, n. 2).

<sup>2</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction (n. 22), although Taylor first introduces the term ‘strong evaluation’ in a 1976 essay (much of which is reproduced in Ch. 1 of *HAL*), the basic idea can be found in his first book, *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964).



conflicting desires about whether or not to give money to a certain charity to help in disaster relief or to use it for buying a new computer, but I can also have a second-order desire that my desire to give to the charity win out. Or again: I may have a desire for revenge, but I can also have a second-order desire that I should not have this first-order desire. According to Frankfurt, it is the capacity for such second-order desires – which is expressive of the more general capacity for reflective self-evaluation about who we are and who we want to become – that enables us to distinguish between persons and non-persons: persons can be said to have this capacity, whereas non-persons do not (Frankfurt 1988, 12).<sup>3</sup> More specifically, Frankfurt goes on to say that it is actually the capacity for ‘second-order volitions’ – an important species of second-order desires – that is essential to being a person (ibid., 16). Someone has a second-order volition when he or she wants a certain desire “to be his [or her] will” (ibid.); i.e., to be an “*effective* desire – one that moves (or will or would move) a person all the way to action” (ibid., 14). The contrast category to persons is what Frankfurt calls ‘wantons’, i.e., “agents [e.g., non-human animals] who have first-order desires but who are not persons because [...] they have no second-order volitions” (ibid., 16).

Taylor agrees with Frankfurt that the capacity for reflective self-evaluation that is expressed in second-order volitions is necessary for being a person or a human agent or a

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<sup>3</sup> Frankfurt’s account thus has the virtue of making sense of the common intuition that personhood extends to human beings and not to non-human animals. Taylor also uses ‘person’ and ‘human agent’ interchangeably (though God, if God exists, is a person too). It should be noted that the idea behind the concept of a second-order desire is not exactly new. Something like it can be found, e.g., in Aristotle and Aquinas’s views about the importance for us as human agents of stepping back from our immediate desires in order to ask what it would be good for us to desire.

self (Taylor often uses these terms interchangeably), but he thinks this is not sufficient.

What is also required is a capacity for strong evaluation (*HAL* 16).<sup>4</sup>

In order to understand this concept of strong evaluation we need to see the contrast with weak evaluation. In cases of weak evaluation, Taylor says,

[...] someone might be weighing two desired actions to determine the more convenient, or how to make different desires compossible (for instance, he might resolve to put off eating although hungry, because later he could both eat and swim), or how to get the most overall satisfaction. Or he might be pondering to see which of two desired objects attracts him most, as one ponders a pastry tray to see if one will take an éclair or a mille feuilles. (*HAL* 16)

The important thing to note here is that when we engage in weak evaluation we do not weigh the alternatives according to any qualitative evaluation regarding the *worth* of the desires themselves but rather simply according to the attractiveness or desirability of different possible consummations as informed by our *de facto* desires.

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<sup>4</sup> For Taylor, to be a person in the “full sense” requires not only the capacity for strong evaluation, but also that this capacity be *actualized* (see *HAL* 34-5). Elsewhere he does maintain that merely having certain capacities – viz., for forming a sense of self, making life-plans and choices, and engaging in strong evaluation – is sufficient for a different sense of personhood, viz., as a moral status, where persons are viewed as bearers of rights (*HAL* 97, 103). But these capacities are precisely those that must be actualized for personhood in the ‘full sense’. Thus, Taylor affirms two different, but related senses of personhood. In the terms that will be discussed later, I think the moral status sense of personhood represents a *constitutive good* (i.e., something that commands our respect, concern, love, etc., and in doing so constitutes certain goods that are part of the good life), whereas achieving personhood in the ‘full sense’ represents a *life good* (i.e. a good that is part of the definition of the good life) for the individual.

In regard to the moral status sense of personhood, Taylor writes: “a person must be the kind of being who is in principle capable of all this, however damaged these capacities [i.e., those mentioned above] may be in practice” (*HAL* 97). He goes on to say: “Even those who through some accident or misfortune are deprived of the ability to exercise these capacities are still understood as belonging to the species defined by this potentiality” (*HAL* 103). From these remarks and others it seems he would include fetuses, the mentally disabled, the senile, those in comas, and all others who belong to the human species as persons in the moral status sense (see *SS* 517-8; *SA* 684; Taylor 2003a, 317-8). Ruth Abbey sees Taylor as begging the question here on the issue of whether all human beings should be considered persons (Abbey 2000, 70). I think a lot will depend on how we fill out the way in which human beings can be said to be constitutive goods. Taylor certainly thinks that human capacity/potential for a higher form of life – under some description – is a key constitutive good (see *SS* 25). But Abbey asks: “What does it mean for something to exist in principle if in some particular cases the capacity can never be activated?” (Abbey 2000, 70). This is a very difficult question to answer as it pertains to tough cases such as the severely mentally disabled, those in perpetual comas, etc. While it is beyond the scope of this work to address this issue, my sense is that for Taylor the answer has to be filled out in terms of his view of human beings as made in the ‘image of God’.

By contrast, in cases of strong evaluation one does in fact evaluate desires (or motives) in terms of qualitative distinctions of *worth*.<sup>5</sup> For example, I may refrain from acting on a desire for revenge because I consider such a motive vicious or base. Or again: I may seek to act out of compassion for those who have suffered from a natural disaster because I regard being compassionate as a virtuous, noble, more fulfilling mode of being. In strong evaluation, Taylor says,

[...] our desires are classified in such categories as higher and lower, virtuous and vicious, more and less fulfilling, more and less refined, profound and superficial, noble and base. They are judged as belonging to qualitatively different modes of life: fragmented or integrated, alienated or free, saintly, or merely human, courageous or pusillanimous and so on. (*HAL* 16)

Although Taylor begins by discussing strong evaluation in terms of our qualitative distinctions regarding the worth of our desires, the last part of this passage makes it clear that these qualitative distinctions are themselves integrally connected to other qualitative distinctions of worth, such as those regarding different ‘modes of life’.

For Taylor, strong evaluation in fact includes all qualitative distinctions of worth.

We can see this in the “Introduction” to his *Philosophical Papers* when he writes:

[...] our self-understanding essentially incorporates our seeing ourselves against a background of what I have called ‘strong evaluation’. I mean by that a background of distinctions between things which are recognized as of categoric or unconditioned or higher importance or worth, and things which lack this or are of lesser value. (*HAL* 3)

The things here that are seen as being of “categoric or unconditioned or higher importance or worth” thus provide normative standards by which we judge the worth of our desires. Such ‘things’ – e.g., modes of life, other persons, and certain other objects – are what Taylor calls ‘strong goods’.

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<sup>5</sup> Ruth Abbey notes: “although [Taylor] uses the adjective “strong” to describes these evaluations, he is really trying to capture their quality rather than their force or power” (Abbey 2000, 22).

According to Arto Laitinen, one can distinguish between ‘strict’ and ‘broad’ senses of strong evaluation in Taylor’s work (Laitinen 2008, 44-9). The ‘strict’ sense covers only second-order evaluations of one’s desires or motivations in terms of their qualitative worth, whereas the ‘broad’ sense covers all first-order value judgments that involve qualitative distinctions of worth. However, I do not think these can in fact be separated in Taylor’s account. This is because our qualitative distinctions regarding the worth of our desires always appeal to normative standards, i.e., strong goods, and these strong goods are always seen as being normative for our desires (see *PHS* 237; *HAL* 18n4, 65-6; *SS* 93).<sup>6</sup> In other words, we can say that what Laitinen calls the ‘strict’ and ‘broad’ senses of strong evaluation are ‘two sides of the same coin’. While I am saying that strong evaluation always involves evaluation of our desires (i.e., a second-order desire), I do not think the same can be said about weak evaluation. Although weak evaluation *can* involve second-order desire (as we see in the foregoing discussion), in the most inclusive sense it seems to just refer to any desire not involving qualitative distinctions of worth.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Two Fundamental Types of Goods: Strong Goods and Weak Goods*

We can in fact get clearer on the distinction between strong and weak evaluation by considering the two different fundamental types of ‘goods’ that this distinction

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<sup>6</sup> Taylor is at times too imprecise in his discussions of strong evaluation, sometimes making it seem as though it were just a second-order desire (*HAL* 65-7; *PHS* 220), while other times appealing to the broader usage (see, e.g., *HAL* 3; *SS* 19-20, 92; Taylor 1995b, 134). However, I think the reading that makes the best sense of his overall discussion is the one I am suggesting: viz., our qualitative distinctions regarding the worth of our desires always appeal to normative standards, i.e., strong goods, and these strong goods themselves are always seen as being normative for our desires (cf. Abbey 2000, 17; Smith 2002, 89-91). I believe an important reason why Taylor often focuses on second-order desires is because it reveals whether strong or weak evaluation is involved. We can ask: Is something considered good simply because it is desired or do we go beyond our *de facto* desires to consider their worth? (See *HAL* 66).

<sup>7</sup> Taylor is not very clear on this point, but I think this is his view. It is implied by his idea of a ‘weak good’, which is discussed below (see *SS* 88-9).

involves. Taylor writes: “In weak evaluation, for something to be judged good it is sufficient that it be desired, whereas in strong evaluation there is also a use of ‘good’ or some other evaluative term for which being desired is not sufficient; indeed some desires or desired consummations can be judged as bad, base, ignoble, trivial, superficial, unworthy, and so on” (*HAL* 18). In other words, we can distinguish between *weak goods*, which are judged to be good simply in virtue of being desired, and *strong goods*, which are judged to be good according to qualitative distinctions of worth and serve as normative standards by which we evaluate the worth of our desires.<sup>8</sup> As aforementioned, Taylor further divides strong goods into life goods and constitutive goods.

Now, the idea that strong goods provide normative standards for our desires – call this the *categorical feature* – is what Taylor has in mind when he says that they have ‘categoric’ or ‘unconditioned’ worth; i.e., strong goods are “goods which we ought to desire, even if we do not, goods such that we show ourselves up as inferior or bad by our not desiring them” (*PHS* 120; cf. *SS* 4, 20). In other words, lack of concern for such goods does not neutralize them for you, but rather “it redounds to your condemnation, shows you up as being blind, or coarse, or insensitive, or cowardly, or brutalized, too self-absorbed, or in some way subject to censure” (*PHS* 239). Hence, the shameless person, Taylor says, “is not someone to whom the whole range of judgements concerning the shameful no longer applies, but on the contrary one who is judged even more harshly” (Taylor 1985c, 266). For Taylor, while it is true that we can only come to genuinely recognize strong goods by being moved by them in some way, nevertheless, the

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<sup>8</sup> Taylor uses language such as ‘strong good’, ‘strong value’, ‘strongly valued good’, and ‘weakly valued good’ in *Sources of the Self* (see *SS* 30, 59, 81, 87-9, 92) and elsewhere (Taylor 1995b, 134; *PA* 106-7, 111-3, 120, 122). I have chosen to use ‘strong good’ over ‘strongly valued good’ because in some cases we may not strongly value a particular (strong) good, but the idea is that we should.

important point here is that being moved by these goods is inseparable from the evaluative belief concerning their qualitatively higher worth by which they are viewed as normative for our desires.<sup>9</sup> If someone was not moved by a particular strong good – e.g., human dignity – then this person would be judged by those who are moved by this good as blameworthy for being blind to something to which he or she should be sensitive. We can see here that this categorical feature of strong goods presupposes a realist or objectivist view of these goods as opposed to a subjectivist view.

This categorical feature of strong goods of course recalls Kant’s ‘categorical imperative’. Taylor in fact sometimes appeals to Kant when discussing this idea.<sup>10</sup> However, Taylor’s account of the categorical feature is much more expansive than the Kantian view. On the Kantian view the categorical feature is limited to a view of moral obligation that is separated off from considerations of the good life. However, for Taylor moral obligation cannot be separated off from considerations of the good life – I will say more on this later – and the categorical feature applies to any consideration about the good life, where this is understood in strong evaluative terms as a higher, more noble, more fulfilling mode of life.<sup>11</sup> This even includes aesthetic considerations. Taylor writes:

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<sup>9</sup> Laitinen puts the point nicely: “While one’s own will or reactions do not contribute to the *validity* of [strong] goods, one’s affective-conative responses are central in gaining understanding of these goods” (Laitinen 2008, 40; cf. 177). However, elsewhere he claims that strong evaluation as a kind of second-order desire should be understood instead as a second-order evaluative belief (*ibid.*, 19-20). But given that for Taylor evaluative beliefs necessarily involve desire (or being moved in some way) I do not think we should separate them. I will return below to further discuss Taylor’s ‘internalist’ view of moral psychology.

<sup>10</sup> See *PHS* 237-40; Taylor 2003a, 308-9; *DC* 294; cf. *HAL* 261-2.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting here that in an essay that develops a Kantian account of morality Jurgen Habermas draws on Taylor’s language of ‘strong evaluation’ (explicitly acknowledging Taylor’s work) in a manner that goes directly against Taylor’s intentions (Habermas 1993, Ch. 1). Habermas uses the term to denote an evaluative domain that is separated off from our moral obligations to others: viz., the existential-ethical domain that is concerned with issues of identity and the good life for oneself (see *ibid.*, 4-6, 8-9, 11-2). Habermas sees this domain as being informed by our particular life histories and shared forms of life and thus it is compatible with a relativistic understanding of the good life. This seems to even be suggested when Habermas uses ‘strong *preferences*’ interchangeably with ‘strong evaluations’ (*ibid.*, 4). This entirely misses the categorical feature of strong evaluation that I am discussing here, as well as the incommensurability

We often apply such languages [of qualitative distinctions of worth] in what we call the aesthetic domain. If I see something especially magnificent in the music of Mozart as against some of his humdrum contemporaries, then I will judge you as insensitive in some way if you rate them on a par. The word ‘insensitive’ here is a word of depreciation. This is a difference one *should* be sensible of, in my view. (*PHS* 238; cf. *HAL* 68; *DC* 294-5)

However, Taylor acknowledges that the categorical feature of strong evaluation is weaker in the aesthetic domain than in the more narrowly construed moral domain regarding our obligations to others. He writes: “if someone professes to see no distinction between his concern for the flowers in his garden and that for the lives of refugees faced with starvation, so that he proposes to act in both cases just to the degree that he feels interested at the time, we are rightly alarmed, and take this more seriously than the failure to appreciate Mozart over Boieldieu” (*PHS* 238). As will be discussed later, strong goods are themselves hierarchically ranked in the sense that some of them make greater normative demands upon us than others. But regardless of such differences each strong good is in some sense normative for our desires.<sup>12</sup>

Besides the categorical feature, another important feature of strong goods is what we can call the *incommensurability feature*. This can be stated as the idea that strong goods are incommensurable with weak goods; i.e., they have ‘incomparably’ higher

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feature that I will be discussing shortly. Moreover, Habermas does not acknowledge here that nowhere does Taylor separate off a domain of moral obligation from strong evaluation; in fact, Taylor argues that this cannot be done (see, e.g., *HAL* 68; *PHS*, Ch. 9; *SS*, Chs. 1-4; Taylor 1995b; *DC*, Chs. 1, 12; cf. Laitinen 2008, 36-41). However, in another essay Habermas does acknowledge that Taylor is against such a separation (*ibid.*, 69-76). Thus, in the previous essay it seems that Habermas is only loosely drawing on Taylor’s account of strong evaluation, though he misleadingly makes it seem as though it is Taylor’s view. It is true that Taylor sees strong evaluation as connected to our identity and the good life, but again this is not separated off from the domain of moral obligations to others. For more on this issue see the exchange between Taylor and Will Kymlicka: Taylor 1991a, 242-5; Kymlicka 1991.

<sup>12</sup> There are obviously many possible strong goods and the question arises of how these goods should be incorporated in our lives. This is a question I will return to discuss later in this chapter. We might note for now a particular question that arises with respect to the Mozart example: does everyone have an obligation to listen to and fully appreciate the music of Mozart? It does not seem that there is an obligation to do so in any sense as strong as our obligation, say, to respect human rights. But still we might at least see the cultivation of an appreciation for great music that is available to us to be part of a higher, more cultured way of life, which has a weaker categorical aspect (cf. Laitinen 2008, 39-40).

worth (*SS* 20). In the context of discussing some specific strong goods, Taylor writes: “Integrity, charity, liberation, and the like stand out as worthy of pursuit in a special way, incommensurable with other goals we might have, such as the pursuit of wealth, or comfort, or the approval of those who surround us. Indeed, for those who hold to such views of the good, we ought to be ready to sacrifice some of these lesser goods for the higher” (*PHS* 236-7). It is important that such sacrifice cannot be simply a matter of strong goods ‘outweighing’ weak goods. Indeed, unlike weak evaluation where one may seek to weigh various desires and then attempt to achieve the greatest overall satisfaction, in strong evaluation the idea of ‘weighing’ strong and weak goods is out of place since there is no common measure between goods constituted by qualitative distinctions of worth (i.e., strong goods) and goods constituted by our *de facto* desires (i.e., weak goods). Instead, weak goods must be judged in the light of strong goods; e.g., given that we strongly value modes of life involving integrity, charity, and liberation we judge a life devoted solely to the pursuit of wealth, or comfort, or the approval of others to be base, contemptible, or unworthy. This does not mean weak goods have no place in a life, but they should not have primacy. Moreover, when there are conflicts between strong and weak goods the considerations that might otherwise have lead one to pursue a weak good should be set aside as irrelevant or as counting for nothing (Taylor 2003a, 309).<sup>13</sup>

This last point is connected to a key difference that Taylor identifies between strong and weak evaluation. In the case of weak evaluation, he says, when a desire is set

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<sup>13</sup> In the last part of this section I will return to further discuss the issue of the place of weak goods in human life. Although I say here that for Taylor when a strong good (e.g., charity) and a weak good (e.g., comfort) come into conflict the weak good should be set aside as irrelevant or as counting for nothing, things become more complicated when the weak good is associated with the strong good of human wholeness. Thus, here the qualification should be made that *so long as human wholeness is properly maintained* then a weak good should be set aside as irrelevant or as counting for nothing when it comes into conflict with a strong good.



aside “it is only on grounds of its contingent incompatibility with a more desired alternative” (*HAL* 19). To recall Taylor’s example from earlier: I may put off eating lunch now, although hungry, because later I can both eat and swim. There is no inherent incompatibility here between the desire to eat lunch now and the desire to enjoy a swim along with lunch: if the pool were open now I could satisfy both desires. But since the pool is not yet open there is a contingent or circumstantial conflict and I must set aside eating lunch now if enjoying a swim along with lunch is the more desired alternative.

In the case of strong evaluation, by contrast, when a particular desire is set aside it is on the basis of a qualitative contrast regarding the *worth* of different desires. Taylor gives the following example: I may refrain from performing some cowardly action, although tempted to do so, not because it just so happens to be incompatible with some other desire, but rather because it is considered to be base or vicious or unworthy. This judgment is based on a qualitative contrast of worth: i.e., to judge a cowardly action as base and as something to be avoided is inseparable from strongly valuing courageous action as part of a higher mode of life.<sup>14</sup> The incompatibility here is non-contingent: “It is not just a matter of circumstances which makes it impossible to give in to the impulse to flee and still cleave to a courageous, upright mode of life. Such a mode of life *consists* among other things in withstanding such craven impulses” (*HAL* 19). However, it should be noted that strong evaluation can also give rise to contingent conflicts, but this is with respect to different strong goods. Sartre’s famous example of the young man who feels

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<sup>14</sup> Taylor also says that some things can be judged not only as comparatively bad or unworthy, but also ‘intrinsically’ or ‘absolutely’ so: e.g., we desire not to be moved by spite at all costs (*HAL* 66; *PHS* 220).

torn between remaining at home to care for his ailing mother and going off to join the Resistance seems to be a case in point (see *HAL* 29).<sup>15</sup>

Now, from the foregoing account of the categorical and incommensurability features of strong goods it needs to be remarked that Taylor uses the language of ‘qualitative distinctions of worth’ in a highly specific sense. We can see this by observing that there are in fact qualitative distinctions that do not seem to involve either the categorical or immensurability feature of strong goods. For instance, Taylor gives the example of someone trying to decide between taking a holiday in the south versus the north: “What the holiday in the north has going for it is the tremendous beauty of the wild, the untracked wastes, etc.; what the south has going for it is the lush tropical land, the sense of well-being, the joy of swimming in the sea, etc. Or I might put it to myself that one holiday is more exhilarating, the other is more relaxing” (*HAL* 17). Taylor notes that the alternatives have different ‘desirability characterizations’ and so can be seen as ‘qualitatively distinct’. However, he writes: “what is missing in this case is a distinction between the desires as to worth, and that is why it is not a strong evaluation. I ultimately opt for the south over the north not because there is something more worthy about relaxing than being exhilarated, but just because ‘I feel like it’” (*HAL* 17).

On the surface this claim is somewhat strange because it would seem that any qualitative distinction is a distinction concerning the worth of something insofar as ‘worth’ and ‘quality’ are conceptually connected. Michael Slote has criticized Taylor for not being clear enough in his use of the concept of ‘worth’ (Slote 1988, 584). I think this is a valid criticism insofar as there are different possible uses of the concept of worth about which Taylor would do well to distinguish. However, I think it is evident that when

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<sup>15</sup> I will return to discuss this issue of contingent conflicts between strong goods later in this chapter.

Taylor speaks of strong evaluation as involving qualitative distinctions of worth he means for ‘worth’ to be understood as having both the categorical and incommensurability features. This is a stipulation that should be kept in mind in order to avoid confusion.

What is especially noteworthy about the above passage is that it shows weak evaluation to be a more complex concept than might be suggested when Taylor says that in weak evaluation when something is judged good “it is sufficient that it be desired”. We now see that the things we desire in the context of weak evaluation can have different desirability characterizations whereby they are seen as qualitatively distinct.<sup>16</sup> For instance, one might prefer the relaxing vacation to the exhilarating one, or strawberry ice cream to vanilla ice cream.<sup>17</sup> Here ‘relaxing’, ‘exhilarating’, ‘strawberry’, and ‘vanilla’ provide the relevant qualitative distinctions that factor into the determination of our preferences. To say that our preference here is based on what we ‘just feel like’ does not mean that there are no qualitative distinctions involved, but rather, it means that our preferences are based on how we happen to be feeling (e.g., we are needing relaxation rather than exhilaration) or how we happen to be biologically wired (e.g., our taste buds make strawberry ice cream more appealing than vanilla ice cream). The important point for the distinction between strong and weak evaluation is that such preferences contrast with qualitative distinctions of *worth* that are seen as being *normative* for our desires (the categorical feature) and are regarded as being of *incommensurably higher worth* than what we just happen to desire (the incommensurability feature). It seems absurd to appeal

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<sup>16</sup> Matters are of course different with non-human animals in that they do not possess a language by which to characterize their desires with respect to their qualities. But there is still some intelligible connection that exists, e.g., in the lion’s desire to eat its prey. I should also note that Taylor draws the concept of desirability characterization from G.E.M. Anscombe (see Anscombe 1957, 70-2; cf. *PHS* 119).

<sup>17</sup> This flavor of ice cream example – much akin to the pastry example mentioned earlier – is one that Taylor uses on a couple of occasions to illustrate weak evaluation (see Taylor 1985c, 266; *DC* 297).

to the categorical and incommensurability features of strong evaluation in explaining our preference of strawberry ice cream over vanilla ice cream (*ceteris paribus*), but it is not absurd to do so when explaining our choice of the courageous action over the cowardly one or our concern for the well-being of other human beings over some selfish pursuit.<sup>18</sup>

However, it is also important to note that strong evaluation could in fact arise in both the choice of the vacation spot and the choice of ice cream. Indeed, Taylor's first way of characterizing the vacation choice seems to actually be a case of aesthetic strong evaluation: viz., when he characterizes it as a choice between "the tremendous beauty of the wild" versus "the sense of well-being", rather than as relaxing versus exhilarating.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, while the choice of the flavor of ice cream is a matter of weak evaluation if the ice cream is similar with respect to the quality of ingredients, strong evaluation may

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<sup>18</sup> Laitinen maintains that the sort of examples I have been discussing here – viz., the choice of a vacation spot and the choice of a flavor of ice cream – actually involve 'small values' (a concept he draws from the work of Joseph Raz), which he includes in the domain of strong evaluation (Laitinen 2008, 49-53). Small values, according to Laitinen, involve qualitative distinctions (i.e., desirability characterizations) that are not of great significance: e.g., the flavor of ice cream as compared to the importance of protecting human rights (ibid., 51). The problem with Laitinen's view is that he interprets strong evaluation in terms of anything involving qualitative distinctions, which sets the bar too low (hence he is committed to the surprising claims that our choice of a flavor of ice cream (*ceteris paribus*) and our desire for an apple or a banana are cases of strong evaluation insofar as they have desirability characterizations). However, strong evaluation is not just a matter of qualitative distinctions, but rather, as I have been discussing, it is a matter of qualitative distinctions of worth that have both the *categorical* and *incommensurability* features.

Laitinen is right that our desire for a flavor of ice cream can be seen *in the light of strong evaluation*: e.g., we can say that this desire is not of much worth given the importance of protecting human rights (see ibid., 50). But 'worth' here is meant in the broader sense of any qualitative distinction, rather than the specific sense of Taylor's account of strong evaluation where it involves the categorical and incommensurability features. Indeed, the worth of the ice cream cannot actually be weighed against the worth of protecting human rights (i.e., no matter how much we have of a particular flavor of ice cream it cannot trump our concern for protecting human rights; the latter is of incommensurably higher worth). Moreover, to see our desire for a flavor of ice cream in the light of some strong good (e.g., protecting human rights) is different from regarding the ice cream as itself a strong good.

Although I think Laitinen's discussion of small values is problematic insofar as it does not properly understand the nature of strong evaluation and counts things as cases of strong evaluation that should not be, nevertheless, it points to an important point that Taylor acknowledges: viz., there are hierarchical rankings among strong goods. As previously mentioned, I will return to discuss this issue later in this chapter when examining Taylor's affirmation of a plurality of strong goods.

<sup>19</sup> It is partly on the basis of this problematic example that Owen Flanagan wrongly maintains that the distinction between strong and weak evaluation is best understood as being between ethical assessment and non-ethical assessment, where ethical is understood in a more narrow sense that focuses on our obligations to others (Flanagan 1996, 143-7).

enter in if there is great difference in the quality. This is even clearer in the case of fine dining. According to Taylor, “this will be because taste is seen as an important part of what makes a human life worthwhile; it will be the object of admiration, contempt; something of which one should be ashamed or proud” (Taylor 1985c, 266).

*Strong Evaluators vs. Simple Weighers*

Another way in which Taylor explores the contrast between strong and weak evaluation is through outlining two different conceptions of selfhood: viz., the self as a ‘strong evaluator’ (i.e., someone who engages in at least *some* strong evaluation) and the self as a ‘simple weigher’ (i.e., someone who *only* engages in weak evaluation). By examining these two conceptions of selfhood, Taylor says, “it will, I think, become overwhelmingly plausible that we are not beings whose only authentic evaluations are non-qualitative”, i.e., the simple weigher conception of selfhood is not a genuine possibility (*HAL* 23). Here I will be concerned with how these two conceptions of selfhood help us to better understand the distinction between strong and weak evaluation. Moreover, I am concerned to examine what it means for us as human beings if we are indeed strong evaluators.

According to Taylor, a simple weigher is reflective in a ‘minimal sense’ in that “he evaluates courses of action, and sometimes is capable of acting out of that evaluation as against under the impress of immediate desire” (ibid.). By contrast, a strong evaluator “envisages his alternatives through a richer language”: “Reflection is not just a matter, where it is not calculation of consequences, of registering that alternative A is more attractive to me, or draws me more than B. Rather the higher desirability of A over B is something I can articulate if I am reflecting as a strong evaluator. I have a vocabulary of

worth” (*HAL* 23-4). For Taylor one of the key differences between the modes of reflection of strong evaluators and simple weighers is that the former are capable of greater articulacy. Whereas “the reflection of the simple weigher terminates in the inarticulate experience that A is more attractive than B”, “the strong evaluator is not similarly inarticulate” since he or she can articulate superiority through “a language of contrastive characterization” regarding the worth of the different alternatives (*HAL* 24). The simple weigher is of course not wholly inarticulate insofar as he or she can give desirability characterizations, as discussed above. But the point is that he or she cannot draw on the richer language of qualitative distinctions of worth that involve the categorical and incommensurability features.

To illustrate the point let us say that alternative A involves helping a neighbor who is in need and alternative B involves watching a baseball game on television. We can then say that for the strong evaluator – presuming he or she chooses alternative A – A is more desirable or choice-worthy than B not just because one so happens to desire it. Indeed, one may have a very strong desire to watch the baseball game but opt for helping one’s neighbor because he or she regards it as part of what it is to be a virtuous person and to live a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life, which is ultimately viewed to be most desirable in strong evaluative terms of worth.<sup>20</sup> Thus, we can see here the difference articulacy about qualitative worth makes in the life of the strong evaluator. According to Taylor, “strong evaluation is a condition of articulacy, and to acquire a strongly evaluative language is to become (more) articulate about one’s preferences” (*HAL* 24-5).

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<sup>20</sup> There are circumstances that might change one’s judgment here; e.g., if one had a family member who was playing and it was an important game.

Moreover, the strong evaluator is not only capable of a reflection that is more articulate, but “it is also in an important sense deeper” (*HAL 25*). The strong evaluator goes deeper through understanding his or her desires or motivations at greater depth. As we have already seen, when a strong evaluator evaluates the qualitative worth of his or her desires it is in terms of their belonging to qualitatively different modes of life. Thus, unlike the simple weigher for whom “what is at stake is the desirability of different consummations, those defined by his *de facto* desires”, for the strong evaluator “reflection also examines the different possible modes of being of the agent” (*ibid.*). According to Taylor, this sort of reflection on the kind of being we are “takes us to the centre of our existence as agents. Strong evaluation is not just a condition of articulacy about preferences, but also about the quality of life, the kind of beings we are or want to be. It is in this sense deeper” (*HAL 26*).

The reflection of the strong evaluator can thus be distinguished from that of the simple weigher in virtue of its articulacy and depth; or as Taylor puts it, the strong evaluator has “articulacy about depth”, since what needs articulation is precisely the ‘deeper’ issues concerning our ‘quality of life’ (*HAL 26*). Taylor goes on to claim that such depth is necessary for our conception of what is to be human: “the capacity for strong evaluation [...] is essential to our notion of the human subject; [...] without it an agent would lack a kind of depth we consider essential to humanity [...]. [The] human beings we are and live with are all strong evaluators” (*HAL 28*).

At this point I think it is important to see how Taylor’s claim about strong evaluators being capable of greater articulacy is connected to a central feature of his philosophical anthropology: viz., his view of human beings as ‘language animals’. On

several occasions Taylor notes the ambiguity in Aristotle's classic definition of human beings as 'zoon logon echon', i.e., 'animal possessing logos' (*HAL* 217; *PA* 113; *DC* 51). The word 'logos' has most often been translated as 'reason' so that human beings are regarded as being the 'rational animal'. However, 'logos' can also be interpreted in terms of 'speech' so that human beings are additionally seen as being the 'language animal'. Taylor maintains that it is in fact this second interpretation that is especially key for an understanding of human life (see *HAL* 216; *PA* 113, 121; Taylor 2005, 35).

The reason for this has to do with the way in which language is *constitutive* of our human form of life. Taylor writes: "Certain ways of being, of feeling, of relating to each other are only possible given certain linguistic resources" (*HAL* 10).<sup>21</sup> According to Taylor, there is a range of meanings that are only possible for linguistic beings such as ourselves. These 'human significances', as Taylor calls them, include: a sense of dignity, pride, fulfillment, integrity, interpersonal love/communion, admiration, indignation, shame, moral right and wrong, etc. (*HAL* 102-3, 260-3; Taylor 1985c, 271-2; *PA* 105, 107). As an illustration, Taylor contrasts the feelings of indignation and anger:

Anger we can attribute to (some) [non-linguistic] animals, at least in some sense, but not indignation [...]. The difference is that we can only ascribe indignation to a being with something like the thought: this person has done an injustice. One is only indignant at a wrongdoer; one can be angry at anyone who is provoking, even innocently, even though he is in the right and one is in the wrong (especially so). But what are the conditions for some [agent] having a thought like that? That he can make discriminations right/wrong, as against just hurting or not hurting; or advantageous/disadvantageous. But this requires that the agent have some notion of standards that hold of a given domain, here human action; and by this I mean be aware of these standards, recognise that they are standards. (Taylor 1985c, 271; cf. *HAL* 261)

Taylor goes on to say: "It is only in language, or some other symbolic activity, that we can be aware of standards qua standards" (Taylor 1985c, 271; cf. *HAL* 73-5, 262-3).

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. 68-75, 158, 232-3, 263; *PA* 101, 103, 105-7, 111-3, 120-1; *DC* 42-3.



This connects up with what was said above about how strong evaluators draw on a language of contrastive characterizations regarding qualitative distinctions of worth, which enables greater articulacy. For Taylor, the standards appealed to in our distinctively human significances are precisely strong evaluative standards of worth that are taken to be normative for our desires (see Taylor 1985c, 266-7). Thus, we can say that it is only in language, or some other symbolic activity, that we can become aware of these strong evaluative standards. Taylor writes:

Prelinguistic animals treat something as desirable or repugnant, by going after it or avoiding it. But only language beings can identify things as *worthy* of desire or aversion. For such identifications raise issues of intrinsic rightness. They involve a characterization of things which is not reducible simply to the way we treat them as objects of desire or aversion. They involve a recognition beyond that: they *ought* to be treated in one or another way. (*PA* 106)

In other words, only human beings *qua* language animals can recognize strong goods, whereas non-linguistic animals can only pursue weak goods.<sup>22</sup>

I think this account of the connection between our linguistic capacities and strong evaluation helps to give greater intelligibility and plausibility to the claim that properly functioning human agents are inescapably strong evaluators.<sup>23</sup> I think it can also help us to better appreciate Taylor's differences with Frankfurt in specifying the defining features of personhood. If we focus on the characterization of human beings as rational animals then it might seem that our capacity for second-order desire is what is most definitive

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<sup>22</sup> Although Taylor speaks in the above passage of 'intrinsic rightness', one worry that could arise is that such strong evaluative standards might just be purely a linguistic construction that we project onto the world, which itself is value-neutral. However, Taylor wants to claim that language actually discloses or makes manifest objective value, and indeed this objective value could not be recognized apart from our linguistic capacities (*PA* 111-26; *DC*, Ch. 3; *HAL* 263; *SS* 257). The basic idea is that through our purposeful engagement with the world as agents who can deploy a language of contrastive characterizations of worth – e.g., higher and lower, noble and base, admirable and contemptible, good and bad, etc. – different objects arise for us as being *fit objects* for qualitative distinctions of worth and thus as having significance for us. This will be filled out more in the next chapter.

<sup>23</sup> Again, an examination of the full argument for this claim will have to wait until the next chapter

about us. However, if we also focus, as Taylor does, on the way in which we are language animals then we can better understand how this transforms the nature of the ends we seek and thus the way in which we evaluate our desires: viz., these ends can be seen in terms of qualitative distinctions of worth that are normative for our desires.

### *The Charge of Intellectualism*

Given Taylor's view of the relationship between being a strong evaluator and linguistic articulacy one might object that if we accept his claim that properly functioning human agents are inescapably strong evaluators then it would seem to commit us to an overly 'intellectualist' view of selfhood or identity. Some commentators on Taylor's work, such as Owen Flanagan (1996) and Daniel Weinstock (1994), have interpreted Taylor's claim as saying that a high degree of reflection and articulacy is needed for selfhood. This strikes them as implausible since there seem to be many not very reflective and articulate people who nevertheless have a sense of selfhood or identity. However, this represents a misunderstanding of Taylor's view, as other commentators have pointed out (see Abbey 2000, 19-21; Laitinen 2008, 29-33). Taylor himself says: "I don't consider it a condition of acting out of a strong evaluation that one has articulated and critically reflected on one's [strong evaluative] framework. Clearly this would be to set too narrow entry conditions. I mean simply that one is operating with a sense that some desires, goals, aspirations are qualitatively higher than others" (Taylor 1994b, 249; cf. *SS* 21).<sup>24</sup> As we already saw, Taylor maintains that "strong evaluation is a *condition of*

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<sup>24</sup> Nicholas Smith attempts to address this issue by distinguishing between 'strong evaluation', which involves reflection and deliberation, and 'strong value' (i.e., strong goods). Smith argues that it is strong value that is fundamental and necessary for identity rather than strong evaluation (Smith 2002, 91, 94-5). However, I believe this view is problematic because recognizing strong values (or goods) implies some kind of evaluation of an object, however aware or reflective one is about it; i.e., we must still have at least

articulacy” (*HAL* 24; my emphasis), which means that a strong evaluator will not necessarily have to be reflective or articulate to any great extent.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, as I will discuss in the second section when examining Taylor’s account of life goods and constitutive goods, it is because strong goods often operate as implicit ‘background’ frameworks for “our moral judgments, intuitions, or reactions” that Taylor regards articulation as playing a vital role in our ethical life (*SS* 26).

Now, when Taylor says that strong evaluation is a condition for articulacy, we have seen that he means that it is a condition for *greater* articulacy. But achieving greater articulacy here involves making explicit and refining something that is already implicitly present. While being fully reflective and articulate is not a condition of strong evaluation and thus of having a sense of self, nevertheless, Taylor does believe that at least *some* degree of awareness and articulacy (i.e., linguistically/symbolically-informed discrimination) is needed. This can be seen in his statement above that in strong evaluation “one is operating with a *sense* that some desires, goals, aspirations are qualitatively higher than others” (my emphasis; cf. *SS* 21). Thus, e.g., one might have some sense or awareness that it is good or more worthy to be courageous and base or unworthy to be cowardly, but nevertheless not be very articulate about why this is so. Or again: one might have a sense that human beings are worthy of our love and respect, but likewise not be fully articulate about why this is so. In such cases, however, we should

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some inchoate ‘sense’ of the qualitative distinctions of worth involved. I think Smith goes wrong in accepting the view that strong evaluation involves fully aware reflection and deliberation. The term ‘evaluation’ might seem to suggest fully aware reflection and deliberation, but this need not be the case. There can be a continuum in the degree of reflection, deliberation, and articulacy among strong evaluations.

<sup>25</sup> Ruth Abbey appeals to this point in Taylor’s early discussion of strong evaluation to argue against Flanagan’s view that Taylor changed his position in his later work (viz., in *Sources of the Self*) to relax the requirement of reflection and articulation. Abbey maintains instead (correctly I believe) that “rather than there being a substantive shift in [Taylor’s] conception of strong evaluation, I think it is more correct to see him as making his argument clearer in his later formulations” (Abbey 2000, 21).

expect that these persons could come to recognize an articulation that made sense of their not fully reflective or articulate sense of the qualitative distinctions of worth involved. But this is so only because they have at least some awareness and articulacy, however implicit or inchoate, regarding qualitative distinctions of worth. As discussed above, this awareness and articulacy is integrally connected to our nature as language animals: language makes possible the strong evaluative significances – e.g., a sense of dignity, pride, fulfillment, integrity, interpersonal love/communion, admiration, indignation, shame, moral right and wrong, etc. – that shape our human form of life. Elsewhere Taylor writes: “Without any articulation at all, we would lose all contact with the good, however conceived. We would cease to be human” (*SS* 97).<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, while Taylor does not believe that a high degree of reflection or articulacy is needed in order to be a strong evaluator and have an identity or sense of self, he does maintain that reflecting on our implicit or inchoate sense of qualitative distinctions of worth and striving for articulacy about them stands as a normative ideal (*SS* 34). Indeed, he regards it as important for what it is to be a responsible self (*HAL* 35ff; Taylor 1976). According to Taylor, “because our insights into our own motivations and into what is important and of value are often limited by the shape of our experience, failure to understand a certain insight, or see the point of some moral advice proffered, is often taken as a judgment on the character of the person concerned” (*HAL* 38). In other words, when we hold human beings morally responsible it is not only on the basis of what they do or do not do, but also “on the basis of what they see or do not see” (*HAL* 39;

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that Taylor still speaks of people being ‘inarticulate’ and about problems of ‘inarticulacy’, but this should be understood, I believe, in terms of a lack of full articulacy.

cf. Laitinen 2008, 32).<sup>27</sup> Related to this issue of responsibility, striving for articulacy also stands as a normative ideal in that it is an important part of achieving ‘the good life’: viz., it enables us to get clearer about the nature of strong goods and their place in our lives, which in turn can empower us to live according to them more fully.<sup>28</sup>

*The Place of Weak Evaluation in Human Life*

Now, if we again grant Taylor’s claim that properly functioning human agents are inescapably strong evaluators, another issue arises: does this claim mean that we only engage in strong evaluation? While Taylor’s distinction between strong evaluators and simple weighers might seem to suggest a distinction between those who only engage in strong evaluation and those who only engage in weak evaluation, I do not think this is in fact his view or that it would be a plausible view to hold. Taylor’s point is to contrast the hypothetical individual (the simple weigher) for whom strong evaluation plays no role in his or her life with the individual (the strong evaluator) for whom it plays at least some important role in order to argue that it is impossible for a person not to engage in at least *some* strong evaluation; i.e., it is impossible to be merely a simple weigher. But I do not think this should be taken to imply that a strong evaluator only engages in strong evaluation. I believe that by introducing the distinction between strong and weak evaluation as two different ways of evaluating our desires Taylor genuinely means to suggest that these are both present in human life. Admittedly, if it is true that human beings engage in both strong and weak evaluation then to speak of human beings as strong evaluators could be misleading. However, as a description of someone it should be

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<sup>27</sup> Note that this is connected to the categorical feature of strong goods.

<sup>28</sup> This is an issue I will need to return to discuss in more detail in the second section once I have outlined Taylor’s account of life goods and constitutive goods.

understood to refer to something that someone engages in sometimes, but not necessarily all the time (somewhat akin to calling someone a baseball player or a philosopher).<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, it seems difficult to escape from engaging in weak evaluation in our life. For instance, we are going to face circumstances like the example Taylor's gives of needing to choose between two kinds of pastries (or two flavors of ice cream), where we must weigh the strength of our desires for the alternatives. Or again: we will face circumstances where we will seek to make different desires compossible and to achieve the most overall satisfaction, such as when deciding upon what activities to do on a vacation. It is true that strong evaluation can enter in at points in such cases: e.g., if I strongly value the virtue of temperance or self-control then I might refuse the offer of a pastry, depending on my food habits or if I have had too many desserts recently. In the other case, I may choose to visit an important historic site on a vacation because I view it as part of a higher mode of life to be knowledgeable about history. However, these strong goods might not enter in or, if they do, they can leave space for weak goods. For example, within the bounds of temperance I can choose which pastry I most desire; or in the other case: granted I make sure to visit the historical site, the other activities of the vacation can be decided by weak evaluation. We can also think of other more mundane examples here, such as the desire for rest. Again, one might forego rest for some strong good, but obviously we cannot always forego rest if we are to live, let alone live well.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> These examples of being a baseball player and a philosopher are particularly appropriate because they can be identity-constituting just like strong evaluation is. Indeed, insofar as they are identity-constituting they might be considered to be strong goods. I want to thank Ruth Abbey for pushing me to clarify Taylor's distinction between strong evaluators and simple weighers.

<sup>30</sup> In support of his claim that there are no pure strong evaluators, Owen Flanagan says: "Normal persons sometimes behave wantonly; for example, we scratch where it itches" (Flanagan 1996, 146). Another example that Taylor gives of weak evaluation is our nausea at certain smells (e.g., sour milk), which we seek to avoid (*SS* 5-6; Taylor 2003a, 305; *DC* 297; Taylor 2011b, 15). Ruth Abbey also maintains that Taylor does not suggest that we always engage in strong evaluation and she gives some

I need to say more here about the idea of strong goods ‘leaving space’ for weak goods in human life. Given Taylor’s claim that strong goods are of incomparably higher worth than weak goods, it might seem that whenever we can we should always pursue strong goods over weak goods. For instance, given that charity is a strong good it might seem that we should always sacrifice weak goods (e.g., our desire for ice cream or comfort/relaxation) whenever we can opt instead for doing charitable actions.<sup>31</sup> However, I do not think this issue is so simple for Taylor and I want to try to suggest how on his view weak goods can be said to have a place in ‘the good life’.

I think we can see how this is so by considering the ideal of the ‘affirmation of ordinary life’, including ‘ordinary desire’, which Taylor discusses as an important aspect of ‘modern identity’, albeit in different variations (see *SS*, Pt. III; *SA*, 609-34).<sup>32</sup> At the heart of this ideal is an aspiration to ‘wholeness’, i.e., a desire to preserve what is integral to being human. The claim is that part of what it is to have an integral human life is that there be some place for pursuing our ordinary desires, i.e., weak goods. If we accept such a view then we can affirm that even though on occasion we may have to sacrifice a weak good (e.g., comfort) for the sake of a strong good (e.g., charity), nevertheless, weak goods should not be entirely eradicated from human life. This is because achieving wholeness or an integrally human life, so understood, is itself a strong good.<sup>33</sup> Insofar as

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examples of cases of weak evaluation: e.g., in our choice of transportation or what to eat for lunch. She also notes how strong evaluation might enter in here, e.g., because of environmental concerns or ethical concerns regarding the treatment of animals (Abbey 2000, 18-9).

<sup>31</sup> The logic of strict utilitarianism would certainly seem to suggest such a view and it is regarded as objectionable for this reason (see Williams 1973b).

<sup>32</sup> According to Taylor, the ideal of the affirmation of ordinary life arose in the modern period at least in part as a response to certain supposedly higher demands, e.g., of religious, contemplative, or heroic life, which might seem to denigrate our ordinary desires and goals.

<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that an important virtue that can be seen as acknowledging the place of certain weak goods in the good life is the virtue of temperance, which is – at least according to Aristotle – a mean between excess in pleasures (especially those of touch and taste) and a *deficiency* in such pleasures.

the pursuit of at least some weak goods is part of the strong good of an integral human life we must therefore seek to reconcile this as far as possible with other strong goods with which it might be in tension, such as charity. Indeed, this effort of reconciliation should itself be seen in light of the aspiration to wholeness.

## II. LIFE GOODS AND CONSTITUTIVE GOODS

### *Taylor's Two-Tiered Account of Strong Goods: Life Goods and Constitutive Goods*

While acknowledging the place of weak evaluation in human life, most of what follows will focus on Taylor's account of strong evaluation since this is most important for his account of ethics and his effort of re-enchantment. As aforementioned, Taylor uses the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' interchangeably and in a broad sense that refers to the whole domain of strong evaluation (see *SS*, Pt. 1). Moreover, in his writings on ethics, Taylor often uses as a central concept the generic term 'the good', which refers only to strong goods. Near the end of Part I of *Sources of the Self* (1989) – which provides Taylor's most extended account of ethics – he remarks:

I have been speaking of the good in these pages, or sometimes of strong good, meaning whatever is picked out as incomparably higher in a qualitative distinction. It can be some action, or motive, or style of life, which is seen as qualitatively superior. 'Good' is used here in a highly general sense, designating anything considered valuable, worthy, admirable, of whatever kind or category. (*SS* 92; cf. 77-8)

In context of his ethical framework I believe we can say that Taylor's usage of 'the good' refers to any particular strong good or to our total framework of strong goods to which the particular goods belong.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Taylor also refers to 'the good' and 'the Good' in distinguishing between life goods and constitutive goods (Taylor 1995b, 135). As we will see in the next chapter, 'the good', understood as our total



At this point I would now like to examine in more detail Taylor's two-tiered account of strong goods in terms of 'life goods' and 'constitutive goods'. Taylor does not articulate this account until *Sources*, which is some time after his initial discussions of strong evaluation (Taylor 1976; *HAL*, Chs. 1 & 2; *PHS*, Chs. 4, 8 & 9). As I read him, Taylor's two-tiered account of strong goods is an attempt to fill out his initial discussions of strong evaluation. This account is also offered as an original ethical framework that is distinct in important ways from the three dominant contemporary ethical frameworks of Kantianism, utilitarianism, and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (at least in its most common form). At the outset of *Sources* Taylor remarks:

Much contemporary moral philosophy [...] has given such a narrow focus to morality that some of the crucial connections I want to draw here are incomprehensible in its terms. This moral philosophy has tended to focus on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life; and it has no conceptual place left for a notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance or [...] as the privileged focus of attention or will. This philosophy has accredited a cramped and truncated view of morality, as well as of the whole range of issues involved in the attempt to live the best possible life [...]. (*SS* 3; cf. *DC* 4-5)

We can identify here three central questions that Taylor thinks moral philosophers should address: (1) 'What is it right to *do*?'; (2) 'What is it good to *be*?'; (3) 'What ought I to *love* (or as Taylor will also put it: What ought I to *respect*)?' Taylor thinks contemporary Kantians and utilitarians – who are the main focus of criticism in the above passage – have tended to concentrate on the first of these questions in providing action-guiding principles (viz., the categorical imperative and the principle of utility), while largely neglecting the latter two (see *SS*, Ch. 3).<sup>35</sup> Contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists

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framework of strong goods, is what Taylor argues properly functioning human agents are inescapably oriented towards in their lives.

<sup>35</sup> While Kant himself certainly places important emphasis on the way in which human beings command our respect (this is the basis of his second formulation of the categorical imperative), many

have given attention to the second question, but often neglect the third (see *DC*, Ch. 1; cf. Dell'Olio 1998). On Taylor's view, the most viable moral philosophy will show how these questions are in fact interrelated, which is part of what his two-tiered account of strong goods in terms of life goods and constitutive goods aims to show.

Let us begin with 'life goods'. According to Taylor, life goods are "facets or components of a good life" that involve "qualitative distinctions between actions, or feelings, or modes of life" (*SS* 93). I believe we can also add 'desires' to this list given the preceding discussion of strong evaluation as involving qualitative distinctions of the worth of desires in which they are "judged as belonging to qualitatively different modes of life: fragment or integrated, alienated or free, saintly, or merely human, courageous or pusillanimous and so on" (*HAL* 16). The 'good life' itself Taylor understands in terms of a "qualitative distinction between ways of being, distinguishing a 'higher' or strongly valued way from its 'lower' contrast case" (Taylor 1995b, 138). Life goods, as "facets or components of a good life", thus provide answers to the question 'What is it good to be?' In short, they are what "define a good life for us" (Taylor 1997a, 173).

Although life goods can be either desires, feelings, actions, or modes of life, nevertheless, I believe that strongly valued modes of life (or 'ways of being') should be regarded as primary given that life goods define for us 'the good life'. Hence Taylor sometimes uses 'virtues' – i.e., strongly valued dispositions or character traits – as a shorthand for describing life goods (*DC* 10-1; Taylor 1994c, 126). The concept of a

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contemporary Kantians seem to de-emphasize this aspect (though they do not necessarily deny it). Taylor reads John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas – the two contemporary Kantians with whom he engages most – as having a more 'procedural' focus (see *SS* 83-89). We can see this in the way that Rawls is concerned with establishing the fair terms of social cooperation for mutual benefit and the way that Habermas is concerned with establishing norms that can be accepted without coercion by all participants in a shared deliberation. These approaches are more in line with Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative: viz., to act in such a way that we can will our action to be a universal law for all rational agents.

virtue emphasizes the primacy of evaluating modes of life, but in a way that also cannot be separated from evaluating desires, feelings, and actions insofar as the genuine possession of a virtue (e.g., compassion, courage, integrity, etc.) requires certain desires, feelings, and actions. By the same token, strongly valued desires, feelings, and actions are indicative of strongly valued modes of life, i.e., they are “judged as belonging to qualitatively different modes of life”.<sup>36</sup>

It is important not to confuse Taylor’s concept of ‘life goods’ here with what he calls ‘life needs’ or ‘life-related values’ (see *SS* 507; Taylor 2003a, 308-10; *SA* 150).<sup>37</sup> Whereas life goods are strong goods that define for us a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life (i.e., ‘the good life’), life needs or life-related values are determined solely by the kind of biological creatures that we are and as such are weakly valued (though they can come to be strongly valued<sup>38</sup>). For Taylor, they include: “survival, flourishing as a living being, including health, strength, energy, the desires which de facto accompany life: sex, food, (in certain cases) dominance” and we might also add, more positively, natural feelings of sympathy (Taylor 2003a, 309; cf. *SA* 608-9).

Something like this notion of life-related values plays a central role in the most prominent form of contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, viz., ‘neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalism’, which is advanced by Philippa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Alasdair MacIntyre. Such neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists seek to found virtue ethics on an account of human flourishing, which is understood on analogy with what it is for

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<sup>36</sup> As we will see in the next chapter, on Taylor’s view of ‘the self in moral space’ there is in fact something ‘inescapable’ about regarding our ‘mode of life’ as the primary locus of self-evaluation.

<sup>37</sup> Russell Hittinger makes this mistake (see Hittinger 1990, 113).

<sup>38</sup> For example: although our desire for food begins as a *de facto* biological desire that is necessary for the sustaining our life, nevertheless, it can also be cultivated as part of a higher form of life involving the ability to appreciate fine foods. Likewise: our biological drive for sex can be taken up as part of higher mode of life in the form of a committed relationship of love. Or again: our natural desire for survival can be reinforced through the strong evaluative judgment that life is worth living and has dignity.

plants and non-human animals to flourish *qua* member of their particular species (Hursthouse 1999a, 195-7; Foot 2001, 15-6, 24-5; MacIntyre 1999, 64-5, 77-9). In other words, this involves founding virtue ethics on considerations of human beings within the “natural, biological order of living things” (Hursthouse 1999a, 206).<sup>39</sup> On Hursthouse’s account, e.g., to flourish *qua* human being means that we flourish with respect to our naturalistic ends as rational, social animals: viz., the ends of individual survival, species continuation, characteristic enjoyment and freedom from pain, and the good functioning of our social group (ibid., 202, 207). The virtues – e.g., courage, temperance, justice, compassion, etc. – are then understood as the character traits that best enable us to flourish so understood. However, what is often missing in such accounts is an articulation of the strong evaluative sense – as we find in Aristotle’s view of ‘the noble’ (*to kalon*) – that fulfilling our naturalistic ends would constitute a higher, nobler, more fulfilling form of life that it is normative for our desires (see Taylor 2003a, 308-10, 318-9).<sup>40</sup>

Taylor’s own ethical perspective can certainly be described as neo-Aristotelian in the sense that he makes considerations of ‘the good life’ central for ethical reflection and he also makes favorable references to Aristotle’s views on ethics. However, his view of the good life differs significantly from the view advanced by neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists in that he understands it in terms of achieving a form of life that is seen as higher, nobler, and more fulfilling, rather than as being more a matter of just fulfilling our

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<sup>39</sup> It is worth mentioning here something that John Cottingham notes, viz.: “Flourishing is a biological term, which etymologically connotes *flowering* – that is to say the healthy, vigorous unfolding of the capacities peculiar to each species” (Cottingham 2009b). In Chapter IV I will discuss the contrast between this notion of ‘flourishing’ and Taylor’s notion of ‘fullness’.

<sup>40</sup> We can see that Aristotle deploys a strong evaluative conception of *eudaimonia* (happiness or well-being) when he states: “we regard neither ox, nor horse, nor any other animal as happy; for none of them can share in this sort of [rational] activity” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, I.9, 1099b29-1100a2 [Aristotle 1999]; cf. X.8, 1178b25-33). For more discussion of this issue see my article “To What Extent Must We Go Beyond Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism?” (McPherson 2012), which I draw on here. See also McDowell 1995; 1998, Essays 1 & 9.

naturalistic ends or life needs. I should also add that the notion of simply fulfilling our naturalistic ends or life needs apart from strong evaluation is problematic since our evolutionary heritage seems to have endowed us with some natural tendencies – e.g., towards narrow self-concern, sexual license, dominance, violence, hatred, etc.<sup>41</sup> – which we should shun, and other natural tendencies – e.g., towards compassion, reciprocity, fidelity, etc. – which we should cultivate. At least this is what we think from a certain strong evaluative standpoint whereby we identify certain of our naturalistic tendencies – e.g., compassion over dominance – as being that which is ‘noblest and best’ about us and thus to be cultivated as part of a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life.<sup>42</sup>

Another key point of difference between Taylor and neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists is that he thinks the question ‘What is it good to be?’ must ultimately be answered by addressing the question ‘What ought I to love [or respect]?’ , which – as mentioned above– is a question that has been overlooked by most neo-Aristotelians. This takes us to the second level of strong goods, viz., constitutive goods.

For Taylor, life goods ultimately depend upon constitutive goods, which are the most fundamental level of strong goods. Indeed, among our qualitative distinctions of worth, he maintains, “there is something which seems to deserve the attribution [of good] in a fuller sense”: viz., constitutive goods (*SS* 92).<sup>43</sup> According to Taylor, constitutive

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<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that some of these natural tendencies, e.g., towards violence and sexual license, seem to be more prevalent among males than females. This list is not intended to mean that everyone has these natural tendencies or that those who do have them to a great degree, but only to give instances of possible problematic natural tendencies.

<sup>42</sup> I take the phrase ‘noblest and best’ from John Cottingham, who uses it when addressing this issue (Cottingham 2003, 71-2). I should mention here that most contemporary neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists do in fact want to affirm compassion over dominance. I think Aristotle would too, given his account of friendship and his view of human beings as social animals.

<sup>43</sup> It is worth remarking here that many commentators on Taylor’s work have not taken note of the fact that constitutive goods are themselves a key type of strong good, as this passage makes clear. For instance, Ruth Abbey describes a constitutive good as providing “the source of strong evaluation”, but does not

goods are “features of ourselves, or the world, or God” that are regarded as commanding or being worthy of our love, respect, admiration, awe, allegiance, etc. (*DC* 10).<sup>44</sup> In other words, they provide an answer to questions such as: ‘What ought I to love?’, ‘What commands my respect?’, and the like. While it is true that any strong good is worthy of our love, respect, admiration, allegiance, etc., the point is that constitutive goods are worthy in a fundamental way: i.e., the worthiness of a life good is derivative upon the worthiness of a constitutive good.<sup>45</sup> In being worthy of love, respect, admiration, and the like, constitutive goods perform two essential functions in the ethical life: first, as the name suggests, constitutive goods constitute life goods as the goods they are for us.

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mention that it is itself an object of strong evaluation (Abbey 2000, 47; cf. Wood 1992, 624). As I will discuss, constitutive goods are the sources of other strong goods precisely because they are the most fundamental strong goods. This is seen in the fact that constitutive goods are “features of ourselves, or the world, or God” that are regarded as being *worthy* of our love, respect, admiration, etc. (in the strong sense that includes the categorical and incommensurability features), and from this other qualitative distinctions of worth arise regarding our desires, feelings, actions, and modes of life (*DC* 10). This point is also overlooked by Nicholas Smith, who discusses ‘strong value’ as basically synonymous with life goods (Smith 2002, 89-97, 113). It is true that Taylor typically refers to life goods when discussing strong evaluation (see, e.g., *HAL* 16; Taylor 1995b, 134), but I believe this is because they are less contentious and his discussions do not always seek to get to the fundamental, more contentious level of strong goods: viz., constitutive goods. But when he does discuss constitutive goods I believe it is clear that they are strong goods. Indeed, it would be puzzling to think of what else they could be but objects of strong evaluation.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor most commonly speaks of constitutive goods in terms of commanding or being worthy of our love (see *SS* 3, 79, 84-5, 92-3, 95-6; Taylor 1994d, 183-4; Taylor 1997a, 173; *CM* 120-1; *SA* 590, 701; *DC* 5, 11-2, 297). Love is certainly the strongest motive that a constitutive good can command and, as Abbey nicely puts it, this gives Taylor’s ethical perspective an “erotic dimension” (Abbey 2000, 49). In emphasizing the motive of love Taylor is seeking to recover a more traditional sense of ethics, especially as exemplified in Plato’s ideal of love for the Good and the Christian (especially Augustinian) ideal of love for God, neighbor, and world (see *SS* 92-3; *CM* 120-1). Taylor is also influenced here by the work of his former teacher Iris Murdoch, who maintains: “We need a moral philosophy in which the concept of love, so rarely mentioned now by philosophers, can once again be made central” (Murdoch 1997, 337). In an endnote in his discussion of constitutive goods in Chapter 4 of *Sources* Taylor remarks: “Anyone who has read Murdoch’s book [*The Sovereignty of Good*] will see the extent of my debt to her in what I have written here” (*SS* 534, n. 4; cf. *SS* 3; *DC*, Ch. 1). Murdoch herself is concerned with recovering something of Plato’s Idea of the Good in the form of an ideal of perfection towards which we should strive. As we will see with Taylor, the centrality of love in Murdoch’s moral philosophy is also connected to the importance of self-transcendence in the moral life, or what she calls “unselfing” (Murdoch 1997, 369).

Besides love, some other important motives that Taylor says constitutive goods can be regarded as being worthy of or as commanding include: respect (*SS* 4-11, 25, 77, 94-6; Taylor 2003a, 316-20; *DC* 11, 297); admiration (*SS* 84-5; *SA* 589; *DC* 11, 297); awe or wonder (*SS* 94; Taylor 1991a, 243; *DC* 297); and allegiance (*SS* 3, 77, 79, 96; Taylor 1991a, 243; *SA* 589). It should be noted that ‘commanding’ here is meant in a normative sense; i.e., a constitutive good is something we *ought* to love, respect, admire, etc.

<sup>45</sup> I want to thank Arto Laitinen for pushing me to clarify this point.

Second, constitutive goods function as ‘moral sources’, i.e., they are “something the love [or respect] of which empowers us to do and be good” (*SS* 93). In other words, they motivate us to realize the life goods they constitute. As we will see, these two functions – call them the ‘constitutive’ and ‘motivational’ functions – are closely related.

In addition to these two functions, Taylor says that constitutive goods – as ‘features of ourselves, or the world, or God’ that are worthy of our love and respect – are part of our ‘moral ontology’, which is the ‘ontological background picture’ that makes sense of our ‘moral phenomenology’ (*SS* 3-11, 57-60, 68-75; Taylor 2003a: 316-20; *SA* 607-9). In other words, our moral ontology is what we take to be the third-personal or objective reality that makes sense of our first-personal strong evaluative experience. This notion of moral ontology plays a crucial role in Taylor’s defense of moral (i.e., strong evaluative) realism. Since I will be exploring this in the next chapter, I want to focus here on the constitutive and motivational functions of constitutive goods.

In order to enable a better understanding of Taylor’s two-tiered account of strong goods I would like to discuss four key examples of constitutive goods that he often discusses and consider how they might be said to be constitutive of certain life goods. I hope this discussion will help to show how Taylor’s two-tiered account of strong goods can make sense of our ethical life. The examples of constitutive goods I want to examine are: (1) other human beings; (2) our own human potential; (3) the natural world; and (4) God. As we will see, each is a constitutive good under some description by which it is regarded as worthy of our love, respect, admiration, etc. Taylor speaks of these constitutive goods as four central components of his own ethical outlook: viz., (1) the ‘moral’ component (in the narrow sense of ‘moral’, which concerns our relationship to

other human beings); (2) the ‘Aristotelian’ component; (3) the ‘ecological’ component; and (4) the ‘theological’ component (Taylor 1991a, 245).

Let us begin then with the example of other human beings as constitutive goods; i.e., the sense we have of other human beings, under some description, as being *worthy* of our respect, concern, and love. According to Taylor, such a view of human beings underlies our basic ‘moral’ (i.e., strong evaluative) responses of respect, concern, and love for other human beings. In order to explain such responses we need to articulate what it is about human beings that makes them *worthy* of respect, concern, and love, which is precisely to articulate the manner in which human beings can be regarded as constitutive goods (*SS* 5; Taylor 1997a, 173; 2003a, 316-20): e.g., one might say that it is something about our being created in the image of God or having capacity for rationality, or strong evaluation, or creativity, or love, or some combination of these and perhaps others, which are viewed as capacities for a higher mode of life (see *SS* 25). Some such view of human beings as constitutive goods can be said to be *constitutive* of certain life goods since in regarding human beings as worthy of our respect, concern, and love in one or several of these ways we therefore strongly value such motives and feelings and view them as part of a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life, i.e., the good life (*SS* 77; *DC* 9). This higher mode of life will include life goods such as the virtues that embody such respect, concern, and love: e.g., compassion, benevolence, and justice as well as the actions, feelings, and desires that belong to these virtues. It will also include love for other persons as itself an important life good; indeed, such love, especially when mutual in the form of ‘communion’, is a crucial form of human fulfillment.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Later in this chapter I will suggest that it is possible for there to be particularized constitutive goods such that it is possible to regard a particular persons as worthy of our love not only *qua* human beings but



Consider now the second key example of a constitutive good: viz., the sense we have of our own human potential as worthy of respect or admiration because of the higher mode of being that is achieved through its realization. For Aristotle, e.g., our human potential as rational, social animals is worthy of respect or admiration in virtue of enabling a higher mode of being than is possible for non-rational animals (*DC* 10-1). Such a view of our human potential as a constitutive good can be seen to be constitutive of certain life goods: viz., the virtues of character and of intellect whereby our human potential is fulfilled as well as the actions, feelings, and desires that belong to these virtues. Something similar can be said about other well-known views of our human potential: e.g., Christian or humanist views of our capacity for love, benevolence, or sympathy; Romantic views of our ‘expressive’ or creative powers; Nietzschean views of our capacity for self-overcoming; and (often implicit) Kantian or utilitarian views of our capacity for ‘universalizing’ or ‘disengaged’ reason whereby we take up a ‘universal’, ‘impartial’, or ‘objective’ standpoint.<sup>47</sup> As we saw in the previous paragraph, such views of our human potential when considered with regard to others can also be the basis for considering them to be worthy of respect, concern, and love.

Unlike the previous two examples of constitutive goods, the last two examples are ‘non-anthropocentric’: viz., the natural world and God. The natural world is a constitutive good insofar as we regard it as worthy of our admiration, respect, awe, and wonder, e.g., in virtue of its beauty, grandeur, intricateness, etc.<sup>48</sup> This view of the natural world as a constitutive good, which we find among ‘deep ecologists’, can be seen then to be

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also *qua* this particular human being. The centrality of communion in Taylor’s theistic teleological perspective will be discussed in Chapter VI.

<sup>47</sup> See *SS* 94-5, 314, 407-8, 495-6; Taylor 1994a, 212; Taylor 1997a, 173; *DC* 11; *SA* 8-10.

<sup>48</sup> See *SS* 102, 513; *EA* 89-91; Taylor 1991a, 245-6; *PA* 100-1, 125-6; *SA* 9; *DC* 297.

constitutive of certain life goods that are part of a higher mode of life that embodies admiration, respect, awe, and the like for the natural world: viz., the virtues related to care and respect for the natural world and to proper admiration, awe, and wonder at its beauty, grandeur, and intricateness as well as the actions, feelings, and desires that belong to these virtues.

For theists, God is a constitutive good insofar as God is regarded as being worthy of our love, awe, respect, and allegiance because of God's perfect goodness, love, wisdom, power, etc. (SS 93; Taylor 1991a, 245; Taylor 1997a, 173; DC 11). God as a constitutive good can be seen then to be constitutive of certain life goods that are part of a higher mode of being that embodies love and respect for God: viz., the virtues of love, devotion, piety, reverence, etc., as well as the practices, feelings, and desires that are expressive of these virtues (e.g., prayer, worship, thanksgiving, sharing in God's love for human beings through charitable actions, etc.). As in the first case, one's relationship of communion with God is itself an important life good.

From this discussion of Taylor's four main examples of constitutive goods and the way in which they constitute certain life goods we can observe something that he often emphasizes: viz., in order to live a good, fulfilling, meaningful, worthwhile, higher form of life we must appropriately engage with things (i.e., constitutive goods) that are seen as being objectively worthy of our love, respect, admiration, and the like.<sup>49</sup>

*Taylor's Internalism and the Role of Articulation in the Ethical Life*

So far in this discussion of constitutive goods I have been focusing on their constitutive function, i.e., the way they constitute life goods as the goods they are for us. I

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<sup>49</sup> See SS 43-4, 507, 510-3, 526-7, n. 20; EA 34-5, 40-1, 58, 72-3, 88-91.

would now like to discuss their motivational function. To begin with, it should be noted that these two functions of constitutive goods are interconnected. On the one hand, we can say that it is in virtue of regarding constitutive goods as being worthy of our love, respect, admiration, and the like and their being constitutive of life goods embodying a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life that they function as ‘moral sources’: i.e., “something the love [or respect] of which empowers us to do and be good”.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, we can only come to acknowledge such constitutive goods and the life goods they constitute by being moved in some way by a sense of the qualitative distinctions of worth involved. In short, there is an inseparable and interdependent relationship between our beliefs regarding qualitative distinctions of worth and our being moved by such qualitative distinctions. For instance, we can only come to acknowledge human beings as worthy of our respect, concern, and love as well as recognize the life goods of compassion, benevolence, justice and the like as part of a higher mode of life insofar as we are actually moved in some way by a sense of the worth of human beings and the higher mode of life that is involved in showing respect, concern, and love for other human beings. Similar remarks could be made about the other examples of constitutive goods, viz., our own potential, the natural world, and God.

In the terms of contemporary Anglo-American meta-ethics, Taylor’s position on moral psychology is a form of ‘internalism’, i.e., the view that “there is an internal and necessary connection between sincerely making a moral judgment and being motivated to

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<sup>50</sup> For Taylor, while constitutive goods are the fundamental moral sources, he also maintains that life goods (especially virtues) can be moral sources in a derivative way; i.e., they can inspire us. Taylor writes: “This is nowhere more evident than in the recounting of the models and paradigms, exemplary people and actions, in real life or story, which both inspire and guide us” (*DC* 12).

act in the manner prescribed by that judgment” (Miller 2003, 7).<sup>51</sup> This contrasts with ‘externalism’, i.e., the view that “the connection between judgment and motivation is only external and contingent” (ibid.). On Taylor’s view, much of modern moral philosophy in the Kantian and utilitarian traditions is representative of externalism in that they take their main task to be that of finding “the principle or principles from which we can derive what we ought to do (the greatest happiness, or universalization, or whatever)”, independent of how we are actually moved (*CM* 120). He writes:

But, one wants to protest, don’t you see that *it also matters* whether people can actually bring themselves to *do* the right thing? But then your interlocutor looks at you blankly and says: of course, but that’s not *moral philosophy*; how people actually get motivated, that’s in the domain of psychology, or sociology, or whatever. In other words, these two issues, what we should do and how we come to do it, which were unproblematically seen as part of the same inquiry by Plato, Augustine, and just about everybody else until the last three centuries, have been neatly sundered and placed in noncommunicating intellectual universes. (ibid.)

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<sup>51</sup> Unlike some internalist perspectives that are also ‘non-cognitivist’ and/or ‘anti-realist’ with regard to moral judgments, such as emotivism and projectivism, Taylor’s position is ‘cognitivist’ and ‘realist’ with respect to moral judgments. Cf. Laitinen 2008, 175-8.

It is because of Taylor’s internalism that I believe Nicholas Smith is mistaken when he maintains that the issue of ‘moral sources’, i.e., the ‘motivational function’ of constitutive goods, can be separated out from the ‘constitutive function’ of constitutive goods (Smith 2002, 116-8). Smith writes: “If moral sources were indispensable to human agency in the way that strong values are, we would expect a life led without some contact with moral sources to be unbearable. And while this may be true for some people, people who lead their lives in accordance with a hypergood, for instance – it surely does not hold for everyone. It is quite conceivable that a person can live a recognizable human life, a life informed by some conception of the good, without reflecting on constitutive goods or contacting them in some other way. Contact with moral sources may be desirable for living a fully human life. It may heighten our experience or strengthen our motivation to meet certain standards. But it does not follow that moral sources are necessary for moral life. It does not entail that they are an essential component of moral motivation” (ibid., 116). I believe Smith goes wrong here in understanding the idea of ‘moral sources’ in a way that is too stringent. He seems to assume that ‘contact’ with a moral source requires a significant degree of reflection and that it must always be deeply inspiring or motivating; hence he connects it with the issue of hypergoods, which is what Taylor calls the higher-order life goods (to be discussed later in this chapter). While it is true, as we will see shortly, that Taylor believes reflection upon and articulation of a constitutive good can bring us into deeper ‘contact’ with it as a moral source and thus more fully empower us to realize the life goods it constitutes, nevertheless, there are lesser degrees of ‘contact’ and empowerment. For Taylor, simply to have a conception of the good, however implicit or inchoate, is to be in ‘contact’ with a moral source since strong goods are inherently motivating. As we will discuss in the next chapter, Taylor believes that a life without any contact with a moral source would indeed be unbearable.

For Taylor these issues cannot in fact be separated since answering the question of ‘What ought I to do?’ requires answering the question ‘What is it good to be?’ “A moral obligation”, he says, “comes across as moral because it is part of a broader sense which includes the goodness, perhaps the nobility or admirability, of being someone who lives up to it. The obligation to do and the goodness in being are two facets, as it were, of the same sense” (*DC* 9). In other words, morality should be conceived of as always connected to some view of a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life, i.e., the good life, which is inherently motivating.<sup>52</sup> But to fully understand this we must specify the constitutive goods that constitute the life goods that define for us the good life. These life goods are seen as part of a higher mode of life precisely because they are part of what it is to love and respect certain constitutive goods (e.g., other human beings, our own human potential, the natural world, or God), which in answering the question ‘What ought I to love and respect?’ are inherently motivating; i.e., to genuinely acknowledge a constitutive good just is to be moved by a sense of its worthiness of being loved, respected, admired, etc., and the higher mode of life involved in realizing these motives.

Although Taylor says that constitutive goods operate as ‘moral sources’ by empowering us to do and be good, he maintains that they are important not merely because they are instrumentally an aid for doing and being good, but also because “loving [or respecting a constitutive good] is part of what it is to be a good human being” (*SS* 93). Indeed, life goods are the goods they are for us, as mentioned, because they are expressive of such love and respect for constitutive goods. The quality of our motivation with regard to such love and respect is thus important for realizing the life goods that

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<sup>52</sup> In other words, Taylor’s ethical perspective is part of the *eudaemonistic* tradition of ethics that goes back to Plato and Aristotle and continues in medieval thinkers such as Augustine and Aquinas.

define for us the good life (*SS* 533-4, n. 2; *CM* 120-1). Taylor sums up his view here as follows: “the fullness of ethical life involves not just doing, but also being; and not just these two but also loving (which is shorthand for being moved by, being inspired by) what is constitutively good” (*DC* 12).<sup>53</sup>

At this point I am now in a position to discuss more fully Taylor’s view of the importance of articulation for our ethical life. It is in part because of his ‘internalist’ view that Taylor regards one of the main tasks of moral philosophy to be articulation of the strong goods by which we find ourselves moved (as opposed to the task of trying to establish a moral principle independent of whether we are moved by it). Such articulation is in fact needed for achieving the ‘fullness of ethical life’.

For Taylor, our strong goods often operate as implicit ‘background’ frameworks for “our moral [i.e., strong evaluative] judgments, intuitions, or reactions” (*SS* 26). Thus, to articulate such background frameworks “is to explicate what makes sense of our moral [i.e., strong evaluative] responses” (*ibid.*). What Taylor has in mind here I believe is something like this: our basic moral or strong evaluative responses often concern in the first instance certain desires, feelings, and actions, whether in ourselves or in others, which we view according to some more or less inchoate ‘sense’ of qualitative distinctions of worth. However, if we are to explain the basis for such responses then we must

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<sup>53</sup> In Chapter IV I will return to discuss the place of love and respect for constitutive goods within the good life when I examine Taylor’s phenomenological account of ‘fullness’, which is important for understanding more precisely how constitutive goods function as moral sources, i.e., as sources of moral motivation (Taylor 1988a, 300-2; *SS*, Ch. 2; *SA* 4-20). Briefly stated, the experience of fullness represents human fulfillment at its pinnacle and it is achieved to the extent we come into greater ‘contact’ with ‘the good’, including both constitutive goods and life goods. The notion of being in greater or lesser ‘contact’ with the good, as we will see, is connected to Taylor’s view of ‘the self in moral space’, i.e., our sense of orientation towards some conception of the good. The metaphor of ‘moral space’ is intended to capture the sense we have of our ‘placement’ in relationship to what we understand to be the good. We come into greater ‘contact’ with the good and experience ‘fullness’ when we achieve a fuller love or respect for a constitutive good and realize more fully the life goods that are constituted by it.

articulate the constitutive goods and life goods that are implicit in these responses. For instance, when I observe or hear of someone maliciously harming an innocent person I am moved with indignation and regard such an action as ignoble and contemptible. Moreover, I am also moved to do what I can to help defend this innocent person and I regard being so moved to help as something noble and admirable. However, in order to make sense of this response I must articulate the underlying sense I have of human beings as constitutive goods: i.e., what it is precisely about human beings that makes them worthy of my respect, concern, and love. Additionally, I must articulate the life goods that are constituted by such respect, concern, and love for other human beings and which are viewed as part of a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life. This will include the virtues of compassion, justice, and courage. In short, articulating these strong goods is important for explaining why I am moved in the way I am (see *SS 77*).<sup>54</sup>

However, articulation is important not only because it enables us to make sense of our strong evaluative responses and to more clearly define the strong goods involved, but also because the articulation of constitutive goods can empower us to more fully realize the life goods they constitute. According to Taylor: “articulation can bring us closer to the good as a moral source, can give it power” (*SS 92*; cf. *DC 12*). Likewise: “To come closer to [constitutive goods as moral sources], to have a clearer view of them, to come to grasp what they involve, is for those who recognize them to be moved to love or respect them, and through this love/respect to be better enabled to live up to them” (*SS 96*). For instance, we can empower a greater love and respect for human beings by articulating

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<sup>54</sup> Another example we might consider here is the admiration we feel towards an exemplary person (e.g., Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Jean Vanier, Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King Jr., etc.). We might begin by articulating the virtues embodied in this person’s character, which in turn leads us to articulate the constitutive goods that constitute them (e.g., views of our human potential, human dignity, God, etc.).

more precisely what it is about human beings that commands our love and respect, such as by articulating one or several of the different notions of human potential already mentioned that best captures our sense of human dignity or worth.<sup>55</sup>

On Taylor's view, the foregoing account of articulation provides the basis for a model of practical reasoning that he calls the 'ad hominem' model, which he believes is superior to the 'apodictic' model that is common among modern moral philosophers, especially in the Kantian and utilitarian traditions.<sup>56</sup> Here 'practical reasoning' – in the broadest sense that covers both models – means a form of reasoning in which the conclusion enjoins some action or course of action.

On the 'apodictic' model of practical reasoning one tries to establish some moral principle (e.g., the principle of utility or the categorical imperative) as a self-evident basic reason or criterion from which we can then derive what we ought to do independent of whether or not we are motivated to act according to it (it is for this reason a form of externalism).<sup>57</sup> Taylor also refers to this model of practical reasoning as 'proceduralism' because it is based on following a particular principle-based procedure, such as maximizing the greatest happiness for the greatest number or testing our actions to see if they can be universalized for all rational agents, which does not depend upon any particular view of 'the good', expressed in terms of constitutive goods and life goods.

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<sup>55</sup> It should be mentioned that articulation, according to Taylor, does not need to be strictly philosophical. Indeed, some of the most powerful forms of articulation, he says, make use of empowering stories, exemplars, images, symbols, and so forth (*SS* 91-2, 95-7; *DC* 12; Taylor 1997a, 179).

<sup>56</sup> See *SS* 3-11, 72-8; *PA*, Ch. 3; Taylor 1994a, 205-7; Taylor 2002b, 183ff; *DC* 12-4.

<sup>57</sup> The claim of self-evidence in these theories is often made by appeal to our 'intuitions' (e.g., our sense that 'murder is wrong', 'pleasure is good', etc.). Taylor writes: "It is characteristic of a great deal of moral philosophy today that it stays clear of these linked domains [of life goods and constitutive goods]. It simply starts with our intuitions and then finds a formula that can claim to generate them, perhaps refining them in the process, until we reach reflective equilibrium" (Taylor 1997a, 173-4). In other words, such intuitions are regarded as foundational rather than something to be more fully articulated and made sense of in terms of life goods and constitutive goods.



By contrast, the ‘ad hominem’ model of practical reasoning (as the name suggests) appeals ‘to the person’, particularly to a person’s experience of the strong goods by which he or she is actually moved or to what a person could be moved by on reflection. In regard to our own ethical perspective, Taylor says: “Our qualitative distinctions, as definitions of the good, [...] offer reasons in this sense, that articulating them is articulating what underlies our ethical choices, leanings, intuitions. [...] It is to articulate the moral point of our actions” (*SS 77*). In other words, they seek to articulate what is implicit in our moral outlook. It is important to note here that such articulation does not leave our responses and our ethical perspective unaffected. As we have already seen, articulating constitutive goods can help us to better define our life goods as well as empower us to more fully realize them. However, it is also possible that in seeking to articulate the constitutive goods underlying our strong evaluative responses we come to realize that an adequate support cannot be found for at least some of our responses, which would cause them to be undermined. Or else we may realize that our responses point us to constitutive goods we do not yet embrace, but which we in fact have reason to embrace because of our moral responses.<sup>58</sup>

When it comes to trying to convince others of our ethical perspective, Taylor says: “I can only convince you by my description of the good if I speak for you, either by articulating what underlies your existing moral intuitions or perhaps by my description moving you to the point of making it your own” (*SS 77*; cf. 505). Whether it is intrapersonal or interpersonal, practical reasoning for Taylor is “a reasoning in transitions. It aims to establish, not that some position is correct absolutely, but rather that

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<sup>58</sup> I will discuss these issues further in the next chapter, particularly with regard to Taylor’s account of the relationship between moral ontology and moral phenomenology and his defense of moral realism.

some position is superior to some other. It is concerned [...] with comparative propositions” (SS 72). The most common form of this in where such a transition is mediated by “error-reducing moves”, e.g., “by the identification of contradiction, the dissipation of confusion, or by rescuing from (usually motivated) neglect a consideration whose significance [one] cannot contest” (PA 53). As we will see, Taylor employs this model of practical reasoning in his argument for moral (i.e., strong evaluative) realism (Chapter III) and in his argument for the importance of theistic moral sources for an ethic of universal human concern (Chapter VI).

*The Plurality of Goods, the Problem of Conflict, and the Possibility of Reconciliation*

According to Taylor, one of the most important things about articulation is that it enables us to “recognize the goods to which we cannot but hold allegiance in their full range” (SS 107; cf. Taylor 1994a, 205). Throughout his work Taylor has been concerned to give articulation to a plurality of strong goods to which he thinks we should be committed, and indeed, to which he thinks many people are at least implicitly committed. However, since these goods often come into conflict in our pursuit of the good life, Taylor also has been concerned to explore how they might be reconciled.<sup>59</sup> Although he most often discusses this issue with regard to the plurality of life goods, I would like to first begin by examining the lesser-noted plurality that exists with respect to constitutive goods for Taylor. Indeed, given their constitutive function, we must first understand the plurality of constitutive goods in order to properly address the plurality of life goods.

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<sup>59</sup> Taylor’s teacher Isaiah Berlin is a major influence on him with respect to this issue. However, Taylor differs from Berlin in being more hopeful about the possibility of some degree of reconciliation between conflicting goods (see Berlin 1994; “Two Concepts of Liberty” in Berlin 2000; SS 106-7, 518-21; Taylor 1994b; 213-4; 1997a; 2001a).

The plurality of constitutive goods can already be seen in the four examples of constitutive goods discussed earlier, which Taylor takes to be central components of his own ethical perspective: viz., (1) other human beings; (2) our own potential; (3) the natural world; and (4) God (Taylor 1991a, 245-6). As this indicates, Taylor does not believe that there is just one constitutive good that constitutes all of the life goods that define for us the good life.<sup>60</sup>

This point is important since some of Taylor's writings on constitutive goods can perhaps give the wrong impression that evaluative outlooks are based on one kind of constitutive good, because when he gives examples of constitutive goods he usually associates each of them with a particular moral outlook: e.g., (1) the Idea of the Good is a constitutive good for Plato (*SS* 92-3; *DC* 10); (2) our potential as rational, social animals is a constitutive good for Aristotle (*DC* 10-1); (3) the idea of cosmic order is a constitutive good for Stoics (Taylor 2003a, 316-7); (4) God is a constitutive good for theists (though Taylor also often mentions that human beings are constitutive goods for theists in virtue of being created in the 'image of God') (*SS* 93; *DC* 10; Taylor 1997a, 173; Taylor 2003a, 316-8; *SA* 701-3); (5) some notion of our powers of rational agency is a constitutive good for different strands of Enlightenment humanism (*SS* 93-5; Taylor

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<sup>60</sup> David Braybrooke writes: "Taylor inclines to think just one source will do: God" (Braybrooke 1994, 102). Taylor responds: "Wow! I thought the entire book, and much of what I have written in recent years, fairly cries out against the enterprise of reducing ethics to a single track, whether we are talking of criteria or sources" (Taylor 1994c, 125). As mentioned, I think Taylor is much more explicit about the plurality of life goods (see *PHS*, Ch. 9). In *Sources* he discusses three main divisions of 'moral sources' in the modern world: viz., (1) theism; (2) naturalist views of the powers of disengaged reason in a disenchanted world; and (3) Romantic views of the goodness of nature internal and external to us (see *SS* 314-20, 495-6). Moreover, he wants to argue for the superiority of theism as a moral source over the other two (see *SS* 317-9, 343, 515-21; I should note that he accepts a theistic version of the Romantic view). Thus, it is not entirely surprising that Braybrooke should interpret Taylor as he does. However, as I will discuss more in the next chapter, I think there is an ambiguity in Taylor's use of 'moral source' here. When Taylor speaks of a moral source with regard to these three positions I do not think he is just referring to a single constitutive good, but rather to a background ontology that can be the basis of a plurality of constitutive goods (e.g., a theistic ontology can be the basis of constitutive goods with respect to God, our own potential, other human beings, and the natural world).

1994a, 212; *DC* 11); (6) some notion of our powers of feeling and expression is a constitutive good for many in the ‘Romantic’ strand of modern thought (the natural world is also often mentioned as a constitutive good here) (*SS*, Ch. 15 & Pt. 4); (7) the will to power is a constitutive good for Nietzsche (Taylor 1988a, 300); (8) the natural world is a constitutive good for ‘deep ecologists’ (*SS* 102, 513; *SA* 9); and so on.

However, in many of these cases the identification of a particular constitutive good with an evaluative outlook can be seen simply as identifying what is an especially important constitutive good within that outlook, which does not preclude recognizing other kinds of constitutive goods. For theists, God is regarded as the most important constitutive good in the sense of being worthy of our *fullest* love and allegiance, but a theist can also view other human beings, his or her own potential, and the natural world as worthy of love, respect, and admiration. This is indeed the case with regard to Taylor’s own perspective as we have observed. Of course these other constitutive goods can also be seen as connected to God in being created by God for an objectively good purpose, which figures into the ontological background picture that makes sense of their being regarded as worthy of love, respect, admiration, etc. But they are distinct constitutive goods in constituting particular life goods. In other cases the evaluative outlook is defined by the constitutive good in question, such as in deep ecology where the natural world is a constitutive good. But this does not prevent the recognition of a broader evaluative outlook of which this particular view is a part. Thus deep ecologists in their broader evaluative outlook can also recognize other human beings, their own potential, and God as constitutive goods. Finally, in some cases a particular feature may serve as a constitutive good in different ways: e.g., our capacity for rationality or certain modes of

feelings (e.g., love) can be the basis for a view of our own potential as a constitutive good and a view of other human beings as constitutive goods.

Now, it should be noted here that in his account of constitutive goods Taylor focuses on general kinds, such as conceptions of human potential and the natural world, with God being an exception to such generality. But we should ask: can we also speak of constitutive goods in more specific terms? For instance, if we acknowledge that a particular human being *qua* human being can be a constitutive good, can we also acknowledge him or her *qua* this *particular* human being as being worthy of our love and respect and as constituting life goods? I think we can. In fact, I believe this is important for making sense of life goods pertaining to our particular relationships. While universal benevolence and justice may be life goods that are constituted in regarding human beings as such as worthy of our respect and concern, the special nature of our love for a particular person can also be an important life good that is constituted by regarding him or her as worthy of love *qua* this particular human being.

But such a particularized constitutive good is still connected to the general kind of which it is an instance; hence we talk about this particular *human being*. We can think about this in terms of the particular way in which a person has realized his or her human potential: e.g., when a person has done so to a significant degree or in an excellent manner or in some other special way, which perhaps includes doing so with originality, creativity, or authenticity. The particular excellences of someone, which are life goods for him or her, thus can be constitutive goods for us in being worthy of our love and respect and constituting life goods related to such love and respect. In fact, I believe that other forms of excellence in fulfilling one's potential as the kind of thing one is – e.g., a

non-human animal, a plant, a work of art, etc. – can be viewed as worthy of our respect and admiration, at least to a degree, and thus as also constitutive of life goods related to the proper appreciation of excellence in its difference forms.<sup>61</sup>

If we grant that there are such particularized constitutive goods in addition to the general kinds of constitutive goods then this further increases the plurality of constitutive goods.<sup>62</sup> With this account of the plurality of constitutive goods in place, let us now turn to discuss the plurality of life goods.

This plurality of life goods should also be evident from the earlier discussion of how Taylor's four central constitutive goods can be said to constitute certain life goods. While some of these life goods are specifically 'moral' in the narrow sense that they involve respect, concern, and love for other human beings, others are related to fulfilling our strongly valued capacities, care for the natural world, and love and devotion to God. Such diversity in kinds of life goods shows that for Taylor strong evaluation goes beyond the narrower, more typical sense of morality. In other places Taylor also specifically mentions aesthetic appreciation (e.g., of nature and art) and personal style or authenticity in the way in which we realize our potential as instances of 'non-moral' life goods (again in the narrow sense of moral) (*HAL* 68; *PHS* 236, 238-40).

Now, given this plurality of life goods it is easy to see how conflicts can arise among them in our pursuit of the good life. For instance, because of the limits of time, energy, and resources, concern for the full development of our own capacities can

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<sup>61</sup> We do not of course admire excellence in all forms. For instance, should we say that someone who is an excellent bank robber is worthy of admiration? There is a sense in which we might admire this person's skill, but certainly we would not judge the person to be an excellent human being, but quite the opposite. As a human being we would see the bank robber as being worthy of contempt and censure and this is the judgment that matters most in this situation.

<sup>62</sup> In a personal exchange Arto Laitinen pointed out that my discussion of general and particular constitutive goods seems to be implicitly acknowledged in Taylor's discussion of a 'politics of universalism' and a 'politics of difference' in his essay "The Politics of Recognition" (*PA* 233-7).

conflict with the demands of compassion and justice. Likewise, concern for particular relationships can conflict with a broader concern for humanity. The demands of compassion and justice can also be in conflict at times. Or again, in regard to the development of our human capacities (e.g., our intellectual, artistic, athletic, and relational capacities), there can be a number of ways of doing so and not all of them will be compatible within a single life.

Such conflicts force us to get clear on how we rank the diverse life goods to which we are committed. In fact, another aspect of the differences between life goods concerns their hierarchically ranked value. Taylor writes:

Most of us not only live with many goods but find that we have to rank them, and in some cases, this ranking makes one of them of supreme importance relative to the others. Each of the goods I am talking about here is defined in a qualitative contrast, but some people live according to a higher-order contrast between such goods as well. They recognize the value of self-expression, of justice, of family life, of the worship of God, of ordinary decency, of sensitivity, and a host of others; but they consider one of these – perhaps their relation to God, or perhaps justice – as of overriding importance [...]. (*SS* 62)

Taylor says that even those who are not so committed to just one kind of life good being of overriding importance still “acknowledge second-order qualitative distinctions which define higher goods, attribute differential worth or importance to them, or determine when and if to follow them” (*SS* 63). Such higher-order life goods he calls ‘hypergoods’, i.e., “goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about” (*SS* 63).

Several remarks need to be made about this notion of hypergoods. First, although Taylor does not explicitly discuss how a constitutive good constitutes a hypergood as a distinct type of life good, I believe we can say that hypergoods are constituted as the goods they are because they express a love or respect for an especially important

constitutive good.<sup>63</sup> Thus the relationship of love/communion with God is viewed as a hypergood for theists because of regarding God as being most worthy of love, respect, and allegiance (i.e., God is the most important constitutive good). Likewise, justice is a hypergood for those for whom human beings are regarded as being most worthy of respect and concern.

Second, I believe it is best to see hypergoods as part of a continuum of hierarchically ranked life goods, which are ranked according to their connection to constitutive goods that are themselves hierarchically ranked in terms of the degree of their worthiness of being loved, respected, admired, etc. Thus one can speak of a single hypergood, which is the good at the very highest end of the continuum, or one might also speak more loosely of a plurality of hypergoods, which are those goods near the highest end of the continuum. But if we speak of hypergoods in the looser way we will still need to find a way to rank them by identifying the one that is the greatest hypergood.<sup>64</sup>

Third, because hypergoods are especially important life goods Taylor says they play a central role in defining our identity.<sup>65</sup> The ‘direction’ of our lives in relation to a

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<sup>63</sup> There is a mistake among some commentators of treating hypergoods and constitutive goods as synonymous (see Calhoun 1991, 234-5; Rorty 1994a, 197; Olafson 1994, 193; Weinstock 1994, 173; Greenway 2000, 29; Baker 2000, 156; 2007, 118-21). This misidentifies the good of loving/respecting (hypergood) with the object loved/respected (constitutive good). The fact that Taylor identifies justice as an example of a hypergood shows that a hypergood is a type of life good. The constitutive good here would be some view of human beings as being worthy of our respect. For some this misinterpretation seems to be due to the fact that the notion of a life good is misinterpreted as merely an ‘ordinary good’, rather than any strong good that defines for us the good life (see, e.g., Baker 2007, 118).

Mark Redhead misinterprets Taylor in a different way when he takes life goods and hypergoods to be synonymous, which fails to see that a hypergood is one type of life good, viz., one that is at the top of one’s hierarchy of life goods (Redhead 2002, 178ff).

<sup>64</sup> It is also possible that there could be a tie such that there are more than one ‘greatest’ hypergoods.

<sup>65</sup> Ruth Abbey says that it is not clear whether for Taylor all moral frameworks or only some include hypergoods. However, she advocates the latter reading since if everyone experienced hypergoods then “the challenges of [life good] pluralism would not be as piquant as Taylor frequently suggests they are” (Abbey 2000, 37). Moreover: “many people do live their lives devoid of any sense of such a preponderant good” (ibid; cf. Williams 1990; Rorty 1994b; Gutting 1999, 148-61). But I think if we understand hypergoods as part of a continuum of hierarchically ranked life goods then it is not as problematic to claim that all moral frameworks include hypergoods. Indeed, this seems to be suggested when Taylor says that even those who



hypergood is thus of great significance: on the one hand, the assurance that we are ‘turned towards’ a hypergood in our actions and in our lives as a whole gives us a sense of “fulness of being as a person or self”; on the other hand, the recognition that our life is ‘turned away’ from it or that we cannot fully live up to it can be experienced as a crushing burden that threatens to plunge us into despair (*SS* 63; cf. 81-2, 518-21).<sup>66</sup>

Now, if we return to the issue of the conflict between our diverse life goods we can see that hypergoods can be important for overcoming or mitigating such conflict insofar as they provide a standpoint from which other life goods can be “weighed, judged, decided about.” In other words, they help us to prioritize our various life goods. However, according to Taylor, they do so in a way that can also be problematic. This is because hypergoods are themselves often experienced as a key source of conflict in our lives when they require us to set aside certain goods (whether strong or weak) (*SS* 64-72). On a social level, hypergoods are often the basis for a critique of existing cultural practices, e.g., when certain practices are judged as not measuring up to the hypergood of universal justice. On an individual level, commitment to a hypergood can seem to require significant sacrifice not only of weak goods, but also of other important life goods: e.g., full commitment to universal benevolence and justice may require us to sacrifice at times certain forms of personal fulfillment (*SS* 69-70, 101). The conflict is made all the more problematic insofar as an additional hypergood is recognized in the aspiration to

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are not so committed to just one kind of life good being of overriding importance still “acknowledge second-order qualitative distinctions which define higher goods, attribute differential worth or importance to them, or determine when and if to follow them” (*SS* 63). Moreover, as we will discuss shortly, the challenge of life good pluralism still does not entirely go away just because we embrace a hypergood.

<sup>66</sup> I will come back to discuss this issue more in the next chapter when examining Taylor’s account of ‘the self in moral space’ and in Chapter IV when considering his account of ‘fulness’.

wholeness or integrity in realizing as far as we can the various life goods we view as part of a good life and constitutive of our identity (see *SA* 313-7, 604-5, 609-56).

Taylor maintains that with hypergoods there is always a danger of ‘self-mutilation’ because of the threat to wholeness and the possibility of self-deprecation resulting from failure to live up to them (*SS* 106-7, 518-21). Thus, he says: “We have to search for a way in which our strongest aspirations towards hypergoods do not exact a price of self-mutilation” (*SS* 106-7). One route, it might seem, is to reject all such hypergoods. But Taylor says the rejection of all higher ideals would be its own form of self-mutilation, or ‘spiritual lobotomy’, which “involves stifling the response in us to some of the deepest and most powerful spiritual aspirations that humans have conceived” (*SS* 520; cf. *CM* 19).<sup>67</sup> It might seem then that we are confronted with a cruel dilemma between two forms of self-mutilation. Taylor contends, however, that this need not be our fate since it is in fact possible to overcome this dilemma and achieve some form of reconciliation between hypergoods and other life goods.<sup>68</sup> Later I will discuss two important cases where Taylor seeks reconciliation between hypergoods and other life goods: viz., in regard to the desire for ‘transcendence’ in human life (Chapter V) and the

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<sup>67</sup> I believe Taylor’s use of ‘spiritual’ here should be understood in a broad sense that refers to any perspective involving strong evaluation and particularly a strong sense of hypergoods (see *SS* 4; see also *SS* 519, where he talks about “spiritual ideals and aspirations” after mentioning the worries surrounding hypergoods). Taylor mentions the idea of a ‘spiritual lobotomy’ with respect to “a stripped-down secular outlook” that attempts to do without any “religious dimension or radical hope in history” (*SS* 520) and with respect to the perspective of “exclusive humanism” that attempts to stamp out as a dangerous illusion any transcendent good (e.g., the love of God) that goes beyond concern for promoting ordinary human flourishing (*CM* 19). But given the broader sense of ‘spiritual’ I believe the notion of a ‘spiritual lobotomy’ certainly applies to any attempt to completely do away with hypergoods, whether they are religious in nature or not: e.g., we might think such a spiritual lobotomy is involved in the attempt to completely do away with an ethic of universal concern centered on the hypergoods of universal justice and solidarity, as we see with someone such as Nel Noddings (see *SA* 630).

<sup>68</sup> See *SS* 106-7, 520-1; Taylor 1994b, 213-4; 1997a; 2001a.

ethic of universal human concern (Chapter VI).<sup>69</sup> For now, however, I will limit myself to considering the conditions for the possibility of such reconciliation.

The essential condition of this reconciliation is what was mentioned at the beginning of this subsection: viz., we must enable ourselves through articulation to “recognize the goods to which we cannot but hold allegiance in their full range” (SS 107; cf. Taylor 1994a, 205). As we have discussed, this is needed because the (strong) goods we embrace are often implicit in our strong evaluative outlook and need to be made explicit if they are to be properly acknowledged. At the most fundamental level we need to articulate the constitutive goods operative in our strong evaluative outlook, including which of them is most worthy of our love, respect, and admiration. Doing so enables us to recognize and make sense of the diverse life goods to which we are committed as well as to identify those among them that are especially important: viz., hypergoods.

But such articulation is only a first step in achieving reconciliation among the diverse goods in our lives. In order to show how it can be achieved Taylor draws on Aristotle’s view of the good life as the “complete good”, where “the disparate goods we seek have to be combined in a single life, and in their right proportions” (SS 76-7; cf. SS 65-6; Taylor 1994e, 30-3). For Taylor, as for Aristotle, it is the task of practical reason to properly order these diverse goods within a single life (SS 86, 125; Taylor 1994e, 25; SA 704-7). This depends not only upon understanding the different levels of importance of these goods, but also on the concept of ‘leading a life’, which Taylor says:

[...] involves both the sense that one’s life is moving somewhere, perhaps in many directions at once, and that one is trying in some degree to guide this

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<sup>69</sup> In these discussions it will be important to meet what Taylor calls the ‘maximal demand’ for addressing the dilemmas created by hypergoods, which he states as follows: “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?” (SA 639-40).

movement (or movements) [...]. [Insofar] as we have some sense of our lives, of what we are trying to lead, we will be relating the different goods we seek not just in regard to their different importance, but also in the way they fit, or fail to fit, together in the unfolding of our lives. (Taylor 1997a, 180)<sup>70</sup>

For Taylor, again as for Aristotle, there is no abstract formula that can determine *a priori* how this proper ordering is to be achieved. Rather, practical reason requires engagement with our concrete lived experience, both for articulating the “goods to which we cannot but hold allegiance” and for working out how they are best to be ordered within our life. Although Taylor believes that such proper ordering by practical reason enables a kind of reconciliation among diverse goods within the context of leading a life, nevertheless, he also acknowledges that this does not preclude that we will at times have to sacrifice the pursuit of some life goods for the sake of other more important ones. But these goods cannot simply be written out of the good life as such; rather, they must find some place within one’s life as a whole (Taylor 1994e, 30).

Now, the question arises here: what exactly does it mean to find a place in our lives for each strong good? From the foregoing account of the plurality of strong goods it seems impossible that one could actually pursue every strong good in his or her life. But is this what the categorical feature of strong goods requires? In other words, when we regard a strong good as being normative for our desires does this mean we must actively pursue its realization in our lives? Taylor does not say much to clarify this issue.

However, Arto Laitinen – drawing on the work of Joseph Raz – points to an important distinction between *engaging* with strong goods and *respecting* strong goods, which I think helps to address this issue (Laitinen 2008, 43). When we engage with a strong good – e.g., the virtue of charity or benevolence – we not only respect the strong good but we

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<sup>70</sup> This concept of ‘leading a life’ will be filled out in more detail in the next chapter when we examine Taylor’s account of ‘the self in moral space’.

also seek to realize it in our lives. However, there are other strong goods that we respect – e.g., being a great artist – but we may not seek to realize in our lives. Laitinen goes on to say that among those strong goods that we engage with some will be central in our life (e.g., hypergoods), while others will not be as central. Furthermore, in addition to strong goods that we respect but do not engage, there may be possible strong goods that we have only an external relation to (i.e., we have no ‘personal resonance’ with it), but which we try to respect (e.g., a great piece of music that a friend has told us about). Lastly, there may also be strong goods of which we are completely unaware.

At the most minimal level it seems that the categorical feature of strong goods requires that we be open and sensitive to properly appreciating or respecting possible strong goods that we may encounter. For instance, we may not be familiar with every great piece of music, but we should properly appreciate the worth of the music that we do encounter (see *ibid.*, 38-9). Thus, even though not everyone is familiar with the music of Mozart (to recall Taylor’s example from earlier), if one does encounter it then he or she should properly appreciate its worth. It might also be argued that the active cultivation of an appreciation for great music is part of a higher, more cultured form of life, which carries with it a categorical aspect in that we can be judged in strong evaluative terms according to the degree to which we are ‘cultured’. But even here one is likely not going to be familiar with every great work of music. Another important example to consider here is God, who is the key constitutive good for theists. Obviously atheists deny or strongly doubt the existence of God and thus would not regard God as a constitutive good to be loved and respected. A person would have to have some level of faith or at least hope in God in order to regard God as a constitutive good. If someone did have faith in

God then obviously God as a constitutive good would be constitutive of a hypergood, viz., the love of God, which one should actively seek to realize. It might also be argued that unless we have conclusive proof against God's existence then we should at least be open to the possibility that God exists and is a constitutive good.<sup>71</sup>

On Taylor's view, there are some strong goods that should be recognized by everyone. For instance, everyone should respect the claims of human dignity (i.e., recognize human beings as constitutive goods) (SS 28). At a basic level, this requires that we refrain from violating the rights of others. This has the strongest categorical aspect in that we can legitimately be prevented from violating the rights of others against our will and perhaps be subjected to some form of punishment if we do violate these rights. It can also be argued that everyone has some responsibility to promote the well-being of other human beings. The categorical aspect is not as strong here, but Taylor certainly thinks (as do I) that we can regard people in strong evaluative terms – higher vs. lower, saintly vs. un-saintly, noble vs. base, admirable vs. contemptible, etc. – according to the degree of their active concern for others.<sup>72</sup> I believe that the virtues that enable us to fulfill our human potential also fall into this category of strong goods.

Given the categorical feature of strong goods it is noteworthy how much leeway Taylor apparently allows in the ethical life. "For most of us," he writes, "certain fundamental moral questions are still put in universal terms: those, for instance, [...] dealing with people's rights to life and integrity." However:

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<sup>71</sup> As will be clear in Chapter V, Taylor does not believe that there is conclusive proof either for or against God's existence. I am in agreement with this view.

<sup>72</sup> This falls into the domain of the supererogatory, whereas the previous point about not violating the rights of others is a matter of strict duty (see SS 90). One will obviously need to seek reconciliation here with other life goods (e.g., particular relationships, personal projects of self-fulfillment, etc.).

Underlying our modern talk of identity is the notion that questions of moral orientation cannot all be solved in simply universal terms. And this is connected to our post-Romantic understanding of individual differences as well as to the importance we give to expression in each person's discovery of his or her moral horizon. (*SS* 28; see Laitinen 2008, 42)

This connects with Taylor's discussions of the notion of authenticity, i.e., that "each of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity" (*SA* 475; cf. *EA*, Chs. II-IV). While some interpret the self-fulfillment in the authenticity ideal to be a form of subjectivism, Taylor argues for a view of authenticity in which self-fulfillment requires the recognition of and engagement with things that are seen as normative for our desires – i.e., strong goods – and that we each do so in our own way (*SS* 507; *EA* 35-41, 81-2). This also involves an acknowledgement that these strong goods have to be explored through 'personal resonance'; i.e., we can only come to recognize objectively valid strong goods through the way in which they resonate within us (*SS* 428, 510-3; *EA* 89-90).<sup>73</sup>

Taylor therefore seems to allow for a great deal of space for individuals to work out through practical reason how best to reconcile the various life goods in their lives, which includes leeway with respect to how far to pursue certain strong goods (e.g., artistic endeavors, humanitarian activity, family life, education, etc.). This does not mean that anything goes since we can judge some ways of reconciling life goods as better or worse (cf. MacIntyre 1994, 188-9). But there is still significant leeway, which is due in part to the fact that authenticity, i.e., realizing our humanity in our own way, is a strong good. This seems to allow for the contingencies of circumstance – e.g., the social, historical, and biological circumstances that shape our particular talents, aptitudes, proclivities, etc. – to play a role in how we lead our lives. These contingencies of

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<sup>73</sup> I will explore this issue further in the next chapter when discussing Taylor's defense of moral (i.e., strong evaluative) realism.

circumstance are also important factors in deciding what particularized constitutive goods to ‘engage’ with: e.g., in deciding whom to marry, whom to befriend, what communities to identify with, what art or aspects of nature to partake in, and so on. We cannot engage with them all, but engaging with some of them is important for realizing the life goods they constitute and here the contingencies of circumstance are often an important factor.

I think the foregoing discussion in the last several paragraphs helps to provide a response to a criticism of Taylor that is put forward by Joel Anderson. The criticism is that Taylor’s account of strong goods as goods that are normative for our desires and define for us the good life does not allow for the “individuating role of personal commitments” that give rise to a plurality of ways of life, which he ostensibly endorses (Anderson 1996; cf. Kitchen 1999, 34). Anderson takes the upshot of accepting Taylor’s account of strong evaluation to be that “we would all be required to live basically the *same life*” (ibid., 25). A key fault that he sees in Taylor’s view is that it cannot account for the Kantian distinction between what is obligatory and what is permissible (ibid., 27, 33-4). However, I believe Taylor can account for something like this distinction, though not in the Kantian terms that strictly separates the ‘moral’ from the ‘non-moral’. As we have seen, it is plausible to interpret Taylor as holding that there are some strong goods – e.g., respecting human dignity, cultivating the virtues, etc. – that should be engaged with by everyone, while there are others – e.g., being a great artist – that should be appreciated or respected but do not necessarily have to be engaged with. Both have a categorical aspect, but in different senses (this is something not recognized in the Kantian distinction where only morality in the narrow sense is categorical). Moreover, he holds that there are hypergoods such as universal justice and benevolence that have overarching importance,



but he thinks these still need to be reconciled with other life goods (hence we cannot strictly separate the ‘moral’ from the ‘non-moral’ in the Kantian fashion).<sup>74</sup> We have also seen that Taylor allows for considerable leeway with respect to how one reconciles the various life goods in his or her life.<sup>75</sup> Although it is true that Taylor’s account of strong goods places constraints on what can count as a good life, there is a lot of room for different ways of living in light of strong goods, especially when we regard authenticity as itself a strong good. Thus, it is false to say that accepting this account means “we would all be required to live basically the *same life*”.<sup>76</sup>

### *Strong Evaluation and Theism*

I want to conclude this chapter by examining a common tendency among commentators on Taylor’s work to see his account of strong evaluation as overly connected to his theism in a way that makes it objectionable for those who do not share his theism. Although in the next chapter I will be considering the issue of whether Taylor’s theism can provide a ‘moral ontology’ that can best make sense of our ‘moral phenomenology’ or strong evaluative experience, Taylor wants to maintain that we all have strong evaluative experiences, whether we are theists or not. Indeed, this is important for the ad hominem model of practical reasoning that he employs to argue for the significance of theism in making sense of our strong evaluative experience. I will

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<sup>74</sup> Taylor in fact thinks that modern moral theories that seek to strictly separate a special domain of moral obligation from all other considerations are in fact appealing to hypergoods, such as universal justice and benevolence, which are among “the central moral aspirations of modern culture” and help define the good life for those who embrace them (SS 88). But because this is not acknowledged, they fail to properly address the issue of reconciliation between life goods.

<sup>75</sup> It should be recalled that earlier (in the first section) I also argued that there is considerable leeway with respect to the pursuit of weak goods in our lives.

<sup>76</sup> In developing this response to Anderson’s critique I have benefited from Laitinen’s response to Anderson (see Laitinen 2008, 36-43). While there is basic agreement with Laitinen, I have filled out the details somewhat differently and I have also placed more emphasis on Taylor’s notion of authenticity.

seek to defend Taylor here against the charge that his account of strong evaluation is too closely connected to his theism. In particular, I want to focus on this charge with respect to his account of constitutive goods, which is where the charge is most frequently made.<sup>77</sup>

Now, it is true that Taylor, as a theist, regards God as an especially important constitutive good. However, as we have seen, he does not believe God is the only constitutive good. Moreover, Taylor believes that even those who embrace a non-theistic account of morality still depend upon constitutive goods (see *SS* 93-6). In other words, for Taylor, constitutive goods are a necessary feature of our moral (i.e., strong evaluative) experience, regardless of whether one is a theist or not. I want to defend Taylor's claim here against those who think that constitutive goods are not necessary for morality.

To begin with, consider Bernard Williams' response to Taylor's evaluative framework. Williams writes: "much of what [Taylor] says about the character of our moral experience [viz., regarding strong evaluation, its constitutive relationship to our identity, and the fact that such evaluation cannot coherently be viewed as 'invented'] seems to me [...] importantly true, and any adequate account of morality must try to explain it." But he then goes on to say:

From this strong base in experience, however, Taylor very rapidly moves uphill, metaphysically speaking. First, he says that the character of our experience means that we have a craving for the good, and wish to be "rightly placed in relation to it"; two pages later, we have a sense of "the incomparably higher", and this, we soon learn, we conceive of as "infinitely valuable." (Williams 1990)

Likewise, elsewhere he writes:

In Taylor's own work, the idea of what it is 'good to love' is at least as important

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<sup>77</sup> See Williams 1990, 1995b, 203; Wood 1992, 623-4, 626; Schneewind 1991, 423-6; Joas 2000, 139; Laitinen 2008, Ch. 7; cf. Baier 1988. While not as common, there are also some who interpret Taylor's account of hypergoods as overly connected to his theism (see Lane 1992, 46, 48, 56; Baker 2007, 12, 121-3, Ch. 7). I will not take up this issue here, but I think Taylor clearly shows that there are hypergoods acknowledged by non-theists, such as universal justice and benevolence (see *SS* 63-75, 88).

as ideas of what it is good to do or to be. It is in terms of what it is good to love that he has formulated notions of the *power* of the good, notions which carry Platonic or Christian resonances. Some time before this point is reached, Taylor will rightly have expected me to part from him, suspicious of the ‘siren songs of old metaphysical bird-catchers’, in Nietzsche’s words, calling ‘you are more, you are higher, you are of a different origin!’ In these connections his views, for me, are too removed from naturalism. (Williams 1995b, 203)

In response to Williams several things can be said. First, for Taylor, as we have seen, the sense of the ‘incomparably higher’ is not something metaphysically mysterious, as Williams seems to suggest, but rather it is basic to strong evaluation and simply expresses the incommensurability between strong goods and weak goods. Given that Williams accepts the importance of the idea of strong evaluation there should not be any problem with the notion of the ‘incomparably higher’ when properly understood (see Taylor 1991a, 241; cf. Skinner 1991, 145-6). Second, in regard to our desire or ‘craving’ to be rightly placed with respect to the good, again there should be nothing objectionable here given that one accepts, as Williams apparently does, the claim that strong evaluation is constitutive of our identity.<sup>78</sup> Finally, the idea of the ‘power of the good’ should also not be viewed as anything overly ‘metaphysical’, but rather as a claim about the nature of our moral (i.e., strong evaluative) experience: viz., what we experience as worthy of our love, respect, and admiration is inherently motivating. While such a view certainly applies to the theist’s view of God as a constitutive good, it is also operative in all other constitutive goods, such as our own potential, other human beings, and the natural world.<sup>79</sup> The issue of metaphysics or ontology of course does come in when we seek to

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<sup>78</sup> We will have to wait until the next chapter to discuss this issue in more detail.

<sup>79</sup> I believe Taylor perhaps shares some of the responsibility for the way in which his account of constitutive goods has been misunderstood. In Part I of *Sources of the Self*, where Taylor provides his most extended account of his evaluative framework, he does not actually discuss his two-tiered account of constitutive goods and life goods until the fourth and final chapter, even though it was operative in the three preceding chapters. Indeed, the basic idea of constitutive goods can be seen at the outset of the book in his discussion of ‘ontological background pictures’ and especially in his discussion of the need to articulate

provide a realist explanation of our ‘moral phenomenology’ or strong evaluative experience. But the specification of an adequate ‘moral ontology’ is separate from the characterization of our ‘moral phenomenology’, which is what is at issue here.

Let us now consider a more developed attempt to argue against Taylor’s account of constitutive goods and its necessity for a proper account of morality: viz., that of Arto Laitinen in his book *Strong Evaluation without Moral Sources* (Laitinen 2008; see 6-8, Chs. 5, 7).<sup>80</sup> Laitinen argues that Taylor’s account of constitutive goods is superfluous for defending what Laitinen calls ‘engaged value realism’, i.e., a view of strong evaluative realism that begins, as Taylor believes his own view does, from the basis of our experiential engagement with the world as strong evaluators. What is worse, Laitinen maintains that such an account of constitutive goods is in fact distortive and harmful for a defense of engaged value realism. It is distortive because he claims it takes us away from our ‘engaged’ perspective as strong evaluators and it is harmful primarily because “it makes it seem possible to question moral realism simply by questioning the point, or existence, of “constitutive goods””, which Laitinen believes is in fact questionable (ibid.,

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something about the ‘ontology of the human’ that makes sense of our moral reactions concerning human beings as worthy of respect (SS 3-11). Moreover, when Taylor does introduce the idea of constitutive goods his first example is Plato’s Idea of the Good, which certainly could give the initial impression that constitutive goods are in some way metaphysically mysterious (SS 92-3). Taylor’s next example of a constitutive good is God for theists, which perhaps does not help to avoid misunderstanding (SS 92-3). He then goes on to discuss the place of constitutive goods in modern ‘humanist’ views, focusing especially on the view of our human potential for rational agency as a constitutive good (SS 93-5). This is a quite limited list of examples, especially given the broad domain that Taylor’s account of constitutive goods is intended to cover. I believe it would have also helped if in his discussion of constitutive goods in Chapter 4 of *Sources* Taylor referred to his discussion at the beginning of the book about articulating a view of the ‘ontology of the human’ that makes sense of our moral reactions of respect for human beings. Nevertheless, I believe that through a careful reading of the book as well as Taylor’s other works one can properly understand his account of constitutive goods.

<sup>80</sup> Laitinen’s book provides the most detailed examination of Taylor’s moral philosophy to date. Even though I am in disagreement with his critique of Taylor’s account of constitutive goods (and a number of other points, as seen earlier), nevertheless, I have benefited greatly from his book and I believe it is a very valuable contribution to understanding the significance of Taylor’s work. There is also much original philosophical work in the book that is valuable in its own right.

259). The key to Laitinen's argument is his attempt, as he puts it, "to drive a wedge between the concepts of ontological background pictures and constitutive goods. If one manages to do that, one does not really have to argue much more, one can almost observe the credibility of constitutive goods vanish into thin air" (ibid.). One of the important consequences of his critique of Taylor's account of constitutive goods, Laitinen says, is that it "locates a quite widely felt unease with Taylor's way of combining theism and moral theory in a new way, leaving the engaged realism intact but criticizing *all* constitutive goods and moral sources equally, not only theistic sources" (ibid., 8).

I believe that Laitinen does not succeed in driving a wedge between the concepts of ontological background pictures and constitutive goods. The failure to do so I contend is because his argument rests on fundamental misunderstandings of Taylor's account of constitutive goods. Moreover, when this account is properly understood it can be seen that Laitinen himself actually relies on constitutive goods.

One of the basic sources of error in Laitinen's understanding of Taylor is in the way in which he characterizes Taylor's two-tiered account of the good. Laitinen writes:

One cornerstone of my argument is the observation that both the metaphors of "moral space", of "locating" sources of [the] good life and the idea of a "moral topography of the self" can be understood at *two levels*. First, at the level of ordinary goods, evaluative properties and "life goods", secondly, at the level of what Taylor calls "constitutive goods" and "moral sources". The first level concerns locating the values themselves, and the second level concerns the sources of value. (ibid., 258)

Laitinen's strict dichotomy here between values and the sources of values I believe is problematic because for Taylor constitutive goods, as I have discussed, are themselves strongly valued, i.e., they are regarded as *worthy* of our love, respect, admiration, etc. Indeed, they are the source of other values, viz., life goods, precisely in that they are the

most fundamental kind of strong good. As we will see, Laitinen's argument for doing away with constitutive goods depends upon this mistaken dichotomy.<sup>81</sup>

We must begin by considering the idea of 'evaluative properties', which Laitinen locates on the first level in his account.<sup>82</sup> Laitinen maintains that evaluative properties "can sometimes be illuminated by focusing on the ontological features of the bearer of value" (ibid., 266).<sup>83</sup> For instance, according to Laitinen, the ontological feature that makes sense of the evaluative property of 'dignity' (or 'worthiness of respect and concern') that human beings (as bearers of value) are believed to possess is that human beings "have value-consciousness and can be responsible for their own lives" (ibid., 276; cf. 107, 120-2, 127, 135). Likewise, the ontological feature that makes sense of the evaluative property of 'worthiness of respect and concern' that non-human animals (as bearers of value) are claimed to possess, such that they are at least not to be tortured, is that "animals are sentient, and that they have some species-typical goals, success in attaining which gives them satisfaction" (ibid., 276; cf. 271). In making these points Laitinen believes that he is driving a wedge between the concepts of ontological background pictures and constitutive goods, which renders the latter superfluous. However, what he is in fact doing (unknowingly) is specifying a constitutive good in each of these cases: i.e., he is identifying something about human beings (viz., 'value-consciousness' and capacity for 'responsibility') and non-human animals (viz.,

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<sup>81</sup> At the end of his discussion of Taylor's account of constitutive goods Laitinen does allow the possibility of what he calls 'metaphysical goods', i.e., God or the cosmos when viewed as worthy of awe, admiration, etc. But he says they are not constitutive goods in Taylor's sense (Laitinen 2008, 291-2). On my account these are constitutive goods in Taylor's sense, but they are not the only ones.

<sup>82</sup> The language of 'evaluative properties' is not drawn from Taylor's work but rather from the work of Joseph Raz (see Laitinen 2008, 168-9, 188). However, Laitinen does associate it with what Taylor calls 'imports' in his essay "Self-Interpreting Animals" (*HAL*, Ch. 2).

<sup>83</sup> Laitinen does not explain the qualifier 'sometimes' here. However, for Taylor, all of our strong evaluations can be made sense of in terms of some ontological background picture.

‘sentience’) in virtue of which he believes they are worthy of our respect and concern.

Thus, in the very attempt to show that constitutive goods are superfluous Laitinen actually relies upon them.

Laitinen does not realize this, I believe, because he misunderstands the nature of constitutive goods and their relationship to other goods. As mentioned, he distinguishes between values and the sources of values and this wrongly makes constitutive goods seem mysterious and thus as superfluous when our values can be made sense of in other, more intelligible terms (as he claims). Laitinen writes:

This idea [of constitutive goods] can be captured with a legislation-analogy: some source has *legislated* that such and such properties count as good (for example God or the autonomous will of moral agents). Or if the legislation-analogy is misleading in being too voluntaristic, we can perhaps say that there is an “ontological feature of the source”, which somehow guarantees or participates in producing the fact that such-and-such a feature is good. For example, the Platonic “Idea of the Good” may determine that justice is good. (ibid., 270)

Likewise, he says:

The well-being of the dog matters to us, it is a good in itself, because this constitutive good “says so” or “makes it the case”. In Taylor’s picture something (external to the dog) “determines” or “legislates” that the well-being of the dog is the good thing. Once this legislation has taken place, value-bearers can be intrinsically good things. (ibid., 277)

Such a view, however, embodies a significant misunderstanding of Taylor’s account of constitutive goods. Nowhere does Taylor talk about constitutive goods in such voluntaristic or mysterious terms; in fact, he has explicitly rejected voluntaristic understandings of the good.<sup>84</sup> If the well-being of the dog matters to us, we can say that it is because we see the dog as worthy of our concern (i.e., as a constitutive good), not because it has been legislated by God. Laitinen seems to take this view at least in part because of the way he assumes Taylor’s theism is operative in his moral theory. But even

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<sup>84</sup> See *HAL*, 29-35; *DC* 14; *SS*, Chs. 14-6; *SA* Chs. 6-7, 582-9, 773-6; Taylor 1994e, 16-23.

if God is a constitutive good for Taylor it is certainly not in the way that Laitinen thinks.

First of all, Taylor does not hold that God *qua* constitutive good constitutes all other goods since, as I have shown, he affirms a plurality of constitutive goods.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, even in regard to the goods that God *qua* constitutive good does constitute, such constitution is not to be understood in voluntaristic terms. Indeed, the voluntarist idea of ‘constitution’ is completely different from the idea of constitution in Taylor’s account of constitutive goods. If God is a constitutive good it is because God is viewed as worthy of our love and respect and thereby certain life goods are ‘constituted’ that are involved in realizing this love and respect (e.g., the virtues of love, devotion, piety, reverence, etc., as well as religious practices that are expressive of these virtues). As mentioned earlier, on a theistic view other constitutive goods – e.g., our own potential, other human beings, the natural world – can also be seen as connected to God: viz., they are created by God for an objectively good purpose, which figures into the ontological background picture that makes sense of their being regarded as worthy of love, respect, admiration, etc. We can see this in the Jewish and Christian view of human beings as constitutive goods in virtue of having been created in the ‘image of God’, which, among other things, means that human beings are created for the purpose of communion with God and one another. Laitinen’s view of theistic-based morality in fact only represents one strand, viz., ‘divine command theory’ (i.e., voluntarism), which is not Taylor’s view. This overlooks the other important strand, viz., theistic-based ‘natural law’ or teleological ethics, which I believe Taylor does embrace in some manner.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Laitinen discusses the idea of a plurality of constitutive goods, but says he finds this to be a peculiar meta-ethical position (Laitinen 2008, 274-6). But it is only peculiar, so I argue, because he misunderstands constitutive goods as something more mysterious than they actually are.

<sup>86</sup> This issue will be discussed in much more detail in the next chapter and in the last chapter.



However, the bigger issue is not Laitinen's characterization of theistic morality, but rather the way in which he distinguishes between values and the sources of values. On a proper understanding of Taylor's two-tiered account of the good, the distinction should be between two classes of strong goods, viz., life goods and constitutive goods. In other words, constitutive goods do not 'stand behind' *all* of our values as their source, but are themselves the fundamental class of strong goods that constitute other strong goods that define for us the good life (i.e., life goods). It is significant that Laitinen does not discuss, as I do, how the specific constitutive goods that Taylor actually affirms – viz., our own potential, other human beings, the natural world, and God – can be said to constitute certain life goods. I believe this is indicative of his misunderstanding of Taylor's view, and I hope my discussion has made it clear that Taylor's two-tiered account of the good in terms of constitutive goods and life goods is quite straightforward and convincing as an account of our ethical life. Moreover, if Laitinen had acknowledged his own dependence on an account of constitutive goods in his attempt to articulate the ontological features that make sense of why human beings and non-human animals can be viewed as worthy of our respect and concern, then it also would have been quite straightforward to see how these constitutive goods can be said to constitute certain life goods: viz., the life goods that are involved in showing respect and concern for human beings and non-human animals, such as the virtues of compassion, benevolence, and justice, which are viewed as part of a higher, more fulfilling mode of life.

Let us now assess Laitinen's three critical claims about Taylor's account of constitutive goods: viz., it is superfluous, distortive, and harmful for a defense of 'engaged value realism'. First, on a proper understanding of constitutive goods I believe

we have compelling reason to believe that they are not in fact superfluous, but rather necessary for the moral life and specifically for a defense of strong evaluative realism. This is evidenced by Laitinen's own (unacknowledged) reliance on constitutive goods. Second, if constitutive goods are indeed necessary for a defense of strong evaluative realism then it follows that they cannot be said to be harmful for it. Finally, if we properly understand constitutive goods as themselves a fundamental kind of strong good then there is no reason to claim that they are distortive of an engaged value realist perspective; in fact, they are integral to a clear understanding of it.

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Now that I have explored the basic contours of Taylor's account of strong evaluation we are in a position to consider the two main substantive arguments that he makes in regard to this account.

## CHAPTER THREE: TAYLOR'S EVALUATIVE FRAMEWORK, PART II

In this chapter I want to examine the two main substantive arguments that Taylor makes in regard to his account of strong evaluation. The first pertains to his claim that properly functioning human agents are inescapably strong evaluators. The second pertains to his defense of moral realism, or otherwise put, strong evaluative realism – i.e., the view that our strong evaluations require and can be given an objective basis.

Both of these arguments are key aspects of Taylor's attempt at re-enchantment, particularly as this pertains to defending the validity of strong evaluation. Both arguments seek to combat the sort of 'naturalism' that is behind views of total disenchantment. As discussed in the Introduction, this sort of naturalism is synonymous with 'scientism', which is a perspective that attempts to model the human sciences on the natural sciences and in some cases to reduce the former to the latter. In other words, it seeks as far as possible to understand human life in 'absolute' terms, i.e., without reference to our experiences of the significance of things for us. This sort of naturalism therefore seeks to avoid giving strong evaluation any important place in understanding human life and often regards it merely as a subjective projection onto a value-neutral universe. By contrast, Taylor wants to argue that strong evaluation is essential for a proper understanding of human life and he wants to defend a realist, non-projectivist view of it.

In the first section I will examine Taylor's 'transcendental argument' for the claim that properly functioning human agents are inescapably strong evaluators, which will involve exploring his account of 'the self in moral space'. Taylor's argument proceeds in two stages: first, he seeks to show how having a sense of identity (or self) is necessary for properly functioning human agency; second, he seeks to show how strong evaluation is

necessary for such identity. While I think there are difficulties with demonstrating something as strong as the claim that strong evaluation is *inescapable* for properly functioning human agency, nevertheless, I argue that strong evaluation is at least very difficult for human agents to avoid entirely and also that Taylor can be said to be exploring “the limits of the conceivable in human life” (SS 32).

In the second section I will examine Taylor’s argument for strong evaluative realism in which he seeks to establish a middle path between ‘Platonism’ and projectivism. As we will see, Taylor’s defense of strong evaluative realism depends upon articulating an adequate moral ontology, i.e., an ontological background picture that can make sense of our strong evaluative responses or moral phenomenology. Although Taylor puts forward ‘hunches’ about the importance of a theistic moral ontology, he does not actually fill this out in much detail. I seek to fill out these hunches by arguing for the importance of a theistic teleological perspective for supporting strong evaluative realism. I also contend that there are good reasons to believe that Taylor holds such a view. However, I maintain that if a non-theistic cosmic teleological view can be made viable then it could also support strong evaluative realism.

## I. THE SELF IN MORAL SPACE

*The Inescapability of Strong Evaluation for Properly Functioning Human Agency: A ‘Transcendental Argument’*

Taylor’s most extended discussion of his argument for the claim that properly functioning human agents are inescapably strong evaluators is found in Part I of *Sources*

of the Self, which is entitled “Identity and the Good”.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, it is the second chapter, “The Self in Moral Space”, where he most directly lays out his argument. Near the beginning of the chapter Taylor writes:

I want to defend the strong thesis that doing without [strong evaluative] frameworks is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations. Moreover, this is not meant just as a contingently true psychological fact about human beings, which could perhaps turn out one day not to hold for some exceptional individual or new type [...]. Rather the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood. (SS 27)

Taylor goes on to say that he is seeking to explore “the limits of the conceivable in human life”, i.e., to give “an account of its “transcendental conditions”” (SS 32).

In speaking of the ‘transcendental conditions’ of the conceivable in human life Taylor makes it clear that his argument for the inescapability of strong evaluation is intended as a ‘transcendental argument’ – a type of argument he has defended and employed in other contexts (*PA*, Ch. 2; Taylor 1989b). In an essay entitled “The Validity of Transcendental Arguments” Taylor writes:

The arguments I want to call “transcendental” start from some feature of our experience which they claim to be indubitable and beyond cavil. They then move to a stronger conclusion, one concerning the nature of the subject or the subject’s position in the world. They make this move by a regressive argument, to the effect that the stronger conclusion must be so if the indubitable fact about experience is to be possible (and being so, it must be possible). (*PA* 20)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For other discussions of ‘the self in moral space’ see: *HAL* 3, Ch. 1; Taylor 1988a; 1991a, 250-3; 1991b, 305-6; 1994a, 206-9; 1994c, 127-9; 1997a; *EA*, Ch. 4; and *SA*, “Introduction”. I take the language of ‘inescapable’ from the titles of Ch. 1 of *Sources* and Ch. 4 of *The Ethics of Authenticity*.

<sup>2</sup> The most well-known example of the use of this form of argument is of course by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* when he argues from our experience of objects to the necessity of thinking it terms of certain fundamental categories of thought. For Kant the ‘categories’ are the indispensable conditions for the possibility of our experience of objects. Taylor believes that transcendental arguments can also be found, e.g., in the work of Wittgenstein (on ‘forms of life’), Heidegger (on the ‘existential structures’ of *Dasein*), and Merleau-Ponty (on ‘embodied agency’). In “The Validity of Transcendental Arguments” and in another essay entitled “Embodied Agency” (Taylor 1989b) Taylor focuses particularly on Merleau-

In a transcendental argument to say something is the ‘condition for the possibility of’ something else is to say that it is ‘constitutive’ of it; i.e., X contributes in some way to making Y what it is (see *PA* 25).<sup>3</sup> This also means that a transcendental argument seeks to make explicit what is already implicit in some feature of our experience insofar as it is constitutive of it; i.e., it involves moving “from sketchier to richer descriptions” where we try to show that “the richer description’s holding is indispensable to the sketchier one’s holding, because the former spells out what the latter adumbrated” (*PA* 32). Finally, a transcendental argument appeals to what Taylor calls ‘agent’s knowledge’: “As subjects effectively engaged in the activities of getting to perceive and know the world, we are capable of identifying certain conditions without which our activity would fall apart into incoherence. The philosophical achievement is to define the issues properly” (*PA* 10-1).

I want to now turn to examine Taylor’s transcendental argument for his claim that properly functioning human agents are inescapably strong evaluators. There are two stages in Taylor’s argument. First, he seeks to show how having a particular sense of identity is necessary for properly functioning human agency. Our having such identities is the feature of our experience that he thinks is “indubitable and beyond cavil”. The “stronger conclusion [...] concerning the nature of the subject” that he wants to then move to is that strong evaluation is necessary for such identity. This is the second stage.<sup>4</sup> We can see then that this regressive argument is intended to show that strong evaluation is necessary for properly functioning human agency, or as Taylor puts it: “Strong

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Ponty’s argument from the nature of our perception to a claim that “our manner of being as subjects is in essential respects that of embodied agents” (*PA* 22). Our being embodied agents is thus an indispensable condition for the possibility of the nature of our perception – an important conclusion for Taylor’s defense of his engaged-hermeneutic approach to philosophical anthropology.

<sup>3</sup> Thus for Kant the categories are constitutive of our experience of objects and for Merleau-Ponty our embodied agency is constitutive of the nature of our perception.

<sup>4</sup> These two stages are clearly stated in Taylor 1994a, 209; 1994c, 127.

evaluation is essential to identity, and identity is essential to being a fully functioning human being” (Taylor 1994a, 209; 1994c, 127).

*Stage One: Identity as Necessary for Properly Functioning Human Agency*

According to Taylor: “We are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me” (SS 34). The first thing to note here is that Taylor uses the concept of identity as equivalent with having a sense of self (see Taylor 1994a, 209). The second thing to note, which was mentioned in the Introduction, is that this concept of identity or selfhood is incompatible with the sort of naturalism that seeks to understand human life in ‘absolute’ terms, i.e., independent of our experiences of the significance of things for us (see *HAL* 3-4). For Taylor, this sense of identity or selfhood is necessary for being properly functioning human agents. In regard to the “question of identity”, he writes:

What [answers] this question for us is an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand. (SS 27)

Here the claim seems to be that having an identity – i.e., knowing where I stand in terms of what I am committed to, identify with, and regard as crucially important (e.g., charity, integrity, family life, etc.) – provides an orientation or ‘map’ by which I can determine the direction my life should go. As Taylor puts it, it enables me to “determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.”

I think Taylor’s view here connects with Harry Frankfurt’s account of second-order desires. According to Frankfurt, as discussed last chapter, the capacity for second-

order desires is expressive of the more general capacity for reflective self-evaluation about *who we are* and *who we want to become* (see Frankfurt 1988, 12). Thus, having an identity, as understood by Taylor, makes possible second-order desires, which is definitive of our specifically *human* form of agency. Rather than only acting out of the immediate impress of my desires as a ‘wanton’ does (to use Frankfurt’s term), I can evaluate which desires I will act upon given my orientations towards what I regard as crucially important and as defining for me the kind of person I want to be. While it is true that we can sometimes act ‘wantonly’ (in Frankfurt’s sense), Taylor holds that as properly functioning human agents we cannot completely avoid engaging in second-order reflection upon our desires in relation to the kind of person we want to become. This is because we are fundamentally ‘meaning-seeking animals’, i.e., we care about the meaning and overall direction of our life.<sup>5</sup>

For Taylor, the case for the necessity of identity for properly functioning human agency is best seen when we consider the ‘pathological’ condition we would be in if we did not have a stable identity constituted by an orientation to what we regard as being crucially important. Taylor often describes this condition as an ‘identity crisis’, which is:

[...] an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand. They lack a frame or horizon within which things can take on a stable significance, within which some life possibilities can be seen as good or meaningful, others as bad or trivial. The meaning of all these possibilities is unfixed, labile, or undetermined. This is a painful and frightening experience. (*SS* 27-8; cf. *HAL* 35; Taylor 1991a, 250-1; 1991b, 305; 1994a, 209; *SA* 6)

Taylor also describes this condition as involving extreme forms of melancholy, ennui, and accidie in which we experience the world as totally disenchanting, i.e., devoid of

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<sup>5</sup> I borrow the term ‘meaning-seeking animals’ from Jonathan Sacks (Sacks 2011, Ch. 1). Later I will discuss how this is connected to our being ‘language animals’.



meaning (*SA* 6; *VRT* 34-42; cf. *SS* 16-9). The main point to see is that this condition is a debilitating one. Without a sense of our orientation towards what we regard as crucially important and identity-defining we would be uncertain of how we should act and this could put us in a state of paralysis or reduce us to the state of a wanton such that we would no longer be a properly functioning human agent. The next stage in Taylor's argument is to show that what we regard as crucially important and identify-defining is a matter of strong evaluation.

*Stage Two: Strong Evaluation as Necessary for Identity*

The key claim in the second stage of Taylor's argument is that "we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find orientation to the good" (*SS* 34). The crux of Taylor's argument here I believe depends on how convincing one finds his phenomenological description of 'the self in moral space', which is his attempt to fill out what he believes is presupposed in having an identity. In other words, it is an attempt to move from a 'sketchier to a richer description' of what is involved in having an identity. Moreover, it appeals to our 'agent's knowledge', i.e., how we actually understand our lives as human agents. Taylor describes the basic idea of the self in moral space in the following terms:

[Our] orientation in relation to the good requires not only some [strong evaluative] framework(s) which defines the shape of the qualitatively higher but also a sense of where we stand in relation to this. [...] [We] come here to 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. And how could it be otherwise, once we see that this orientation in relation to the good is essential to being a functional human agent? The fact that we have to place ourselves in a space which is defined by these qualitative distinctions cannot but mean that where we stand in relation to them must matter to us. Not being able to function without orientation in the space of the ultimately important means not being able to stop caring where we sit in it. (*SS* 42)

According to Taylor, this fundamental aspiration of human beings “to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value” is tied to our concern for “what kind of life is worth living, e.g., what would be a rich, meaningful life, as against an empty one”, or “what makes a full life” (SS 14-15, 42-44). Hence I spoke above about human beings as ‘meaning-seeking animals’. These two issues are “indissolubly linked” because “the goods which define our spiritual orientation are the ones by which we will measure the worth of our lives”; i.e., the issue “about the worth, or weight, or substance of my life” is “a question of how I am ‘placed’ or ‘situated’ in relation to the good, or whether I am in ‘contact’ with it” (SS 42).

We should understand ‘the good’ here as encompassing Taylor’s two-tiered account of strong goods. In light of this we can say that the idea of ‘contact’ or ‘placement’ with respect to ‘the good’ has to do with the quality of our love, respect, and admiration for constitutive goods (e.g., other human beings, our own potential, the natural world, God) and the extent to which we have realized the life goods they constitute. The degree of fullness or meaning in our lives corresponds then to the degree of our contact or placement to the good so understood.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to holding that our “craving for being in contact with or being rightly placed in relation to the good can be more or less satisfied in our lives”, Taylor maintains that there can arise a ‘yes or no’ question, which concerns “the direction of our lives, towards or away from it, or the source of our motivations in regard to it” (SS 45). In other words, the question concerns whether or not we are on the side of the good and striving

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<sup>6</sup> In Chapter IV I will discuss Taylor’s account of ‘fullness’ in more detail, especially as discussed in *A Secular Age* where the concern is with the different understandings of it in religious and non-religious views. I will be concerned to show the connection between the experience of fullness and the achievement of ‘self-transcendence’, understood as the transcending of a lower for a higher mode of selfhood.

towards realizing it more fully in our lives, which is a question that arises in light of the categorical feature of strong goods. According to Taylor, all strong evaluative frameworks raise this ‘absolute question’, which frames “the context in which we ask the relative questions about how near or far we are from the good” (SS 45). In raising the issue of the overall direction of our lives the absolute question shows that “our condition can never be exhausted for us by what we *are*, because we are always also changing and *becoming*” (SS 47; Taylor’s emphasis). Thus, Taylor says, “the issue for us has to be not only where we *are*, but where we’re *going*; and though the first may be a matter of more or less, the latter is a question of towards or away from, an issue of yes or no. That is why an absolute question always frames our relative ones” (SS 47; Taylor’s emphasis).<sup>7</sup>

The issue here of the direction of our lives as a whole makes it clear that there is necessarily a temporal structure to our understanding of our selves in moral space. Indeed, Taylor argues that it shows that we must recognize another basic condition for making sense of lives: viz., that we understand our lives in terms of an unfolding story. Following the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre 2007, Ch. 15), Taylor holds that such a narrative understanding of our lives, like our orientation towards the good, is not an ‘optional extra’. “In order to have a sense of who we are,” he writes, “we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going” (SS 47). In other words, for Taylor, again following MacIntyre, we must understand our lives and our sense of orientation towards the good as an open-ended story or narrative ‘quest’ in which we strive to more fully realize the good in our lives (SS 48).

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<sup>7</sup> In Chapter IV I will return to discuss this issue in more detail when considering Taylor’s account of the three general modes of being in moral space: ‘fullness’, ‘exile’, and a ‘middle condition’ between them.

One important consequence of this narrative conception of the self is that it enables us to see the inadequacies of a certain influential view in the philosophy of personal identity, which is classically expressed in the work of John Locke and more recently found in Derek Parfit's work. Both of these writers hold what Taylor describes as a 'punctual' or 'neutral' view of the self or personal identity, which is the view that the self can be understood as constituted merely by momentary self-awareness.<sup>8</sup> But if Taylor's view is correct it means that we cannot think of our selves in this way at all. For Taylor, "[we] exist only in a certain space of questions, through certain constitutive concerns", viz., those which "touch on the nature of the good that [we] orient [ourselves] by and on the way [we are] placed in relation to it" (SS 50). "But then", he says,

[...] what counts as a unit will be defined by the scope of the concern, by just what is in question. And what is in question is, generally and characteristically, the shape of my life *as a whole*. [...] [As] a being who grows and becomes I can only know myself through the history of my maturations and regressions, overcomings and defeats. My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative. (SS 50)

According to Taylor, seeing our lives in these terms is in fact crucial for the question of the meaning of life. He writes: "We want our lives to have meaning, or weight, or substance, or to grow towards some fulness [...]. But this means our *whole* lives. If necessary, we want the future to "redeem" the past, to make it part of a life story which has sense or purpose, to take it up in a meaningful unity" (SS 50-1).

From the foregoing account of the self in moral space we can see how Taylor seeks to move from a sketchier to a richer conception of what is involved in having an identity and understand why he says: "Strong evaluation is essential to identity, and identity is essential to being a fully functioning human being" (Taylor 1994a, 209).

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<sup>8</sup> Recall that in the Introduction this view was listed among the various expressions of the 'naturalist temper' in modern philosophy.

*Evaluating Taylor's Argument*

At this point we must now ask: how convincing is Taylor's transcendental argument for the inescapability of strong evaluation for properly functioning human agency? In addressing this question I begin by first clarifying a potentially misleading aspect of Taylor's argument, which could make it seem more objectionable than it is. As we have seen, Taylor seeks to support his view of the inescapability of strong evaluation by providing a phenomenological description of 'the self in moral space'. However, it is important that the term 'moral' in 'moral space' be understood in a broad sense. As we discussed last chapter, Taylor often uses the terms 'morality' or 'ethics' in the broad sense of being synonymous with any form of strong evaluation, whether it concerns our obligations to others or our conception of the good life, which can include life goods besides narrowly moral ones (e.g., aesthetic life goods). This broad conception of 'moral space' is important because if the term 'moral' is understood in a narrow sense as referring only to our obligations or duties to others, then it seems it would be quite easy to object – as some commentators have – to the claim that properly functioning human agents are inescapably orientated in 'moral space' since we would only need to point to 'immoral' or 'amoral' persons who show a lack of concern for others.<sup>9</sup> But even in such

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Johnston makes this mistake of identifying strong evaluation with a more narrow sense of morality (Johnston 1999, 99). Owen Flanagan has also been criticized by other commentators on Taylor's work for reading Taylor in a too narrowly 'moralistic' manner (see Smith 2002, 94-6; Laitinen 2008, 99-100). However, it should be noted that Flanagan does acknowledge that Taylor affirms a broader view of strong evaluation beyond referring to our moral obligations to others (Flanagan 1996, 145). Yet, Flanagan objects to Taylor's broad view: "If we understand the ethical so broadly that anyone who evaluates her desires in terms of "better" and "worse" is a strong evaluator, then the person convinced of the superiority of her style, fashion, or social class will turn out to be a strong evaluator. I conclude that the best way to understand the contrast between strong and weak evaluation is as one involving ethical assessment, on the one hand, and any kind of nonethical assessment, on the other. [...] The downside for Taylor of thinking of the contrast in the way I recommend, and thus not counting all qualitative assessment as ethical, is that it means that not everyone is a strong evaluator" (ibid., 147). Flanagan therefore reads Taylor against his own explicit view and imputes to him a view that he thinks he should hold. He then goes on to argue against this

cases it is still possible to see that strong evaluation (i.e., an orientation towards some conception of the good) is operative, although we may want to say that they are wrong. We might think here of the well-known example of Paul Gauguin, who left his wife and children for what he surely regarded as a higher mode of life of being an artist in Tahiti. Or we might think of Nietzsche's 'immoralist' viewpoint, which in fact advocates a different understanding of 'morality' according to which strength is strongly valued, while concern for those who are weak is not. It perhaps would have been better or at least less misleading if Taylor had used the phrase 'strong evaluative space' rather than 'moral space', but one should just keep in mind that for him these are synonymous.

However, once we get beyond this possible misunderstanding there is still a possible serious objection to Taylor's claim that properly functioning human agents must be strong evaluators: viz., it seems that there are in fact counter-examples to this claim. Paul Johnston, e.g., has pointed to the fact that those who are non-realists about values cannot be said to engage in strong evaluation (since it presupposes a realist view), at least if they are to be taken on their word (Johnston 1999, 98; cf. Laitinen 2008, 101-4). Such non-realists regard evaluative judgments as being no more than subjective attitudes, i.e., weak evaluations, acquired as the result of the contingent circumstances of one's life, as opposed to being appeals to strong goods that are normative for our desires and of incomparably higher worth. But does this mean that non-realists would therefore lack a

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more narrowly 'moralistic' view of strong evaluation as inescapable (see *ibid.*, 152-4; cf. 142-6). This is a very strange and highly objectionable argumentative strategy. Moreover, Flanagan's objection to Taylor's broad view of strong evaluation is quite unconvincing since it simply seems to fail to appreciate how broadly strong evaluation does in fact extend in human life. For instance, Taylor actually does maintain that issues of personal style or taste can involve strong evaluation (see *HAL* 68; *PHS* 236, 238-40). It should also be noted that Taylor has said of the immoralist/amoralist: "it seems to me that such a person is perfectly possible, in a way that the agent totally outside of any strong evaluation is not. We might think him callous and evil, but no totally reduced to the sub-human. [...] the main line of my argument does not show morality to be inescapable" (Taylor 1991a, 251).

sense of orientation in life and thereby suffer from an identity crisis? *Prima facie* this does not seem to be the case since non-realists could in principle regard certain things – e.g., family life, a job, golf, music, democracy, justice, charity, and so on – as mattering or being important to them in such a way that they are constitutive of a narrative conception of identity or selfhood even though such importance is viewed as being contingent on what they happen to desire and so would only involve weak goods.<sup>10</sup> There are in fact a number of well-known philosophers who hold such a view. A good case in point is Richard Rorty’s ‘liberal ironist’ position, which maintains that “cruelty is the worst thing we do”, but regards this belief as being merely contingent upon how one happens to be constituted and the cultural context one happens to live in (Rorty 1989, xv-xvi, 73-8; see De Sousa 1994, 113-5).<sup>11</sup>

One response someone could make to this *prima facie* case is to try to show how ethical non-realists are in fact strong evaluators in practice, even if they are not in theory.<sup>12</sup> This is in fact the route that Taylor takes when he argues against ‘naturalists’ who think they can do without strong evaluative frameworks. Taylor regards Benthamite utilitarianism as a key instance of this sort of naturalist outlook that seeks to do without strong evaluation. Indeed, it begins from the premise that “[nature] has placed mankind

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Smith points out – rightly in my view – that there seems to be an equivocation in Taylor’s use of the term ‘mattering’ (or ‘importance’): “On the hand, there are things that matter to us just on account of our embodiment in the world. On the other, there are things that matter to us on account of their worth” (Smith 2002, 96). However, Taylor is clearer about this issue in *HAL* 98-9, 102-3.

<sup>11</sup> Some other notable ethical non-realists are: A.J. Ayer, John Mackie, Simon Blackburn, Harry Frankfurt, and Bernard Williams.

<sup>12</sup> Arto Laitinen suggests that another response is to say that non-realists can be strong evaluators so long as we “drive a wedge between the notion of strong evaluation and realism”. If strong evaluation could be separated from a commitment to realism then it is possible that “there are strong evaluators who base their qualitative distinctions concerning worth on their preferences” (Laitinen 2008, 103; cf. 6). However, I do not think a ‘wedge’ can in fact be driven between the notion of strong evaluation and realism. As I will discuss next section (and as I already briefly mentioned in the last chapter), strong evaluation presupposes a commitment to realism and without it one could not consistently be a strong evaluator. We see this in the categorical feature of strong evaluation as well as in the appeal to a ‘moral ontology’ that is needed for making sense of our ‘moral phenomenology’.

under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do” (Bentham 1988, 1). However, according to Taylor, the Benthamite utilitarian does not in fact lack a strong evaluative framework since he or she has a “strong commitment to a certain ideal of rationality and benevolence” and “admires people who live up to this ideal, condemns those who fail or who are too confused even to accept it, feels wrong when he himself falls below it” (SS 31).<sup>13</sup> For Taylor then it is one of great weaknesses of this version of utilitarianism that the “utilitarian lives within a moral horizon which cannot be explicated by his [or her] own moral theory” (SS 31). But, he says, “once one becomes aware of how human agents are inescapably in a space of such moral questions, it springs to light that the utilitarian is very much one of us, and the imagined agent of naturalist theory is a monster” (SS 32; cf. 329-33, 336-9; HAL 17-26; Taylor 1994e, 22-3).

Likewise, in regard to non-realist views such as projectivism – to be discussed more in the next section – Taylor says that projectivists often attempt to affirm a first-order morality based on our ordinary moral experience, e.g., that cruelty is bad and benevolence is good, even while accepting a non-realist, projectivist view of these judgments. We saw something like this in the case of Rorty. However, Taylor believes that there is often still a “confused sense that espousing the projection view ought to have a devastating effect on first-order morality” (SS 59). Taylor also notes that those who take the ironist stance like Rorty regard it as “an object of admiration [...] when people can do so, perhaps of condescension tinged with contempt when people take their first-order

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<sup>13</sup> In his more extensive discussion of utilitarianism in Chapter 19 of *Sources* Taylor cites the following revealing remark from Bentham that certainly seems to suggest that strong evaluation is operative: ““Is there one of these pages in which the love of humankind has for a moment been forgotten? Show it me, and this hand shall be the first to tear it out”” (SS 331).



moralties with ultimate seriousness. Here they are strong evaluators without reserve” (Taylor 1994c, 128). On a number of occasions Taylor makes similar remarks about those such as Camus who seem to strongly value one’s ability to courageously face up to the meaninglessness of existence and to work for the good of humanity. But insofar as they do so life is not seen as entirely meaningless.<sup>14</sup>

I think there is much to be said for Taylor’s claims here. For one thing, it is hard to understand how one could really hold to the ordinary moral experience that cruelty is bad and benevolence is good without making the judgment that there is something of incomparably higher worth involved here that is normative for our desires. Indeed, it is hard to see how one could actually regard this merely as a subjective attitude that is on par with other subjective preferences we happen to have, e.g., regarding which flavor of ice cream is our favorite. Moreover, if such judgments are really on par then it does seem as though it would have a devastating effect on our first-order morality.<sup>15</sup> At best it seems it would be reduced to being a matter of ‘enlightened’ self-interest, given the nature of society or given that we happen to have a preference for benevolence and the avoidance of cruelty. However, if our self-interest turned out to require cruelty or malevolence, then one could not say there is anything inherently wrong with this.

Furthermore, it does seem difficult to live as though life is meaningless, i.e., as if there were no objectively valid strong goods to orientate our lives towards, but only our subjective preferences. An important test case for this has been pointed out by Owen Flanagan: viz., the sort of person represented in Soren Kierkegaard’s account of ‘the

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<sup>14</sup> See Taylor 1994a, 212; *PHS* 235; *SS* 93-5, 406-11; *SA* 9, 560-6, 580-9; 694-5, 701-3.

<sup>15</sup> Later in this chapter I will be discussing how acknowledging the ‘radical contingency’ of our ethical beliefs can end up undermining these beliefs.

aesthete' in *Either/Or* (see Flanagan 1996, 152).<sup>16</sup> While today the term 'aesthete' might be taken to refer to someone who is concerned with the realm of beauty, Kierkegaard uses it in a manner that is more in line with its Greek etymological roots, i.e., where it refers to a person who is concerned with feelings or sensations (in a weak evaluative way). The aesthete is not concerned with morality, but he or she is also not an immoralist like Gauguin and Nietzsche, who, as mentioned earlier, clearly seem to be operating with strong evaluative commitments (viz., to artistic expression and the will to power). What is particularly challenging about the case of the aesthete for Taylor's argument is that he or she is someone who seems to make a point of avoiding life-defining strong evaluative commitments altogether by only seeking out short-term experiences that are interesting, exciting, novel, pleasurable, etc. There can be both unsophisticated and sophisticated versions of the aesthete: the unsophisticated aesthete follows the immediate impress of desire (and is thus akin to a wanton), while the sophisticated aesthete is more calculating or reflective in pursuit of his or her desires. Examples of sophisticate aesthetes include: calculating sensualists such as Don Giovanni, or Kierkegaard's own character, Johannes the Seducer; intellectuals who are only concerned with the 'interestingness' of their thoughts; people whose primary concern is to be witty or funny; and so on.

So is the aesthete then a valid counter-example to Taylor's claim that properly functioning human agency requires strong evaluation? We might try to read into the lives of sophisticated aesthetes – like Taylor does with respect to ethical non-realists – and show how they are still operating in light of some sense of strong evaluation. For instance, it might be argued that someone like Don Giovanni is operating with an implicit

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<sup>16</sup> In the following discussion of Kierkegaard's account of the aesthete I have been greatly aided by Guignon and Pereboom, eds. 2001, 5-8.

sense of the higher worth of his capacities for cunning and sexual conquest. But it seems difficult to similarly find strong evaluation in the lives of unsophisticated aesthetes. We might ask, however, whether it is actually possible to live one's life entirely as an unsophisticated aesthete. In fact, one of the main goals of Kierkegaard's account of the aesthete is to show that neither the sophisticated nor the unsophisticated aesthetic life is an existentially viable option as both are forms of despair.<sup>17</sup> Taylor actually briefly discusses Kierkegaard's account of the aesthete in *Sources* and he nicely summarizes his view of why the aesthetic mode of existence is not existentially viable: "The aesthetic man lives in dread, because he is at the mercy of external finite things and their vicissitudes. But he also lives in despair, despair of himself, because he cannot but sense that he is meant for something higher" (SS 450). We can also add that, like Taylor, Kierkegaard believes there is a fundamental human need to give a unity and meaning to one's life as a whole through an orientation to the good. But the life of the aesthete lacks any such overall unity and meaning and thus he or she falls into despair (see Guignon and Pereboom, eds. 2001, 6). This despair I believe can also be described in terms of Taylor's account of an identity crisis. Therefore, we can say that Kierkegaard's account of the aesthete actually helps to support Taylor's view.

In my view this point about the human need to give unity and meaning to one's life as a whole through orientation to the good is really the key issue in Taylor's argument. I think this can be seen to be connected both to our nature as language animals

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<sup>17</sup> In *Either/Or* Kierkegaard's aesthetic character "A" often gives expression to such despair. Consider, e.g., the following remarks: "Wine can no longer make my heart glad; a little of it makes me sad, much makes melancholy. My soul is faint and impotent; in vain I prick the spur of pleasure into its flank, its strength is gone, it rises no more to the royal leap. I have lost my illusions. Vainly I seek to plunge myself into the boundless sea of joy; it cannot sustain me, or rather, I cannot sustain myself. [...] I am solitary as always; forsaken, not by men, which could not hurt me, but by the happy fairies of joy, who used to encircle me in countless multitudes, who met acquaintances everywhere, everywhere showed me an opportunity for pleasure" (Kierkegaard 1973, 34-5).

and to our capacity for reflective self-evaluation. As discussed last chapter, language makes possible the qualitative distinctions of worth that define for us a good, worthwhile, meaningful life (see *PA* 106). Once these qualitative distinctions of worth arise through language it seems difficult not to move within the space of meaning constituted by these qualitative distinctions such that we become ‘meaning-seeking animals’ and are “not [...] able to stop caring where we sit in [the space of meaning]” (*SS* 42). Moreover, it is distinctive of our human form of life that we stand back and reflect upon who we are and who we want to become and that we draw upon qualitative distinctions of worth in doing so. Perhaps it is in principle possible, as discussed above, for some people to regard certain things – e.g., family life, a job, golf, music, democracy, justice, charity, and so on – as being important to them in such a way that they are constitutive of a narrative conception of identity even though such importance is viewed as being merely contingent on what they happen to desire (i.e., as involving only weak goods). But it does seem difficult for the question of the objective *worth* of these desires not to arise at some point.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, if there is not something of incomparably higher worth involved here that is normative for their desires then it would seem difficult to understand why such things should have their important life-defining role and why one should measure his or her life according to them, especially if they are really regarded as being on par with a preference for a flavor of ice cream.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This issue is discussed in an interesting way in Cottingham 2003, 18-31, 64-73.

<sup>19</sup> Although I have been focusing on evaluating Taylor’s argument for the inescapability of strong evaluation, it should also be mentioned that there are some commentators who have objected to the connected claim about the inescapability of narrative for our identity. Nicholas Smith, e.g., accepts Taylor’s argument for the inescapability of strong evaluation, but objects to the inescapability of narrative: “on first hearing, the thesis that narrative self-understanding is an inescapable, structural requirement of human agency does not ring true. We consider story-telling to be a special art, a skill only some people possess. Surely, to be incapable of telling a convincing story about oneself does not thereby forfeit one’s claim to agency. Even the capacity to care deeply about one’s narrative identity, we might think, is hardly a

One of the difficulties with demonstrating Taylor's view about the inescapability of strong evaluation is that it seems possible for some people to avoid, at least for a time, the kind of reflective self-evaluation whereby the awareness of a lack of a strong evaluative framework would cause an identity-crisis or a state of melancholy, ennui, accidie, etc. But life does have a way of sooner or later forcing this reflective self-evaluation upon us (i.e., if we do not engage in it already in virtue of being the sort of rational, linguistic animals that we are). We can see this in cases of 'mid-life crises' and when people confront some failure or misfortune in their lives or their own impending death (see *SA* 307-9, 677, 720-2).

Another difficulty with demonstrating Taylor's view about the inescapability of strong evaluation is that although it does seem that there are cases where ethical non-realists rely on strong evaluation in practice (which they deny the validity of in theory), this can be difficult to establish in every case. Moreover, it is difficult to conclusively establish the impossibility of someone having a stable life-defining identity based only on

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requirement of having identity at all. [...] Taylor does not show that the loss of narrative identity would have devastating consequences for the subject. And without such an argument, we are not forced to the conclusion that narrative identity is necessary in the requisite sense" (Smith 2002, 99-100; cf. Smith 2004, 44-5; Walker 2007, 149-55). Smith does not deny that a narrative may be desirable and help contribute to the meaningfulness of someone's life, but he says: "it is still not clear why a meaningful life must be one which, as a whole, has direction. [...] But even if we accept that the meaning of a life requires some narrative figuring, why must it be a quest-type story, a story of self-discovery in relation to the good? In the first place, one might be skeptical that the meaningful moments of one's life can be encompassed in a single unifying narrative. [...] On the other hand, [...] one might feel unduly restricted, strait-jacketed perhaps, by the thought that one's life can be so encompassed" (Smith 2002, 100-1).

I think Smith's criticisms here miss the mark since he interprets the idea of a narrative as requiring more than it actually does (e.g., the special skill or art of 'story-telling'). For Taylor it simply has to do with the fact that in order "to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going" (*SS* 47). Indeed, this is often more or less implicit in our self-understanding, rather than being akin to a detailed written autobiography. I think it is in fact difficult to see how we could have a coherent identity without some sense of how we have become what we are and of where we are going. Thus, it can hardly be said to be a 'straight-jacket', especially given its open-ended character, which includes the ability to revise our 'narrative' self-understanding throughout life. As for the objection to the idea that "a meaningful life must be one which, as a whole, has direction", this simply follows from Taylor's claim that human agents are orientated towards the good, which Smith accepts, so it is odd that he would object to this. Smith tries to separate the two claims of inescapability in regard to strong evaluation and narrative, but it does not seem that these can be disconnected and they certainly are not for Taylor.

weak goods, where a commitment to charity and justice is seen on par with a preference for a flavor of ice cream. But since we have seen that there is some reason to doubt whether this is possible, we can at least say that Taylor's argument is indeed exploring "the limits of the conceivable in human life" (SS 32). It seems to me that strong evaluation is at least very difficult to avoid entirely as human agents.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to note that if Taylor is correct in claiming that strong evaluation is inescapable for properly functioning human agency, or if it is at least difficult to avoid engaging in strong evaluation as human agents, then this means that it is difficult to live life as though it were totally disenchanting, i.e., devoid of strong evaluative meaning. But this in itself does not establish re-enchantment since our strong evaluative experiences might be mistaken. What is needed is a defense of strong evaluative realism, which, as we recall from the Introduction, is the key to Taylor's effort of re-enchantment. Let us now turn to examine Taylor's defense of strong evaluative realism.

## II. MORAL (STRONG EVALUATIVE) REALISM

### *Strong Evaluation and Moral Ontology*

It is important to begin by recalling that I have said that Taylor's account of strong evaluation presupposes a realist or objectivist view of strong goods, particularly in light of their categorical feature, i.e., the way they are seen as normative for our desires

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<sup>20</sup> We can also add that from the standpoint of those who are strong evaluators and believe that there are things that have incomparably higher worth that should be recognized as normative for our desires we would judge a person who did not engage in strong evaluation as being shallow, or insensitive, or as not living a full, integral, undamaged human life in the strong evaluative sense (SS 27, 31-2; HAL 26). In other words, apart from the question of whether it is possible in principle not to be a strong evaluator, as strong evaluators ourselves we believe that people should be strong evaluators and live by their strong evaluative judgments. But to vindicate this claim requires a defense of moral (i.e., strong evaluative) realism.

rather than contingent upon them.<sup>21</sup> In the first instance the worth of our desires is evaluated by the normative standards provided by the life goods that define for us the good life. But these depend upon a more fundamental level of strong goods, viz., constitutive goods, which provide the ultimate normative standards. It was also briefly mentioned in the last chapter that such constitutive goods – as “features of ourselves, or the world, or God” that are worthy of our love, respect, admiration, and the like – are part of what Taylor calls the ‘moral ontology’ or ‘ontological background picture’ that makes sense of our ‘moral phenomenology’ or strong evaluative responses.

One of Taylor’s central goals in *Sources of the Self* is in fact to explore the ontological background picture that “lies behind some of the moral and spiritual intuitions of our contemporaries” (SS 3-4; cf. 8-9).<sup>22</sup> Unsurprisingly, it is also in this work that he provides his most thorough defense of a moral (i.e., strong evaluative) realist position. In examining Taylor’s defense of moral realism I will largely follow his line of argument in *Sources*.

Taylor begins his discussion in Part I of *Sources* with the example of the strong evaluative judgment that we ought to respect human life, which he takes to be one of the most important and widely shared moral intuitions among contemporaries. Indeed, it seems to be shared in all human societies in one form or another, even if sometimes with certain restrictions. While he acknowledges that the roots of our respect for human life

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<sup>21</sup> In contrast to what I maintain here, Laitinen claims that Taylor’s original analysis of strong evaluation is compatible with a subjectivist view, while acknowledging that Taylor later came to defend a realist view (Laitinen 2008, 21-2). However, I do not think such compatibility exists given the categorical feature of strong goods (cf. Abbey 2000, 26). A subjectivist view would undermine this feature and acceptance of this feature undermines subjectivism.

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that Taylor’s use of ‘moral intuition’ here does not refer to any ‘special faculty of moral perception’, as some intuitionists hold, but rather it seems to refer to our inarticulate strong evaluative sense of things.

seem to be “connected perhaps with the almost universal tendency among other animals to stop short of the killing of conspecifics”, nevertheless, he says:

[Like] so much else in human life, this ‘instinct’ receives a variable shape in culture [...]. And this shape is inseparable from an account of what it is that commands our respect. The account seems to articulate the intuition. It tells us, for instance, that human beings are creatures of God and made in his image, or that they are immortal souls, or that they are all emanations of divine fire, or that they are all rational agents and thus have a dignity which transcends any other being, or some other such characterization; and that *therefore* we owe them respect. (SS 5)

In other words, articulating what lies behind our moral intuition that we ought to respect human life requires us to specify an account of human beings as constitutive goods, which is to say, we must specify the ontological features in virtue of which human beings are regarded as commanding or being worthy of our respect, concern, love, and the like. It should also be noted that each of the examples of possible articulations of the sense in which human beings are constitutive goods cited in the above passage points to some capacity of human beings for a higher mode of life. “The sense that human beings are capable of some kind of higher life”, Taylor maintains, “forms part of the background for our belief that they are fit objects of respect, that their life and integrity is sacred or enjoys immunity, and is not to be attacked” (SS 25).<sup>23</sup>

For Taylor then our ‘moral reactions’ in regard to respect for human beings can be seen to have two facets:

On one side, they are almost like instincts, comparable to our love of sweet things, or our aversion to nauseous substances, or our fear of falling; on the other, they seem to involve claims, implicit or explicit, about the nature and status of human beings. From this second side, a moral reaction is an assent to, an affirmation of, a given ontology of the human. (SS 5)

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<sup>23</sup> Given some such notion of human beings as constitutive goods we can also see how showing respect or concern for others would constitute a higher mode of being for ourselves; i.e., it would constitute certain life goods (e.g., virtues such as justice, benevolence, compassion, etc.) that define for us the good life.



Taylor goes on to say:

Ontological accounts offer themselves as correct articulations of our ‘gut’ reactions of respect. In this they treat these reactions as different from other ‘gut’ responses, such as our taste for sweets or our nausea at certain smells or objects. We don’t acknowledge that there is something there to articulate, as we do in the moral case. [...] [In] either case our response is to an object with a certain property. But in one case the property marks the object as one *meriting* this reaction; in the other the connection between the two is just a brute fact. (SS 6)

This passage connects with the point discussed above about strong evaluation appealing to normative standards by which we judge the worth of our desires. In the case of our ‘moral reactions’, when we say that human beings *merit* our respect this entails that if someone were not to feel that respect is owed to other human beings he or she would be subject to our censure or condemnation and seen as blind or insensitive to a normative standard that should be recognized (PHS 120, 239). However, in the case of our taste for sweets (e.g., a certain flavor of ice cream) or our reactions of nausea at certain smells (e.g., sour milk), talk of ‘merit’ in any strong sense is out of place because we would not condemn a person who did not share our particular taste for sweets or our nausea at certain smells. It is simply a ‘brute fact’, as Taylor puts it, which is based on our particular biological and psychological constitution and the properties of a given object. Thus, it is a matter of weak evaluation rather than strong evaluation.<sup>24</sup>

The key point here then is that to engage in strong evaluation involves an appeal, whether implicit or explicit, to some ontological account that makes sense of our strong evaluative responses; or as Taylor will often put it, in order to make sense of our moral

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<sup>24</sup> Recall from the last chapter that Taylor does acknowledge that weak evaluation can involve qualitative distinctions (e.g., strawberry vs. vanilla ice cream, sour vs. non-sour milk, etc.), but just not the sort that has the categorical and incommensurability features of strong goods. Hence I say that talk of ‘merit’ in any *strong sense* is out of place in weak evaluative cases. It should also be recalled that the taste for sweets example is more complicated than Taylor acknowledges here: the choice of the flavor of ice cream is a matter of weak evaluation if the ice cream is similar with respect to the quality of ingredients, but strong evaluation may enter in if there is great difference in the quality. According to Taylor, “this will be because taste is seen as an important part of what makes a human life worthwhile” (Taylor 1985c, 266).

phenomenology we must appeal to some moral ontology.<sup>25</sup> Taylor believes that this is how we do reason and argue about morality, e.g., when we seek to explain the justification for our sense that human beings command our respect (see *SS* 6-7).<sup>26</sup>

Although we have been discussing the idea of a moral ontology primarily in terms of constitutive goods – i.e., what it is about an object that makes it worthy of our respect, concern, love, admiration, and the like – for Taylor it is important that an account of moral ontology should also include an articulation of what our strong evaluative responses say about ourselves. Indeed, an adequate moral ontology must have both sides. On Taylor’s view making sense of our strong evaluative responses “means articulating what makes these responses appropriate: identifying what makes something a fit object for them and correlatively formulating more fully the nature of the response as well as *spelling out what all this presupposes about ourselves and our situation in the world*” (*SS* 8-9; my emphasis; cf. *SS* 256-8; Taylor 1991a, 245; *SA* 589).<sup>27</sup>

It should also be mentioned that although we have been focusing on the role of ontological background pictures with respect to making sense of our strong evaluative responses to human beings as worthy of our respect, the same basic point applies to the ‘Aristotelian’, ‘ecological’, and ‘theological’ components discussed last chapter.

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<sup>25</sup> See *SS* 5-11, 68-75; Taylor 2003a, 316-20; *SA* 589, 607-9, 692-5; *DC* 297-302.

<sup>26</sup> Appealing to a moral ontology in order to make sense of our moral phenomenology can also be understood in terms of appealing to what Taylor calls an ‘import’ in some of his pre-*Sources* writings. “By ‘import’”, Taylor says, “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. [...] In identifying the import of a given situation we are picking out what in the situation gives the grounds or basis of our feelings, or what could give such grounds, or perhaps should give such grounds, if we feel nothing or have inappropriate feelings” (*HAL* 48-9; cf. 50-76, 197-8; *PHS* 223-7). If we take Taylor’s example of our moral reactions of respect for other human beings, we can say that the import here is the description of human beings by which they are seen as worthy of this respect (i.e., constitutive goods). Arto Laitinen describes Taylor’s concept of an ‘import’ as an ‘evaluative property’, i.e., something that is fit to be valued in a certain way (Laitinen 2008, 168-70). As I pointed out in the last chapter, Laitinen does not see that in appealing to evaluative properties related to strong evaluation he is appealing to constitutive goods.

<sup>27</sup> I will return to discuss this issue in more detail later on in this section.

Provided we accept constitutive goods in these areas, we must specify the ontological background picture that informs our sense of the worthiness of our human potential, the natural world, and God for respect, admiration, love, concern, etc.

*The Projectivist Challenge*

One of the greatest challenges to such a realist account, according to Taylor, comes from an “important strand of modern naturalist consciousness” that seeks to do away with all such appeals to moral ontology in making sense of our moral responses. “The temptation is great”, he says, “to rest content with the fact that we have such reactions, and to consider the ontology which gives rational articulation to them to be so much froth, nonsense from a bygone age” (SS 5). Indeed, one might appeal to “a sociobiological explanation for our having such reactions, which can be thought to have obvious evolutionary utility and indeed have analogues among other species” (SS 5-6).<sup>28</sup> This would mean that even though human beings often appeal in their moral reasoning to a moral ontology to make sense of their moral responses, such appeals must be regarded as illusory and as mere subjective projections onto a value-neutral universe. As mentioned in the Introduction, this ‘projectivist’ view represents an extreme version of disenchantment that Taylor is concerned to combat in his effort of re-enchantment. Before considering Taylor’s response to projectivism, I want to lay out the basic argument for this view as put forward by John Mackie. Not only is Mackie one of the most influential and well-known defenders of projectivism, he is also the person that Taylor is especially concerned to refute (see SS 6, 59-60; Taylor 2003a).

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<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Wilson 1978; Dawkins 1989; Wright 1997; Mackie 1977, Ch. 5; 1998.

In *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* Mackie begins by acknowledging that ordinary moral thought and language as well as the Western philosophical tradition on the whole have shared the view that morality is objective; i.e., it is in some sense part of the 'fabric of the world' (Mackie 1977, 30-5). But he wants to argue that this is in fact an error of judgment. The basic claim of Mackie's 'error theory' is that "although most people in making moral judgements implicitly claim, among other things, to be pointing to something objectively prescriptive, these claims are all false" (ibid., 35). In defense of this claim Mackie provides two main arguments.

The first is what he calls the 'argument from relativity', which starts from the observation of the variations in moral codes throughout history and between different societies and even within societies. Mackie then contends that these variations "are more readily explained by the hypothesis that they reflect ways of life than by the hypothesis that they express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values" (ibid., 37). This conclusion is of course open to dispute, especially by those who claim that while specific moral codes may differ in certain respects, nevertheless, certain shared underlying values can be found, such as the value of respect for human life discussed above. But even if this were the case it still would not be enough to demonstrate the objectivity of morality. We can see why when we consider Mackie's second argument, which he considers to be the more important of the two.

This second argument he calls the 'argument from queerness', which has two parts. The first part of the argument – the metaphysical part – states: "If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relationships of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe" (ibid., 38). This is due to the fact

that such objective values are regarded as having “authoritative prescriptivity”, i.e., they are said to be “intrinsically action-guiding and motivating” (ibid., 39, 49). The second part of the argument – the epistemological part – states: “if we were aware of [such objective values], it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else” (ibid., 38). Here Mackie assumes that moral realism commits a person to some implausible form of intuitionism that claims to be able to recognize something like a Platonic notion of intrinsic value that exists independently of our contingent desires, but which nevertheless has an authoritative “to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it” (ibid., 40; cf. 24).<sup>29</sup> Given such a view Mackie goes on to say that another way of bringing out the ‘queerness’ of claims regarding moral objectivity is to ask how objective moral values would be consequential or supervenient upon natural features of the world. For instance, when someone says that something is wrong because it is a form of deliberate cruelty, Mackie asks: “just what *in the world* is signified by this ‘because’?” (ibid., 41).

According to Mackie, it would be better to adopt the ‘principle of parsimony’ (i.e., ‘Ockham’s razor’) and give a simpler explanation for our moral responses as merely subjective responses, rather than appeal to a special intuitive faculty that is claimed to recognize something like a Platonic notion of intrinsic value (ibid., 41). Such a move is made even more compelling, he believes, when we realize that it is possible to also offer

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<sup>29</sup> Mackie specifically refers to work of G.E. Moore, but he believes that such intuitionism is implicit in our ordinary moral thought. The continued influence of intuitionism in moral philosophy can be seen, e.g., in Rawls 1999, Ch.1; Stratton-Lake, ed. 2002; and Audi 2004. Somewhat similar to Mackie’s point about ‘queerness’, but from a different perspective, Mary Midgley says that “moral philosophers from Moore onwards” (presumably referring at least those who are intuitionists) have represented the notion of good “as floating free, a kind of mysterious exotic pink balloon” (Midgley 1995, 185).

an explanation for why people have the tendency to be mistakenly drawn to believe in the objectivity of moral values. Mackie writes:

On a subjective view, the supposedly objective values will be based in fact upon attitudes which the person has who takes himself to be recognizing and responding to those values. If we admit what Hume calls the mind's 'propensity to spread itself on external objects', we can understand the supposed objectivity of moral qualities as arising from what we call the projection or objectification of moral attitudes. (ibid., 42)

He goes on to explain that this projection of our moral attitudes can be motivated, e.g., by the social function of morality in regulating the way people act towards one another (ibid., 43). From this explanation of the error that moral realists are said to commit we can see why Mackie's 'error theory' is also known as 'projectivism'.

Now, in criticizing moral realism Mackie does not see himself to be advocating some form of moral nihilism, but rather he wants to offer what he believes is a better understanding of morality and its function, which is encapsulated in his pithy statement: "Morality is not to be discovered but to be made: we have to decide what moral views to adopt, what moral stands to take" (ibid., 106). This statement is perhaps misleading since it can give the impression that one just arbitrarily decides what morality will consist in. However, for Mackie, when we "decide what moral views to adopt" we do so with specific goals in mind. The 'object' of morality, he maintains, can be understood in two ways, depending on whether we employ a broad or a narrow sense of morality, both of which he believes are important. In the narrow sense, morality is concerned with deciding on what rules should govern conduct in a society aimed at mutual benefit and its primary function is to serve as a device for counteracting limited sympathies (ibid., Ch. 5).<sup>30</sup> In the broad sense, morality is viewed as a general, all-inclusive theory of conduct that

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<sup>30</sup> Mackie's view here owes much to Hume's account of justice as an 'artificial virtue'.

provides directives for living a good life, subjectively understood (*ibid.*, Ch. 8). What is missing in these two senses of morality is an acknowledgement of strong goods that are regarded as being of incomparably higher worth and normative for our desires.

*Taylor's Middle Way Between Projectivism and Platonism*

How then does Taylor propose to defend the objectivity of strong goods against Mackie's projectivist challenge? The crucial task for Taylor is to argue for the viability of a middle way between projectivism and 'Platonism' in regard to the objectivity of moral values (i.e., strong goods).<sup>31</sup> What Taylor wants to contest in both perspectives is their shared view that what is objectively real is only what exists independently of our human responses to the world. The key difference between these two perspectives is of course that Platonism affirms that moral values can exist independently of human responses and thus regards them as objectively real, whereas projectivism rejects such a possibility and thus regards moral values as mere projections of our subjective attitudes onto the world.

While Taylor agrees with Mackie in finding the Platonist version of moral realism to be lacking in cogency, he denies that the consequence of rejecting it is that we must accept a projectivist account of our moral phenomenology. For Taylor, we do not need to accept this conclusion if we reject the particular naturalist outlook that it is based upon. As previously discussed, one of the fundamental features of this sort of 'naturalism' – understood as equivalent with 'scientism' – is that it seeks, as far as possible, to

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<sup>31</sup> Ruth Abbey employs this notion of a 'middle way' position in her discussion of Taylor's moral realism (Abbey 2000, 31). For important passages in Taylor's work regarding this middle way position see *SS* 7-9, 53-60, 68-9, 256-8, 341-2, 510, 512-3; Taylor 1991a, 245-9; 1994a, 209-11

I should clarify here that in using the term 'Platonism' I am not referring specifically to the works of Plato, but rather to a position that resembles Plato's thought. The basic idea of 'Platonism' as used here is just this idea of ethical values existing in complete independence of our human responses. This is the position that Mackie and other projectivists such as Simon Blackburn see moral realists as endorsing and it can be found in the works of 'moral intuitionists' such as G.E. Moore and W.D. Ross.

understand the world in ‘absolute’ terms, i.e., without reference to our experience of the significance of things for us as purposeful agents. The world is thus viewed as ‘disenchanted’ or ‘value-neutral’. Moreover, the world so understood is regarded as what is ‘objectively real’. The classical formulation of this point is in terms of a distinction between primary and secondary qualities, where the former are qualities that are inherent to objects (e.g., shape, mass, etc.), while the latter are qualities that are not inherent to objects, but rather depend on our subjective responses to objects (e.g., color). This naturalist outlook gives rise then to the split between fact and value, which has been a problem for so much of modern moral philosophy (see *SS* 53-60). We see this embodied in Mackie’s view of moral values as subjective attitudes, which in our ordinary ethical thought we project onto a value-neutral or value-free world of ‘facts’.

However, on Taylor’s engaged-hermeneutic approach there can be no such separation between fact and value since as engaged, purposeful human agents we always experience the world as valued-laden rather than value-neutral. Thus, it is only from within an engaged perspective that we can make a case for moral realism. Taylor writes: “Moral argument and exploration go on only within a world shaped by our deepest moral responses”, such as our sense of human beings as worthy of our respect (*SS* 8). The corollary of this is that to take a disengaged stance that prescind from such moral responses means to cut ourselves off from the only way in which strong goods can be recognized.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Taylor says, “we should treat our deepest moral instincts [...] as our mode of access to the world in which ontological claims are discernible and can be rationally argued about and sifted” (*SS* 8). I believe we can in fact identify two issues here in regard to the importance of our moral (i.e., strong evaluative) responses. First,

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<sup>32</sup> This is a point that follows from Taylor’s ‘internalism’, as discussed in the previous chapter.



there is an *epistemological issue* concerning our access to the good, which must come through our strong evaluative responses. But more importantly, I believe, there is an *ontological issue* concerning how we define the good; viz., the good is that which has the objective properties of being ‘desirable’ for human beings (i.e., in the strong evaluative sense of what we ought to desire, love, admire, respect, etc.), and thus it is defined in terms of that which is good-for-human beings given the kind of engaged, purposive beings that we are.<sup>33</sup> This can be seen from the fact that Taylor regards strong goods as necessarily definitive of a good, fulfilling, worthwhile, higher form of life.<sup>34</sup>

So how exactly then do we argue for a moral realist position on the basis of “our deepest moral responses”? Taylor’s argument appeals to what he calls the ‘best account principle’ (or the ‘BA principle’), which he expresses in the following terms:

What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms which on critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives? ‘Making the best sense’ here includes not only offering the best, most realistic orientation about the good but also allowing us best to understand and make sense of the actions and feelings of ourselves and others. (SS 57; cf. 58-9, 68)<sup>35</sup>

Taylor goes on to say:

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<sup>33</sup> In describing the good in terms of that which is good-for-human beings I am speaking at a very general level. As discussed in the previous chapter, there are of course many different ways in which one can live in light of strong goods that are valid for everyone.

<sup>34</sup> Given that Taylor is quite explicit about his attempt to navigate a middle path between Platonism and projectivism it is remarkable how often his position gets associated or identified with a kind of Platonism. See, e.g., Williams 1990, 1995b, 203; Hittinger 1990, 125; Shklar 1991; Olafson 1994, 193-4; Joas 2000, 214, n. 39. Taylor is of course similar to Plato in his emphasis on the love of the good, but he departs from Plato’s view that the good is wholly independent of human responses. In the later respect, Taylor says, “Platonism is dead” (Taylor 1994a, 210; cf. 1991a, 248). In a response to an interpretation of himself as a Platonist, Taylor says that he believes this interpretation is due to the fact that people have difficulty getting beyond the two options of Platonism and projectivism and understanding the possibility of a ‘middle way’ (Taylor 1994a, 209-10; cf. 1991a, 247-8). This difficulty is also seen in Stephen Clark, who interprets Taylor as a kind of projectivist given that he opposes Platonism (Clark 1991; cf. Rosen 1991, 188-90; Rorty 1994a, 199; Rosa 1996). In my view Taylor’s meta-ethical position is akin to Aquinas’s view of goodness, viz.: “goodness expresses the aspect of desirableness” (*Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 5, A. 1; Aquinas 1948), which means that it cannot be defined independently of our human responses.

<sup>35</sup> We can see that this ‘BA principle’ is part of Taylor’s ‘ad hominem’ model of practical reasoning.

[The] terms of our best account will never figure in a physical theory of the universe. But that just means that our human reality cannot be understood in the terms appropriate for this physics. [...] Our value terms purport to give us insight into what it is to live in the universe as a human being, and this is a quite different matter from that which physical science claims to reveal and explain. This reality is, of course, dependent on us, in the sense that a condition for its existence is our existence. But once granted that we exist, it is no more a subjective projection than what physics deals with. (SS 59; cf. 68; Taylor 1991a, 245)

When Taylor says here that the reality of value (i.e., strong goods) is ‘dependent on us’, but not in the sense of being merely our subjective projection, he is advocating what John McDowell calls a ‘no-priority view’ (McDowell 1998, 159-60; cf. Laitinen 2008, 171). Contra Platonism and projectivism, this is the view that neither the object side nor the subject side of our evaluative experience can be said to have priority in the determination of values.<sup>36</sup> Rather, as Taylor would put it, strong goods only arise out of our purposeful engagement with the world as human agents whereby certain objects are perceived as being worthy of our respect, concern, love, admiration, etc. This means we cannot understand strong goods if we only consider the subject side or the object side of experience. Both are needed to make sense of our experience as strong evaluators since the dependence runs both ways.

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<sup>36</sup> In putting forward his ‘no-priority view’ McDowell is responding to Blackburn’s projectivist view, particularly to the following comment: “The projectivist holds that our nature as moralists is well explained by regarding us as reacting to a reality which contains nothing in the way of values, duties, rights and so forth; a realist thinks it is well explained only by seeing us as able to perceive, cognize, intuit, an independent moral reality. He holds that the moral features of things are the parents of our sentiments, whereas the Humean holds that they are their children” (Blackburn 1981, 164-5). McDowell responds: “But why do we have to limit ourselves to those two options? What about a position that says the extra features are neither parents nor children of our sentiments, but – if we must find an apt metaphor from the field of kinship relations – siblings? [...] Denying that the extra features are prior to the relevant sentiments, such a view distances itself from the idea that they belong, mysteriously, in a reality that is wholly independent of our subjectivity and set over against it. It does not follow that the sentiments have a priority. If there is no comprehending the right sentiments independently of the concepts of the relevant extra features, a no-priority view is surely indicated” (McDowell 1998, 159-60). David Wiggins makes a similar point when he writes: “no attempt to make sense of the human condition can really succeed if it treats the objects of psychological states as unequal partners or derivative elements in the conceptual structure of values and states and their objects” (Wiggins 1998, 106).

On the basis of the ‘BA principle’ Taylor then constructs a “terse polemical attack” against projectivism, which has two main phases. First, he maintains that we “cannot help having recourse to [...] strongly valued goods for the purposes of life: deliberating, judging situations, deciding how you feel about people, and the like” (SS 59). In other words, we need such strong goods in order to best make sense of the actions and feelings both of ourselves and others, e.g., in “assessing his conduct, grasping her motivation, coming to see what you were really about all these years, etc.” (SS 59). The second phase of Taylor’s attack is then to claim: “What is real is what you have to deal with, what won’t go away just because it doesn’t fit with your prejudices”, and so “what you can’t help having recourse to in life is real, or as near to reality as you can get a grasp of at present. Your general metaphysical picture of “values” and their place in “reality” ought to be based on what you find real in this way” (SS 59). As mentioned above, Taylor believes that the force of this argument is in fact “obscurely felt” even by non-realists insofar as there is some “confused sense that espousing the projection view ought to have a devastating effect on first-order morality”, though many projectivist still seek to maintain – inconsistently in Taylor’s view – the compatibility between projectivism and first-order morality (SS 59-60). This is especially evident, e.g., in Simon Blackburn’s ‘quasi-realism’ position (see Blackburn 1981; 1985).

So what should we make of Taylor’s argument here? First of all, it should be noted that it appears to depend on his transcendental argument for the inescapability of strong evaluation for properly functioning human agents. However, even if we accepted the view that we are inescapably strong evaluators this itself is not enough to establish the

truth of moral realism.<sup>37</sup> For one thing, such a view is compatible with human beings holding very different and even incompatible strong goods (see MacIntyre 1994, 188). Additionally, it is a view that a projectivist could accept at one level; i.e., he or she could affirm that in our ordinary ethical experience we are indeed ‘inescapably’ strong evaluators, but that our experiences of strong goods should ultimately be understood as subjective projections.<sup>38</sup> This would of course undermine these goods and it could also give rise to an identity crisis, which for Taylor would seem to be the logical outcome of a consistent projectivist stance. But the fact that we might end up in an identity crisis or espousing a nihilistic perspective if we do not affirm the objective reality of strong goods is not itself an argument for moral realism. It would just show what is at stake in whether or not we consistently affirm a non-realist, projectivist position.

We might also question what exactly Taylor means when he says that what is real is “what you have to deal with”, “what won’t go away”. There is an obvious sense in which this is true, but is it intended to establish the truth of moral realism? I don’t think so. Instead, I believe Taylor is best understood as attempting to establish the legitimacy

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<sup>37</sup> On this point Gary Kitchen concurs: “It is important to recognize that Taylor’s case against moral anti-realism cannot turn on the validity or otherwise of transcendental arguments. This is because a transcendental argument of this kind would establish only that strong evaluation was a human universal, not that strong evaluation referred to some underlying moral reality that made moral judgements true or false” (Kitchen 1999, 53, n. 58). Taylor does sometimes seem to suggest that the transcendental argument is sufficient to at least show the *prima facie* implausibility of non-realism, such as in the following remark: “The argument I try to make in my first part [of *Sources*] against anti-realism depends not on the thesis that some particular account of the good is correct, but rather on the inescapability of some understanding of good in anyone’s moral horizon. The argument may be invalid, but the attempt is to show that something so basic and inescapable to us as a sense of identity depends on taking some goods seriously” (Taylor 1994a, 206). It is not surprising then that some commentators, such as Hans Joas, believe that the transcendental argument is intended as Taylor’s full argument for moral realism. Joas writes: “It is in this very indispensability [of strong values for our self-description] that the reality of these values then lies” (Joas 2000, 138). However, while this might give some impetus towards moral realism, nevertheless, the full defense of moral realism – as we will see Taylor acknowledges – does in fact require more in terms of a convincing substantive account of a specific moral ontology.

<sup>38</sup> Thus, a projectivist can affirm what Ruth Abbey calls ‘weak realism’, which acknowledges that our ordinary moral phenomenology suggests a realist view, even if this is ultimately denied (Abbey 2000, 27).

of a particular way of arguing for the truth of moral realism. If moral realism is true then it is in this sense that it would be considered real, i.e., as something we have recourse to in our lives and which helps to explain the actions and feelings of ourselves and others. This seems to be indicated when Taylor says: “what you can’t help having recourse to in life is real, or as near to reality as you can get a grasp of at present. Your general metaphysical picture of “values” and their place in “reality” ought to be based on what you find real in this way” (SS 59). Taylor wants to maintain that this sense of ‘reality’ should not be discounted because of a naturalistic prejudice that wrongly prioritizes that which exists independently of human responses over that which is dependent upon our experience of the significance of things for us as human agents for its existence.

But all of this is still compatible with the possibility that moral realism might turn out to be a mistaken view, which Taylor acknowledges (SS 74). Indeed, this possibility is inherent to the BA principle in virtue of its fallibilistic character.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, since Taylor wants to claim that a moral realist view does provide the best account of our moral experience, it is clear that to support this conclusion much more needs to be said than has been said so far. In particular, Taylor’s best account argument requires that we engage in practical reasoning about our particular moral experiences. As discussed in the last chapter, practical reasoning for Taylor is “a reasoning in transitions. It aims to establish, not that some position is correct absolutely, but rather that some position is superior to some other. It is concerned [...] with comparative propositions” (SS 72). Thus, if we take a particular moral experience such as our sense of human beings as worthy of respect and

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<sup>39</sup> It is in part because of the recognition of contestability in Taylor’s view that Stephen White regards Taylor as holding a position that White refers to as ‘weak ontology’, as opposed to ‘strong ontology’, which has an underlying assumption of certainty (White 2000, 6-8, Ch. 3). In a similar vein, Ruth Abbey describes Taylor’s moral realism as ‘falsifiable realism’ (Abbey 2000, 27-30).

that a higher mode of life can be realized in showing respect for other human beings, we can then ask: does a projectivist or a realist account best make sense of such experience? For Taylor, as already discussed, our experience itself seems to point in the direction of a realist account. For instance, in the context of his discussion of hypergoods, Taylor says: “We sense in the very experience of being moved by some higher good that we are moved by what is good in it rather than that it is valuable because of our reaction [...]. We experience our love for it as a well-founded love” (SS 74). But the crucial issue here is whether such experience of our love (or respect, admiration, etc.) being ‘well-founded’ can be convincingly shown to be the case. To achieve this requires that we argue for a specific moral ontology that in comparison to other possible explanations can best make sense of our moral phenomenology.

It should be observed that in the argument against projectivism considered so far Taylor has in fact appealed more to moral phenomenology than to any specific moral ontology, though by his own account the latter is required if one is to adequately defend a moral realist position. Taylor does in various places gesture towards his own moral ontology – which in important ways depends on his theistic outlook – but he still leaves much to be filled out. I want to try to get clearer on the nature of Taylor’s moral ontology and examine how it might be said to offer a basis for his moral realism.

*Interlude on McDowell’s Quietist Re-Enchantment and Sophisticated Naturalism*

However, before turning to examine Taylor’s moral ontology, I think it is important to first consider the work of John McDowell, who seeks a somewhat similar kind of re-enchantment as Taylor – i.e., a defense of strong evaluative realism against views of total disenchantment – but without articulating any moral ontology. Indeed, he

adopts a ‘quietist’ position in which such articulation is shunned and our responses to values are left ‘as they are’ (though what ‘they are’ is a point of contention).<sup>40</sup> McDowell is also a key representative of what Taylor identifies as a ‘sophisticated’ form of naturalism in ethics that “[understands] our evaluations as among the perceptions of the world and our social existence which are inseparable from our living through and participating in our form of life” (*SS* 67; cf. 346-7).<sup>41</sup> Unlike the scientific form of naturalism behind the projectivist views that Taylor critiques, this sophisticated form affirms the validity and importance of our ‘engaged’ (i.e., first-personal) perspective for properly understanding our ethical life. I think it is important to consider McDowell’s position then because while Taylor’s view certainly has affinities with it, he thinks we also need to go beyond it.<sup>42</sup> In particular, contra McDowell’s quietism, Taylor thinks re-enchantment requires articulation of an adequate moral ontology. Moreover, contra McDowell’s sophisticated naturalism, Taylor believes that a theistic moral ontology is important for re-enchantment. In short, McDowell offers a rival view of what is involved in seeking re-enchantment to that of Taylor and I believe consideration of this rival view will ultimately enable us to better appreciate the significance of Taylor’s position.

It should first be noted that McDowell holds a conception of ethical values that is very much in line with Taylor’s account of strong evaluation. Like Taylor, McDowell recognizes a ‘categorical feature’ in ethical values. He writes: “The ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to

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<sup>40</sup> McDowell thus endorses what Andrew Koppelman calls “naked strong evaluation”, i.e., strong evaluation that is “unsupported by any particular metaphysical claims” (Koppelman 2009, 107).

<sup>41</sup> Taylor discusses McDowell as a key instance of a sophisticated naturalist in Taylor 2003a. Another instance he mentions is Bernard Williams (*SS* 530, n. 28). However, one of the main differences between McDowell and Williams is that the former is a moral realist, while the latter is not. We will see later why Williams is an ethical non-realist. Cf. Rorty 1994a-b; Rosen 1991, 188-94; Gutting 1999, 136-61.

<sup>42</sup> It should be mentioned that there seems to be a lot of mutual influence between Taylor and McDowell, as can be seen in the references to each other’s works.

them” (McDowell 1994, 82; cf. 79, 91; 1998, Essay 4, 196-7). Moreover, he recognizes an ‘incommensurability feature’ in ethical values in that ethical considerations are said to ‘silence’ non-ethical ones (1998, 16-8, 47, 55-6, 90-3, 191-2; cf. 1995, 206). One example that he appeals to is the way in which for the virtuous agent the demand of the virtue of courage can silence or set aside considerations of one’s own safety. What is paramount for the virtuous agent, according to McDowell, is the strong evaluative consideration of ‘the noble’ (1995, 209, 215, 218; 1998, 9-10, 36, 42, 92-3, 169).

Like Taylor, McDowell also seeks a middle way position between projectivism and ‘Platonism’ in defending a realist account of ethics, as we have already seen with his ‘no-priority view’.<sup>43</sup> Taylor and McDowell both maintain that it is only on the basis of our responses to ethical values – i.e., our ‘moral phenomenology’ – that we can argue for and affirm ethical realism. Similar to Taylor’s distinction between disengaged and engaged standpoints, McDowell makes a distinction between two kinds of intelligibility: viz., “the kind that is sought by (as we call it) natural science [i.e., the realm of ‘natural law’], and the kind we find in something when we place it in relation to other occupants of the “logical space of reasons” [i.e., the domain of meaning]” (1994, 70; cf. 71-2).

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<sup>43</sup> It is important to note that McDowell distinguishes between two kinds of ‘platonism’: ‘rampant platonism’ and ‘naturalized platonism’ (He uses the lower case to suggest a resemblance to Plato rather than a connection to anything Plato specifically says; see McDowell 1994, 77-8, 84-5, 87-8, 91-2, 95, 115-6, 123-6). McDowell writes: “In rampant platonism, the rational structure within which meaning comes into view is independent of anything merely human, so that the capacity of our minds to resonate to it looks occult or magical. Naturalized platonism is platonistic in that the structure of the space of reasons has a sort of autonomy; it is not derivative from, or reflective of, truths about human beings that are capturable independently of having that structure in view. But this platonism is not rampant: the structure of the space of reasons is not constituted in splendid isolation from anything merely human. The demands of reason are essentially such that a human upbringing can open a human being’s eyes to them” (ibid., 92). On the previous page he says: “The idea [of naturalized platonism] is that the dictates of reason are there anyway, whether or not one’s eyes are opened to them; that is what happens in a proper upbringing.” McDowell accepts naturalized platonism, while rejecting rampant platonism. I follow Taylor in using the term ‘Platonism’, which refers to what McDowell calls rampant platonism.



In his middle way defense of ethical realism, McDowell also makes a similar argument to the one expressed in Taylor's 'BA principle'. Drawing on the metaphor of Neurath's ship, which has to be rebuilt while at sea, he writes:

[One] can reflect only from the midst of the way of thinking one is reflecting about. So if one entertains the thought that bringing one's current ethical outlook to bear on a situation alerts one to demands that are real, one need not be envisaging any sort of validation other than a Neurathian one. The thought is that this application of one's ethical outlook would stand up to the outlook's own reflective self-scrutiny. (1994, 81; cf. 82-4; 1995, 213-8; 1998, 36-44, 187-97)

According to McDowell, what is needed in order to recognize such ethical values is to acquire the conceptual capacities that can open our eyes to "the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons" (ibid., 82). The rational demands of ethics, he says, "are not alien to the contingencies of our life as human beings. [...] ordinary upbringing can shape the actions and thoughts of human beings in a way that brings these demands into view" (ibid., 83). The resulting habits of action and thought are what he calls 'second nature' (ibid., 84). Against scientific naturalism, which attempts to understand everything in 'absolute' terms (i.e., independent of our experience of the meaning of things for us), McDowell defends a more sophisticated version of naturalism, viz., a 'naturalism of second nature', which can account for the space of reasons – i.e., the domain of meaning – in terms of the development of our human potentialities as rational, linguistic animals within a particular 'form of life' (ibid., 84-95, 125-6; 1998, 60-5, 206-7). He writes: "We tend to be forgetful of the very idea of second nature. I am suggesting that if we can recapture that idea we can keep nature as it were *partially enchanted*, but without lapsing into pre-scientific superstition or a rampant platonism" (1994, 85; my emphasis).

Taylor certainly agrees with McDowell regarding the importance of our upbringing and development as human beings within a form of life for acquiring the

ability to move within the space of reasons (or the domain of meaning) (see *HAL*, Chs. 2, 4, 9-10; *SS* 32-40). However, he believes much more is needed if we are to adequately re-enchant the world, i.e., defend the validity of the ‘enchantment’ or strong goods that can be found in our being-in-the-world. As we have mentioned, what is needed is the articulation of an adequate moral ontology, i.e., an ontological background picture that can make sense of our strong evaluative responses.

This whole issue of moral ontology goes largely unaddressed in McDowell’s work. It seems to me the issue gets lost in his Neurathian critique of attempts to justify an ethical outlook from a standpoint outside of that outlook (see McDowell 1994, 79-84; 1995; 1998, 12-22, 35-44, Essay 9). Taylor is of course in agreement with McDowell that justification for an ethical outlook must be internal to that outlook, i.e., based on our responses to strong goods. But he thinks that from within an ethical outlook we must appeal to an ontological background picture that can make sense of our strong evaluative responses and which is in fact implicit in or presupposed by those responses.

McDowell does not entirely avoid the issue of ontology insofar as he challenges the more reductive or scientific ontologies with his account of the role of second nature in human life. However, while he sees the capacity to recognize ethical demands as arising out of our upbringing and development within a particular form of life, McDowell does not seek to articulate an ontological background picture that can make sense of the demands themselves. Indeed, he often speaks as though it is simply a matter of developing a ‘sensitivity’ to certain situations in which one can just see, e.g., that courageous acts are required in certain fearful situations, kind acts are required in situations where someone is in need, and so forth (see McDowell 1994, Lecture IV; 1998,

Essays 1, 3, 9). But why courage and kindness should be seen as virtues – i.e., as part of a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life – and why other human beings are worthy of our concern is left unexplained. Although McDowell affirms the importance of the strong evaluative category of ‘the noble’, the question arises whether his sophisticated naturalism can really make sense of the notion of the ‘incomparably higher’ (i.e., the ‘incommensurability feature’ of strong goods). According to Taylor, sophisticated naturalism “still can balk at the full “reality” of the intrinsically higher, in the name of a naturalistic, evolutionary account of the human animal and its life form” (Taylor 2003a, 316).<sup>44</sup> But, he continues: “we have not discharged our entire debt to phenomenology once we have laid the ghost of microreductionism to rest. There remains the tension between the phenomenology of the incommensurably higher and a naturalist ontology which has difficulty finding a place for this” (ibid.).<sup>45</sup>

McDowell does speak of the need for reflective self-scrutiny of our ethical outlook, but it is not clear what exactly this involves beyond seeking a kind of internal coherence (viz., in avoiding contradictions). It seems that the most he wants to say is that if our ethical outlook “hangs together” in a “coherent scheme of life” then “that is surely some reason to suppose that the perceptions [of the ethical outlook] are veridical” (McDowell 1995, 214; cf. 1998, 21-2). However, this judgment of the veridicality of our ethical outlook is quite underdetermined without an articulation of an ontological

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<sup>44</sup> Taylor says that he is not entirely clear where McDowell stands on the issue of this kind of sophisticated naturalism that appeals to a “naturalistic, evolutionary account of the human animal and its life form” (Taylor 2003a, 316). It is not that Taylor doubts that McDowell affirms a sophisticated naturalist view, but the question is just about what kind exactly (the question arises it seems because of McDowell’s lack of articulation of a moral ontology). But the above quote seems to be Taylor’s best sense of McDowell’s position, which is perhaps suggested by McDowell’s frequent use of Stanley Cavell’s opaque phrase “whirl of organism” (ibid., 312; see McDowell 1998, 206-7).

<sup>45</sup> Shortly I will suggest that for Taylor the incomparably higher makes sense in light of a theistic teleology. I will also contend that it can be difficult to sustain a sense of the incomparably higher against the backdrop of cosmic purposelessness, which it seems McDowell’s sophisticated naturalism affirms.

background picture that can make sense of it. Indeed, we might wonder why for McDowell articulating such an ontological background picture is not part of what is required to achieve internal coherence. This underdetermination in fact seems to be a necessary feature of his Wittgensteinian ‘quietist’ position that seeks to remain content with the meanings that arise out of a particular form of life without asking questions about the ontological background picture that can make sense of them (see 1994, 86, 93-5; 1998, 180, 183-4, 195, 197, 277-8). In other words, there is an attempt to leave these experiences ‘as they are’ without seeking to articulate any deeper basis for them. However, I think Taylor has convincingly shown that certain ontological background pictures are in fact implicit in or presupposed by our strong evaluative responses (e.g., of respect for human beings) as what ultimately makes sense of them. If this is right then a position that is truly quietist with respect to such ontological background pictures would have to involve a sort of willed inarticulacy about them. Moreover, such a position leaves an ethical outlook unstable insofar as challenges can arise with respect to what ultimately makes sense of it and this could invite a projectivist explanation. Indeed, since we become aware of ethical demands through our upbringing into a particular form of life, one might regard our experience of these demands – apart from any deeper explanation – as mere cultural prejudice. Thus, if we accept Taylor’s point about the importance of ontological background pictures we can say that McDowell’s defense of ethical realism on the basis of his ‘no-priority view’ is only a partial defense. A full defense requires the articulation of a moral ontology that can make sense of our moral phenomenology.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> In the terms used in a recent essay by Taylor, we can say that McDowell wants to remain in the ‘interstitial’ domain – i.e., the domain of our being-in-the-world (to use Heidegger’s phrase) or our engagement in a particular ‘form of life’ (to use Wittgenstein’s phrase) where ethical demands arise for us – while denying the need for an ‘anchored’ domain – i.e., an ontological background picture that is

*Taylor's Moral Ontology: A Theistic Teleological Perspective*

In his discussion of moral ontology at the beginning of *Sources* Taylor notes that in the modern world the articulation and defense of one's moral ontology can be "very difficult and controversial" (SS 9). This is due in part to the pluralistic nature of modern society in which any attempt to articulate and defend a given moral ontology can be contested, even where there is agreement about particular moral judgments, such as that human life should be respected. Moreover, for many people the moral ontology behind their moral phenomenology remains largely implicit and underexplored. This leaves open the possibility that there could be "a lack of fit between what people as it were officially and consciously believe [...] on the one hand, and what they need to make sense of some of their moral reactions, on the other" (SS 9). Taylor believes this is in fact the case for those who adopt a reductive naturalist stance towards their moral reactions, e.g., when they offer a sociobiological explanation of their moral responses of respect for human life. But it could also be the case in less reductive approaches as well. When there is such a lack of fit between moral phenomenology and our ontological background picture this requires that we either revise our moral phenomenology to fit our moral ontology (or lack thereof), or else revise our moral ontology to fit our moral phenomenology (see SA 609).

On Taylor's view it is part of the modern predicament that many people's moral beliefs have a "tentative, searching, uncertain nature". Although many people may not be attracted to reductive naturalist explanations for their strong evaluative responses since they believe such responses do "show them to be committed to some adequate basis",

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appealed to in order to make sense of our ethical outlook (see Taylor 2011c, 119). But Taylor writes: "I think it is important to make the distinction interstitial/anchored – and also to vindicate the non-projective status of the interstitial – not because this neatly tells us what we should drop and what we should retrieve, but rather as a prelude to defining again what I see as the inescapable place for the anchored" (ibid., 119).

nevertheless, they are “perplexed and uncertain when it comes to saying what this basis is” (SS 10). Taylor further maintains that many people would not feel ready to make a final choice between theistic and secular ontologies as the grounds for their strong evaluative responses. In light of the fact that most of us, as Taylor puts it, “are still in the process of groping for answers here”, the task of articulation thus goes beyond merely “formulating what people already implicitly but unproblematically acknowledge”, or “showing what people really rely on in the teeth of their ideological denials.” What is needed is to show that “one or another ontology is in fact the only adequate basis for our moral responses, whether we recognize this or not” (SS 10). As an example of this kind of argument Taylor specifically mentions Dostoevsky’s thesis: “If God does not exist, then everything is permitted”. Acknowledging the difficulty of this level of argument, Taylor says: “I will probably not be able to venture very far out on this terrain in the following. It will be sufficient, and very valuable, to be able to show something about the tentative, hesitating, and fuzzy commitments that we moderns rely on. The map of our moral world, however full of gaps, erasures, and blurrings, is interesting enough” (SS 10-1).

Taylor goes on in Parts II-V of *Sources* to examine the ontological background pictures that stand behind some of “the moral and spiritual intuitions of our contemporaries” regarding life goods such as benevolence, justice, freedom, the affirmation of ordinary life, and authenticity. Besides the original theistic framework, Taylor is especially interested in examining the modern development of non-theistic moral ontologies along what he describes as two important ‘frontiers’ of moral exploration: the first frontier – influenced in large part by the modern scientific revolution – focuses on how the powers of disengaged reason in a totally disenchanted

universe can function as a moral source; the second frontier – stemming primarily out of the Romantic tradition – focuses on the way in which nature, internal and external to us, can function as a moral source. Taylor’s reason for describing these as ‘frontiers’ of moral exploration is that he believes that “they are inherently contestable in a way that the theistic outlook is not” (*SS* 317). While theism is contested in regard to its truth, Taylor claims: “no one doubts that those who embrace it will find a fully adequate moral source in it” (*ibid.*). By contrast, the two non-theistic views concerning the dignity of disengaged reason and the goodness of nature can be questioned as to their adequacy as moral sources. Taylor sums up this point as follows: “The nagging question for modern theism is simply: Is there really a God? The threat at the margin of modern non-theistic humanism is: So what?” (*ibid.*).<sup>47</sup> It is particularly this challenge of inadequacy to non-theistic sources then that turns them into frontiers of exploration in which there are “continually renewed attempts to define what the dignity that inheres in us as rational or expressive beings, or the good involved in our immersion in nature, consists in” (*ibid.*).

Taylor’s central claim here that non-theistic sources are contested as to their adequacy in a way that a theistic outlook is not has made for some controversy among commentators on his work.<sup>48</sup> What is particularly striking is Taylor’s claim above that “no one doubts that those who embrace it will find a fully adequate moral source in it.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> More recently, Taylor writes: “Morality without God may be no longer inconceivable, even though still not fully credible for us” (*SA* 545). This is offered as part of an explanation for why some people remain open to the transcendent.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Williams 1990; Lane 1992, 48, 55-6; Skinner 1991, 147-50; Kymlicka 1991, 181, n. 17; Larmore 1991, 161; Schneewind 1991, 426; Braybrooke 1992, 102; Kitchen 1999, 48-9.

<sup>49</sup> As Ruth Abbey notes, there has been some confusion surrounding this claim among commentators on Taylor’s work (Abbey 2000, 32). Some have interpreted it as saying that even non-theists should recognize theism as a fully adequate moral source, which they find objectionable (see Skinner 1991, 147-8; Kymlicka 1991, 181, n. 17; Lane 1992, 48; Williams 1990). Abbey says the confusion here may be due to the fact that Taylor runs two points together in his claim: the first is about how theists experience their theism as a fully adequate moral source; the second is about how this experience is viewed by non-theists

It is noteworthy that he does not actually do much here to explain how exactly this is so. Moreover, on the occasions when he does discuss the importance of theism for our ethical life he often puts forward his views in rather tentative terms, e.g., in terms of ‘hunches’.<sup>50</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction, this can perhaps give rise to the suspicion that Taylor is just “whistling in the dark”, as Quentin Skinner has put it (Skinner 1994, 48; cf. Kitchen 1999, 49; O’Hagan 1993, 81); i.e., offering a statement of ‘blind faith’ (faith without any reasons to support it). However, Taylor does offer reasons for his ‘hunches’ about the importance of theism for ethics and I also think his view can in fact be filled out so as to provide a more compelling position. I want to try to do so here with respect to how Taylor’s theism provides support for moral realism.<sup>51</sup>

I need to first clarify something here about ‘moral sources’. As we saw in the previous chapter, Taylor often uses the term ‘moral source’ to refer to the way in which a constitutive good is a *source of moral motivation*, i.e., the way in which it motivates us to do and be good. However, I think this needs to be seen as connected to another sense of a ‘moral source’, which refers to the moral ontology or ontological background picture that makes sense of our strong evaluative responses or moral phenomenology and thus is a *source of moral intelligibility* (see *SS* 3-11; *EA*, Ch. III). Indeed, the above discussion of

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(Abbey 2000, 32). She then notes that Taylor has gone on to clarify that he was only trying to make the first point, as he writes: “It was a claim about how different views are understood by their protagonists, and not about the value of one view somehow being recognized by all” (Taylor 1991a, 241). However, it seems that in claiming that the question of adequacy arises for non-theists in a way it does not for theists Taylor clearly means for this to count as a point in favor of theism as a moral source (even if it can be questioned as to its truth). Moreover, as I have said, he does provide some argument in support of his view that theism can provide a more adequate moral source than a non-theistic view. I will be trying to fill out this argument here and in Chapter VI (and to some extent in Chapter V). Now, Abbey also points out that some commentators have objected to the adequacy of theism as a moral source, especially in light of the problem of evil (see Schneewind 1991, 426; Rosen 1991, 190-4). I will discuss Taylor’s theistic response to the problem of evil in Chapter V. As will be clear, I think the problem of evil is a problem for everyone and the question is what perspective provides us with the best resources for addressing this problem.

<sup>50</sup> See *SS* 342; 515-21; *CM* 30-5; Taylor 2003a, 316-20; *SA* 589, 607-9, 693-703.

<sup>51</sup> In later chapters I will discuss the importance of Taylor’s theism for his view of the good life (Chs. IV-V) and for making sense of an ethic of universal concern and motivating us to live up to it (Ch. VI).



the three main divisions of moral sources in the modern world seems to appeal more to this second sense of a moral source (see also *SS* 495-6). We can see this in the fact that they are ontological views that can be the basis of different constitutive goods: viz., a theistic ontology can provide the basis for constitutive goods related to God, our own potential (as made in the image of God), other human beings (as made in the image of God), and the natural world (as created good by God); the naturalist view of the powers of disengaged reason in a totally disenchanting universe can be the basis of constitutive goods with respect to our own potential and other human beings; the Romantic view of nature internal and external to us can be the basis of constitutive goods with respect to our own potential, other human beings, and the (non-human) natural world. But we can also see that the two senses of a ‘moral source’ are necessarily connected in that constitutive goods function as sources of moral motivation in virtue of being part of a moral ontology that is a source of moral intelligibility, i.e., it makes sense of our moral phenomenology. This is why we need to explore the way in which Taylor’s theism provides support for moral realism in order to explore why he thinks theism provides a fully adequate moral source, which can be taken in both senses. Let us now turn to do so.

It should be said at the outset that I do not think Taylor holds a position as strong as Dostoevsky’s thesis: “If God does not exist, then everything is permitted”.<sup>52</sup> Taylor does believe that the non-theistic sources mentioned above do have some important appeal, but he questions whether they are *fully* adequate as moral sources. He wants to affirm aspects of these sources from his own theistic standpoint. Indeed, he sees these non-theistic sources as having their historical roots in Judaeo-Christian faith and he

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<sup>52</sup> The atheistic character Ivan in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* makes this claim. While Taylor (and many others) attribute this claim to Dostoevsky himself, I think there is reason to doubt whether he actually endorses it as it stands. However, I cannot pursue this issue here.

believes they can be said to have a “continuing dependence” on it insofar as their full adequacy depends on it (*SS* 319; cf. Morgan 1994).

So how should we understand the way in which Taylor’s theism provides a basis for his moral realism? It is important to note that there are in fact two main traditions of theistic ethics, which are incompatible with each other. On one tradition, known as ‘voluntarism’ or ‘divine command ethics’, what is good and bad is claimed to be so simply in virtue of the fact that it has been commanded by God, whose commands we have reason to obey because of the promise of reward for doing so and the threat of punishment for not doing so. One thing that some people find attractive about this view is that the identification of morality with the will of God makes the objectivity of morality a relatively straightforward matter. Though of course we must believe that God exists and also believe we know the medium through which he has revealed his commands. The main objection to this view is that for many people it does not capture their sense of goodness and badness. For instance, many people believe it is good to help human beings in need because their dignity as human beings makes them worthy of help, rather than just because God has commanded us to do so. Moreover, divine command ethics also seems to allow that God could command things we find to be morally wrong (e.g., murder). In short, it seems to reduce ethics to simply being a matter of what someone with the most power (*viz.*, God) happens to want and can enforce others to follow, rather than being a matter of what we find to be genuinely good and worth pursuing in its own right (see Rachels and Rachels 2007, 54-8). The most well-known historical representatives of this view are William of Ockham, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and, in certain respects, John Locke. However, this view seems to be more widespread in popular

religious consciousness than it is among theistic philosophers and theologians, though it is often assumed to be what theists are committed to by those who are critical of a theistic basis for ethics.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, as we saw last chapter, Taylor's own theistic basis for ethics is sometimes wrongly assumed to be some form of divine command ethics, which displays a lack of careful reading of his work since on numerous occasions he has rejected voluntaristic understandings of the good, theistic or otherwise.<sup>54</sup>

On the other tradition of theistic ethics, often known as 'natural law ethics' or theistic teleological ethics, good and bad are not based simply on the commands of God, but rather God wills on the basis of what he already knows to be good and bad and does so for the sake of the good. According to Aquinas – who is perhaps the most well-known representative of this perspective – goodness is said to be 'convertible' with being, which means that it expresses the aspect of the desirability of being (see *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 5, in Aquinas 1948; cf. MacDonald, ed. 1991). Such a view finds support, e.g., in our desire for self-preservation, in our aspirations towards perfecting our human capacities, in the experience of 'fulfillment' or 'fullness', and in our love for other beings whereby we experience a greater 'fullness of being' insofar as we affectively identify with them. On the natural law view then God is said to create the world such that each created thing is directed towards its good by a 'natural law' or teleological directedness of its nature. In

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<sup>53</sup> See Schneewind 1998 for an account of the rise of secular moral philosophy in the modern West as a response to voluntarism.

<sup>54</sup> See *HAL*, 29-35; *DC* 14; *SS*, Chs. 14-6; *SA* Chs. 6-7, 582-9, 773-6; Taylor 1994e, 16-23. For this problematic reading of Taylor see, e.g., Laitinen 2008, 270, 277 (discussed last chapter); Fraser 2007, 57; Connolly 2004, 176; Smith 2002, 114; Redhead 2002, 191-2; White 2000, 46, 51-2, 63; Braybrooke 1994, 103, 105; Larmore 1991, 161; Koppelman 2009, 107. To take one egregious example, Mark Redhead writes: "What is most important [for Taylor] is not the actual substance of [God's] will but that one actually strive to uphold it because it is God's will and not one's own" (Redhead 2002, 191). He goes on to say: "To acknowledge the transcendent [...] is to acknowledge the capricious will of God" (ibid., 192). Again, there is no basis in Taylor's text for such assertions, but quite the opposite. It seems such voluntarist readings are simply imputing to Taylor an unattractive position that he explicitly rejects out of a lack of understanding and perhaps a lack of sympathy for Taylor's theistic worldview. At any rate, it is a straw-man caricature.

the case of human beings, this involves a view of human nature as orientated towards the good and able to grasp what this good consists in so as to be able to consciously seek to realize it in one's life. On this view the objectivity of morality is located not merely in the will of God, but rather in an objectively good purpose for human life. This view has been the most dominant view in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and it has been especially dominant in the Catholic tradition. I also believe that broadly speaking it is the one that Taylor, as a Catholic, is best understood as holding.

Although I believe it is clear that Taylor in some sense holds a view that can be described as 'teleological', nevertheless, the manner in which this is so, its connection to his theism, and its importance for his defense of moral realism are issues that need to be filled out since he is typically not very explicit about these matters. Yet, it is also true that much of what he has written can perhaps best be read as pointing towards such a view.

Consider for instance the remarks on this point by Taylor's teacher Isaiah Berlin:

The chief difference between my outlook and that of Charles Taylor is that he is basically a teleologist – both as a Christian and as a Hegelian. He truly believes, as so many in the history of thought have done and still do, that human beings, and perhaps the entire universe, have a basic purpose – whether created by God, as religious Christians and Jews believe, or by nature, as Aristotle and his followers, and perhaps Hegel (whose attitude on this point seems to me somewhat ambivalent), have taught. Consequently, everything that he has written is concerned with what people have believed, striven after, developed into, lived in the light of, and, finally, the ultimate goals towards which human beings as such are by their very natures determined to move. (Berlin 1994, 1)

In his response to Berlin's remarks Taylor acknowledges that "the differences run very deep metaphysically and theologically" (Taylor 1994b, 213), but he does not say much to fill out the exact nature of his teleological outlook.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Fergus Kerr remarks that it is striking that Taylor "says nothing about Berlin's view of Christian theology as a causally predictable deterministic march to some predestined goal" (Kerr 1997, 152).

To get clearer on the manner in which Taylor is a ‘teleologist’ I think it is important to distinguish between two different kinds of teleological explanation that Taylor has been concerned with defending throughout his career. We can see this starting with his first book, *The Explanation of Behaviour*, where Taylor’s primary aim is to argue against the theory of behaviorism by defending one form of teleological explanation, viz., that which has to do with explaining the actions of humans and other animals in terms of their conscious purposes or intentions. At the outset of the book Taylor states that one of the reasons why he is concerned with defending this form of teleological explanation is because it is of central importance for ethics, especially for the kind of ethical reflection that he thinks is needed: viz., that which is exemplified in the work of Aristotle and “which attempts to discover what men should do and how they should behave by a study of human nature and its fundamental goals” (*EB* 4; cf. *SA* 589). According to Taylor, the central premise underlying this kind of ethical reflection is that “there is a form of life which is higher or more properly human than others, and that the dim intuition of the ordinary man to this effect can be vindicated in its substance or else corrected in its contents by a deeper understanding of human nature” (*EB* 4).

In speaking of a “study of human nature and its fundamental goals” Taylor is referring here to a second kind of teleological explanation. In contrast to the first kind of teleological explanation that seeks to explain particular actions in terms of an agent’s conscious purposes or intentions, this second kind seeks to explain something’s ‘nature’ through identifying its ‘fundamental goals’, expressed in terms of natural inclinations, tendencies, potencies, and the like. In the case of human beings we might say that this

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However, I think it is clear from Taylor’s writings that he does not hold such a determinist view (see Taylor 1985d, 384-5, which is quoted below).

second kind of teleological explanation goes deeper because explaining the innate fundamental goals of human nature can be an important part of explaining why someone has the particular conscious purposes that they do (though of course there will be other factors as well, such as environment, particular psychological dispositions, the character of one's rational deliberation, etc.). Moreover, from a first-personal standpoint we can take as our conscious purposes certain fundamental goals of human nature, as one does in the mode of ethical reflection Taylor describes above where we adopt such goals so as to achieve "a form of life which is higher or more properly human than others".

As discussed in the Introduction, for Taylor the "study of human nature and its fundamental goals" is an important part of his philosophical anthropology, which he says "tries to define certain fundamental features about human beings, their place in nature, their defining capacities (language is obviously central to these), and their most powerful or basic motivations, goals, needs, and aspirations" (Taylor 2005, 35; cf. *EB* 3-4). Taylor is thus committed to defending a robust account of a human nature and this can be seen in his attempt to identify certain 'human constants', such as that human beings are: (1) embodied agents who are purposefully engaged with the world and thus experience the world as having significance for them; (2) expressive language animals whose experience and identity is constituted through linguistic self-interpretation; (3) social animals who are drawn to interpersonal communion and whose self-interpretation is dialogically constituted; (4) strong evaluators who are orientated in 'moral space' as they seek fullness or meaning and whose identity is constituted by a narrative understanding of

their sense of ‘placement’ with respect to their view of the good; and (5) religious animals who have a natural bent towards ‘transcendence’.<sup>56</sup>

We should note at this point that it is this second kind of teleological explanation involved in a study of human nature and its fundamental goals that Berlin primarily has in mind when he refers to Taylor as a teleologist. Moreover, it seems to be the primary way in which Taylor understands himself to be a teleologist. We see this in an exchange with William Connolly in which Connolly calls into question the teleological nature of Taylor’s outlook and to which he responds:

[What] is meant by “teleological philosophy”? If we mean some inescapable design at work inexorably in history, a la Hegel, then of course I am not committed to it. But if we mean by this expression that there is a distinction between distorted and authentic self-understanding, that the latter can in a sense be said to follow *a direction in being*, I do indeed espouse such a view. And that makes a big part of my “ontology” of the human person. (Taylor 1985d, 384-5; my emphasis; cf. 1994e, 17; Connolly 1985, 375)

What is especially important for our purposes here is to understand why this sense of teleology – understood in terms of “a direction in being” – is central to Taylor’s defense of moral realism. Taylor says in this passage that such a teleological view is a big part of his “ontology of the human person”, but what we need to see is how it is important for the moral ontology that underlies his moral realism.

In the discussion above I noted that for Taylor a proper account of moral ontology has two sides. On the one hand, articulating our moral ontology means identifying what it is about an object that makes it worthy of our respect, concern, love, admiration, etc. In

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<sup>56</sup> Recall that this non-exhaustive list of human constants was already mentioned in the Introduction. I should mention that the relationship between the ‘historical’ and the ‘fundamental’ or ‘essential’ aspects of human life has been the subject of a fair amount of commentary on Taylor’s work. See, e.g., Abbey 2000, Ch. 2; Smith 2002, 87, 100-1, 133-5, 140, 235, 237-42; Laitinen 2008, Ch. 2; Ricoeur 2007; Walker 2007, 149-154; Flanagan 1996, 154; Kitchen 1999, 34; and Olafson 1994. I follow Abbey, Smith, and Laitinen in regarding the ‘historical’ and the ‘essential’ as being compatible and important features of Taylor’s work.

other words, we must specify here the constitutive goods that are operative in our moral phenomenology. On the other hand, articulating our moral ontology means spelling out what our strong evaluative responses concerning life goods and constitutive goods say about “ourselves and our situation in the world” (SS 8-9). For Taylor these two-sides of moral ontology are inseparable since each is needed for making sense of the other. While Taylor often tends to focus on the first side of an account of a moral ontology, i.e., the specification of constitutive goods, nevertheless, I believe it can be seen that it is in fact the second side of articulating what our strong evaluative responses say about “ourselves and our situation in the world” that is especially important for a defense of moral realism. Moreover, it is here that teleology plays a fundamental role, though I will discuss later how it can also play an important role in regard to our articulation of constitutive goods.

The basic point is as follows: If Taylor’s ‘middle way’ of arguing for moral realism on the basis of our ‘deepest moral responses’ is to be successful, I believe this will only be because human beings are similarly constituted so as to be able to recognize the same objects as being in the same way worthy of respect, concern, love, admiration, and the like as the ‘best account’ of our undistorted, most authentic human experience.<sup>57</sup> For this to be true it requires that human beings share the same teleological directedness that makes sense of why the proper recognition of constitutive goods and life goods would enable the achievement of “a form of life which is higher or more properly human

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<sup>57</sup> This is suggested in a couple statements of the no-priority view. Taylor writes: “an essential condition of the existence of such [value] properties is that there are human beings in the world, with a certain form of life, and kinds of awareness, and certain patterns of caring” (SS 68). Likewise: “ethics tries to define the shape of the human moral predicament. But there would not be such a thing unless human beings existed. Once we exist, certain ways of being are higher than others in virtue of the way we are (the ‘Aristotelian’ component); certain demands are made on us by other human beings in virtue of the way both we and they are (the ‘moral’ component). I would want to add: certain demands are made on us by our world in virtue of what we are and how we fit into it (the ‘ecological’ component). And further, I believe that certain goods arise out of our relation to God (the ‘theological’ component)” (Taylor 1991a, 245).



than others". The corollary of this is that if human beings were not similarly constituted in this strong teleological sense, then we would lack an objective basis for arriving at shared agreement about strong goods.

At this point, however, one might wonder what Taylor's theism has to do with any of this. Indeed, one might ask: is it not enough for us to be able to establish that human beings do indeed seem to share on the whole the same teleological directedness?<sup>58</sup> In order to show the difference that theism might be said to make on this issue I would like to turn to the writings of another theistic philosopher, viz., John Cottingham, whose work helps to fill out what I believe is implicit in Taylor's view or at least the direction it is best seen as pointing towards.<sup>59</sup>

According to Cottingham, one of the most important aspects of theism is that in the face of our human vulnerability and finitude it can be seen to offer a 'home' for our deepest aspirations to goodness, truth, and beauty as enduring values (Cottingham 2009a, 5). In other words, theism allows for us to interpret our natural aspirations to goodness, truth, and beauty as part of a purposeful cosmic outlook that is directed towards such enduring values, rather than being set against the backdrop of cosmic purposelessness. "So far from being a cosmic accident or by-product of blind forces," Cottingham says, on a theistic interpretation of reality "our lives would be seen as having a purpose – that of attuning ourselves to a creative order that is inherently good. Our deepest responses would be seen as pointing us towards such a goal, and our deepest fulfilment to be attained in realising it" (Cottingham 2003, 62; cf. 2005, 51-3). Thus, even if we can identify a teleological directedness towards certain goals inherent in our human nature

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<sup>58</sup> This is an important part of the project of contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics; see Foot 2001; Hursthouse 1999a; MacIntyre 1999; Midgley 1995; 2011a-b; Nussbaum 1995; 2006.

<sup>59</sup> Cottingham acknowledges a debt to Taylor's work in Cottingham 2005, ix.

(e.g., love/communion, rationality, creativity, etc.) it makes a difference for our sense of their importance whether we see them in light of a wider cosmic purpose or not. The question arises here for a non-theistic ethical viewpoint of whether one's sense of a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life attained through fulfilling certain fundamental goals of human nature is not to some extent undermined when our human nature is seen merely as "a cosmic accident or by-product of blind forces". Perhaps one might argue that it is not, but this seems to be at least one way in which we might understand how the question of the adequacy of a non-theistic ethical perspective could arise in a way it does not for a theistic ethical perspective.<sup>60</sup>

Another way, I believe, is identified by Cottingham when he claims that a theistic teleological outlook makes a difference for the kind of reasons we are able to offer for what we regard as the fundamental goals of our human nature that should be realized if we are to achieve "a form of life which is higher or more properly human than others". "In an entirely godless universe," he writes,

[...] there would be no divine teleology, no supremely intelligent and benevolent purpose, to underwrite our aspirations to moral goodness. Instead, we would just be members of a species, who, at a given epoch of evolution, had a particular collection of characteristics and potentialities. Now perhaps some individuals would have more fun developing some of those capacities (for cruelty, let us say), while others would be happier developing others (for generosity, say). Relative to their desires or inclinations, one could say that some had 'reason' to choose cruel

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<sup>60</sup> Cottingham writes: "To make our ethical home within an entirely closed and contingent cosmos, and pretend that we are wholly comfortable so doing, seems a violation of our human nature. The options now seem severely limited. One would be a kind of ethical quietism [à la McDowell], the attempt at a sort of willed complacency in the face of brute facticity. Another, equally evasive, would be the attempt to detach ourselves from our plight and pretend it doesn't really matter much – the strategy of irony [à la Rorty]. A third option would be defiance – the kind of response pioneered by Nietzsche and later perfected by Camus" (Cottingham 2008, 36). To this he contrasts the standpoint of religious hope: "For those who can espouse it, hope enables us to reach forward, beyond the contingent circumstances of our situation, and aspire to align ourselves with objective, non-contingent values that represent the best that humanity can become" (ibid., 37). I believe Taylor is getting at something like this when he asks whether our sense of the significance of human life "is best explained in a quite non-theistic, non-cosmic, purely immanent-human fashion", and replies that his 'hunch' is that the answer is 'no' (SS 342). I will return to discuss the issues raised here more in Chapter V when examining the place of 'transcendence' in human life.

acts (a subjective, or instrumental reason, as it were), while others had ‘reason’ to choose generous acts. But considering the matter independently of the contingent desires of the creatures in question, there would be, so far as I can see, no satisfactory way of assigning to some features of their possible actions the objective property of providing a reason (let alone a conclusive reason) for the agents to act in a certain way. (Cottingham 2005, 53)

When Cottingham speaks here of a ‘conclusive reason’ he means essentially the same thing as what Taylor means by the ‘categorical feature’ of strong goods – i.e., strong goods are normative for our desires rather than contingent upon them. In regard to such conclusive reasons, Cottingham’s basic claim is as follows: “Only if the universe has a moral teleology behind it will moral goodness or righteousness really exist – as something we have conclusive reason to choose – rather than merely dissolving away into features that are suitable for furthering [...] whatever purposes we may happen to have set for ourselves” (Cottingham 2009a, 41-2; cf. 2003, 71-3; 2005, 56).

Apart from a theistic teleological perspective, Cottingham argues, what it seems we are left with is a conception of ethics that is ‘radically contingent’, as Bernard Williams has put it – i.e., dependent on the contingencies of our personal, cultural, and evolutionary history (Williams 2002, 20; cf. Cottingham 2005, 55; 2008; 2009a, 42-5).<sup>61</sup> There is perhaps a weaker moral objectivity possible here if as a contingent matter of fact human beings happen to share more or less the same teleological directedness in the form

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<sup>61</sup> In addition to Williams there are a growing number of philosophers who recognize and embrace the ‘radical contingency’ of ethics. Cottingham mentions David Wiggins as an important example, from whom he cites the following passage: “In philosophy at it is, there is a tendency for a first-order morality to be conceived as a structured array of propositions or judgments. But [it is better] to conceive of such an ethic more dispositionally, as a nexus of distinctive sensibilities, cares, and concerns that are expressed in distinctive patterns of emotional and practical response. [...] [Such] a nexus will be conceived by a neo-Humean genealogist or aetiologist as something with a prehistory and a history as well as a present and a possible future” (Wiggins 2006, 236; cf. Cottingham 2008, 32). Rosalind Hursthouse writes: “If things had been otherwise [regarding how our human nature happens to be constituted], ethics would not exist, or would be unimaginably different” (Hursthouse 1999a, 264). Another important example of affirming contingency in ethics can be found in Richard Rorty’s *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Rorty 1989). Among commentators on Taylor’s work, see: Rosen 1991, 192-4; Flanagan 1996, 160, Ch. 12; Gutting 1999, 137-41, 154-61.

of natural inclinations or tendencies that give rise to similar moral responses. But this is quite different from the kind of stronger moral objectivity that is rooted in a theistic moral teleology and which is able to offer conclusive reasons. Indeed, Williams says: “This sense of contingency can seem to be in tension with something that our ethical ideas themselves demand, a recognition of their authority” (Williams 2002, 21).

Likewise, when discussing ‘self-authorizing’ views of ethics – including that of Isaiah Berlin, who accepts the contingency of ethics (see Berlin 2000, 242) – Taylor says:

[How] coherent is this view of the creation of meaning and value in the face of the void? [...] Can the values we take as binding really be invented? Or in the less radical version of Berlin, where we admit that they emerge from our past and our identity, what does it mean to endorse them in their temporality and relativity? Of course, I see that my standard for a good human life has no application before or after there are humans. [...] But that doesn’t prevent me from thinking that these standards are rooted in what we are, even in human nature, to use the traditional expression, and that they need to be sought after, discovered, better defined, rather than being endorsed. Moreover, what are we to make of the aura surrounding these standards, the fact that they command my admiration and allegiance? That is, after all, what the references to God and the cosmos were attempting to make sense of. It is not at all clear that Humeans, Kantians, let alone Nietzscheans, can offer a more convincing account of this than the traditional ones. (SA 589; cf. Taylor 2003a, 316-7; SS 340-7)

We can see here then another way in which the question of the adequacy of a non-theistic ethical perspective can arise in a way it does not for a theistic ethical perspective.

I think Cottingham’s case for the difference that a theistic teleological framework makes for ethics is quite compelling.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, it is plausible to believe that something like this is implicit in Taylor’s own defense of a theistic basis for moral realism, or at least it seems to depend on it. While so far I have been discussing the difference that a theistic teleological perspective makes with respect to articulating what our strong

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<sup>62</sup> While cosmic purposelessness is affirmed by most contemporary non-theistic intellectuals, in the next subsection I will discuss the possibility of a non-theistic cosmic teleology and the differences this might make.

evaluative responses say about “ourselves and our situation in the world”, it should also be noted that it can make a difference for our articulation of certain constitutive goods.<sup>63</sup> Of course, any teleological view that informs an understanding of “ourselves and our situation in the world” and thereby identifies certain fundamental goals in our human nature that if realized would constitute “a form of life which is higher or more properly human than others” can be said to specify constitutive goods related to the worthiness of our own potential and also to what makes other human being worthy of our respect, concern, and love. In particular, on Taylor’s theistic view human beings are regarded as worthy of respect, concern, and love because we are created by God – albeit through the process of evolution – in the ‘image of God’. This means, at least in part, that human beings as ‘persons’ share similar capacities to God as a ‘person’, such as capacities for creativity, rationality, and love, and this marks us out as created for a higher purpose, viz., above all, communion with God, with one another, and perhaps also with the natural world.<sup>64</sup> In addition, we can see the way a theistic teleological framework could play an important role in articulating how the natural world is a constitutive good; e.g., one might understand the natural world to be worthy of respect because he or she sees it as created by God and expressive of God’s objectively good purposes. For the theist this can form part of the background for his or her experience of beauty, wonder, and awe when contemplating the natural world.

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<sup>63</sup> This issue was briefly discussed in the last chapter.

<sup>64</sup> When we examine the moral sources of an ethic of universal concern in Chapter VI I will discuss in more detail Taylor’s view of human beings as created in the ‘image of God’, according to which the highest telos of human life is communion (see, e.g., *SA* 278-9, 282, 668, 701-3, 764).

*Confronting the Evolutionary Challenge*

However, in order to establish the viability of a theistic teleological perspective one must respond to an important objection, which has been put forward forcefully by Bernard Williams, whom we have just mentioned in reference to his view of the radical contingency of ethics. For Williams, one of the most important factors contributing to this radical contingency of ethics is the history of human evolution. On his view evolutionary biology presents a strong challenge to anyone who would wish to found ethics on considerations of human nature, a project which he calls ‘naturalistic ethics’ (using a different sense of ‘naturalistic’ than Taylor, since Taylor’s ethics would certainly be a version of naturalistic ethics on Williams’ sense of ‘naturalistic’). Williams writes:

[The] most plausible stories now available about [human] evolution, including its very recent date and also certain considerations about the physical characteristics of the species, suggests that human beings are to some degree a mess, and that the rapid and immense development of symbolic and cultural capacities has left humans as beings for which no form of life is likely to prove entirely satisfactory, either individually or socially. Many of course have come to that conclusion before, and those who have tried to reach a naturalistic morality which transcends it have had to read the historical record, or read beyond the historical record, in ways that seek to reveal a partly hidden human nature which is waiting to be realized or perfected. (Williams 1995a, 109; cf. 1995b, 199; Kitchen 1999, 46)

He goes on to say that the idea of naturalistic ethics “was born of a deeply teleological outlook”, which is “a philosophy according to which there is inherent in each natural kind of thing an appropriate way for things of that kind to behave. On that view it must be the deepest desire – need? – purpose? – satisfaction? – of human beings to live in the way that is in the objective sense appropriate to them [...]” (ibid., 109-10). But on his view: “The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that

there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way fully into ethical thought” (ibid., 110).

Williams certainly gives powerful expression to a tragic-pessimistic outlook<sup>65</sup>, but there is reason to think that his appeals to evolutionary history to justify this outlook are unsatisfactory. There are a number of thinkers who do not see evolutionary theory as justifying the view that “human beings are to some degree a mess” and that “no form of life is likely to prove entirely satisfactory, either individually or socially” (see, e.g., Hursthouse 1999a, Pt. III; Nussbaum 1995, 2006; MacIntyre 1999; Cottingham 2003, 2008; Midgley 2011a-b; De Waal 1996, 2006; Pope 2007, Ch. 6). Williams speaks of “the rapid and immense development of symbolic and cultural capacities”, and elsewhere he says: “the evolutionary success of humanity, in its extremely brief period of existence, may [...] rest on a rather ill-sorted *bricolage* of powers and instincts” (Williams 1995b, 199). However, these claims about the rapidity, immensity, and brevity of the human evolutionary process seem overstated since the relevant evolutionary changes have in fact taken place over many millions of years. “We do not know exactly when ‘modern’ homo-sapiens came into existence,” Cottingham writes, “but there is good reason to suppose that our species has remained biologically stable for many millennia. And certainly the human beings with whom Aristotle or the Buddha or Jesus were concerned were, in all

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<sup>65</sup> In *Shame and Necessity* Williams sums up his tragic-pessimistic outlook in the following terms: “We know that the world was not made for us, or we for the world, that our history tells no purposive story, and that there is no position outside the world or outside history from which we might hope to authenticate our activities” (Williams 1993, 166). For other relevant discussions see: Williams 1985, 43-4, 48, 52-3, 152-5; 1993, 164; and 1995b, 199. It is worth noting that Williams’ tragic-pessimistic outlook is quite similar in spirit to that of Richard Dawkins, who describes what he takes to be the ‘Darwinian view of life’ as follows: “In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference” (Dawkins 1995, 133). For a critical discussion of such ‘cosmic pessimism’ see Midgley 2002, Ch. 1 and 2011a-b.

respects relevant to biological flourishing, pretty much identical with us” (Cottingham 2008, 27). In other words, human beings throughout recorded history seem to be essentially the same kind of rational, social animals that we are. Indeed, they seem, more or less, to embody the ‘human constants’ identified by Taylor.

This does not mean that there are not still difficulties to work out in an account of the good life. For instance, as mentioned in the last chapter, part of our evolutionary inheritance it seems is that we have been endowed with natural tendencies not only towards compassion, reciprocity, fidelity, etc., but also – at least in the case of some people and to some extent – towards narrow self-concern, sexual license, dominance, violence, hatred, and the like.<sup>66</sup> On a purely evolutionary account it is easy to see how each of these tendencies could in different ways be said to serve an evolutionary function in the ‘struggle for survival’. But it is more difficult to work out how the good life should be understood and lived out in light of these diverse and incompatible natural impulses or tendencies. Here one might indeed wonder whether we are an evolutionary mess, as Williams says. While certainly there can be a number of important non-theistic considerations for favoring, e.g., a compassionate life over a life seeking dominance, nevertheless, I think it is here that a theistic teleological framework may be considered important if we are to be provided with *conclusive, non-contingent reasons* for choosing compassion over dominance as part of higher, nobler, more fulfilling form of life.

We can see this in Taylor’s discussion of the problematic propensity to violence in human life. For Taylor, as a Christian, this raises the question of “how can human nature as we know it be in the image of God?” To which he replies:

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<sup>66</sup> As Hume memorably put it, we have “some particle of the dove kneaded into our frame, along with the elements of the wolf and the serpent” (Hume 1975, 271). The issue I am raising here was briefly raised in the last chapter. I am taking it up more fully here.



Here's a hypothesis from within a Christian perspective: humans are born out of the animal kingdom, to be guided by God; and the males (at least the males) with a powerful sex-drive, and lots of aggression. As far as this endowment is concerned, the usual evolutionary explanation could be the correct one. But being guided by God means some kind of transformation of these drives; not just their repression, or suppression, keeping the lid on them; but some real turning of them from 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. [...] There is now something higher in one's life, a dimension of something incomparably higher, which one can't turn one's back on totally, a dimension of longing and striving which one can't ignore. (*SA* 668)

As the last sentence in this paragraph makes clear, Taylor's Christian interpretation of the evolutionary story enables one to see his or her life within a purposeful framework – one centered on the telos of love/communion – in which certain modes of life are judged to be 'incomparably higher'. In other words, it provides us with a strong evaluative standpoint whereby we identify certain of our naturalistic tendencies – e.g., compassion over dominance – as being that which is 'noblest and best' about us and thus to be cultivated as part of a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life (see Cottingham 2003, 71-3). Perhaps one can also tell a purely secular story regarding the progress of 'civilization', as we find in certain Enlightenment thinkers like Hume, but the challenge remains of whether it can capture in the same way a sense of the 'incomparably higher'.

But whereas a non-theistic ethical perspective may be questioned as to its adequacy, for Taylor, as previously mentioned, a theistic perspective can be questioned as to its truth. Indeed, as Williams' remarks attest, the theory of evolution is often thought to provide a particularly strong challenge to the truth of a theistic teleological perspective, since it can seem to offer a picture of the world as the product merely of blind, contingent forces. However, one might question the complete incompatibility that Williams suggests exists between evolutionary theory and a theistic teleological perspective when he says

that the “first and hardest lesson of Darwinism” is “that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play”. Taylor’s comments above already go some way to showing how the evolutionary story might be told from a theistic teleological view. This story also seems to be given greater support by those who have argued that the universe is in some sense ‘biophilic’ and ‘noophilic’, i.e., there is a ‘tendency’, and indeed some have said an ‘inevitability’, for the universe to give rise first of all to life and then to intelligence (see Conway Morris 2003, 2010; Rees 2001; Davies 2006; Midgley 2011a-b; Pope 2007, Ch. 5; Haught 2010; Cottingham 2003, 47-9; Nagel 2012; Manson, ed. 2003). In other words, on this view the development of something like human life appears, at the very least, to be a strong possibility ‘built in’ to the nature of the universe from the beginning. If this is the case, then the possibility of a theistic teleological view seems at least compatible with our understanding of the universe.<sup>67</sup>

While so far I have been discussing the importance of a theistic teleological view in comparison to non-theistic views that see life as cosmically purposeless, at this point it is important to note that there are in fact attempts to develop non-theistic views of cosmic purpose on the basis of the biophilic and noophilic theories of the universe, which go against the dominant modern non-theistic view.<sup>68</sup> For instance, Paul Davies argues against the well-known remark by Steven Weinberg that “[the] more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless” (Weinberg 1977, 154).<sup>69</sup> Davies writes:

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<sup>67</sup> There are of course still difficulties regarding the problem of evil (see Rosen 1991, 190-4). Although I cannot discuss this issue here, I do think Cottingham provides a compelling response (Cottingham 2003, Ch. 2; 2005, Ch. 2). I will return to discuss this issue in Chapter V.

<sup>68</sup> Among contemporary non-theistic scientists, notable affirmers of cosmic purposelessness include Richard Dawkins, Stephen J. Gould, and Steven Weinberg.

<sup>69</sup> It is worth quoting here more of the passage: “It is almost irresistible for humans to believe that we have some special relation to the universe, that human life is not just a more-or-less farcical outcome of a

Doing science means figuring out what is going on in the world – what the universe is “up to,” what it is “about.” If it isn’t “about” anything, there would be no good reason to embark on the scientific quest in the first place, because we would have no rational basis for believing that we could thereby uncover additional coherent and meaningful facts about the world. So we might justifiably invert Weinberg’s dictum and say that the more the universe seems pointless, the more it also seems incomprehensible. (Davies 2006, 16)

Later on he writes: “It seems to me that there is a genuine scheme of things – the universe is “about” something. But I am equally uneasy about dumping the whole set of problems in the lap of an arbitrary god or abandoning all further thought and declaring existence to be a mystery” (ibid., 268). A theist will likely object to the highly tendentious way of referring to God here as an “arbitrary god” since most theists do not believe that God is arbitrary at all, but rather, they believe that God always acts with perfect wisdom and goodness. That aside, Davies clearly wants to distance himself from any sort of “nostalgia for a theistic worldview in which humankind occupies a special place” (ibid.). “Yet”, he writes, “I do believe that life and mind are etched deeply into the fabric of the cosmos, perhaps through a shadowy, half-glimpsed life principle, and if I am to be honest I have to concede that this starting point is something I feel more in my heart than in my head. So maybe that is a religious conviction of sorts” (ibid.).<sup>70</sup>

A very similar view also finds expression in the recent work of Thomas Nagel. In *Mind and Cosmos*, he writes:

The world is an astonishing place [...]. That it has produced you, and me, and the rest of us is the most astonishing thing about it. If contemporary research in molecular biology leaves open the possibility of legitimate doubts about a fully mechanistic account of the origin and evolution of life, dependent only on the

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chain of accidents reaching back to the first three minutes, but that we were somehow built in from the beginning. [...] It is hard to realize that this [earth] is just a tiny part of an overwhelmingly hostile universe. It is ever harder to realize that the present universe has evolved from an unspeakably unfamiliar early condition, and faces a future extinction of endless cold or intolerable heat. The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless” (ibid.). See n. 65.

<sup>70</sup> I owe these references to Midgley 2011a-b.

laws of chemistry and physics, this can combine with the failure of psychophysical reductionism to suggest that principles of a different kind are also at work in the history of nature, principles of the growth of order that are in their logical form teleological rather than mechanistic. (Nagel 2012, 7)

This allows then for a cosmic teleological perspective in which human beings have an important place: viz., “[each] of our lives is a part of the lengthy process of the universe gradually waking and becoming aware of itself” (ibid., 85; see 1997, 127-33; 2010, 16-7). He goes on to say: “I am not confident that this Aristotelian idea of teleology without intention makes sense, but I do not at the moment see why it doesn’t” (Nagel 2012, 93). There are of course those who would question whether cosmic teleology makes sense apart from theism; e.g., Alasdair MacIntyre writes: “the only type of teleologically ordered universe in which we have good reason to believe is a theistic universe” (MacIntyre 1998, 152; cf. 2011, 25-8). Cottingham also seems to endorse this claim in the discussion above. The idea here seems to be that to believe that the universe as a whole is expressive of a purpose requires or at least suggests a purposive being (viz., God) that created it. However, Nagel confesses to “an underground assumption [...] in not finding it possible to regard the design alternative as a real option. I lack the *sensus divinitatis* that enables—indeed compels—so many people to see in the world the expression of divine purpose [...]” (Nagel 2012, 12).<sup>71</sup> He also thinks a non-theistic teleological view – if viable – would allow for “a more unifying explanation than the design hypothesis” because it does not appeal to anything beyond nature (ibid.).

Now, if the non-theistic cosmic teleology that is endorsed by Davies and Nagel can be made compelling then I think it could enable re-enchantment. In other words, I think it could provide an ontological background picture that supports strong evaluative

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<sup>71</sup> Elsewhere Nagel also confesses to a “fear of religion”, which I will discuss in Chapter V.

realism. Moreover, it would not suffer from the adequacy problems that plague non-theistic views that affirm cosmic purposelessness, as discussed above. It especially seems to support a sense of the ‘incomparably higher’ with regard our human capacity to come to understand the nature of the universe. This is because of our important role in the telos of the universe in “gradually waking and becoming aware of itself.”<sup>72</sup> A key difference between this non-theistic cosmic teleology and a theistic one is that on a non-theistic view the universe is conceived of in impersonal terms (i.e., as based on “principles of the growth of order”, or a “life principle”), whereas on a theistic view it is seen in personal terms (i.e., as based on a person, viz., God). I think this difference plays itself out in different conceptions of the telos for human life. On the non-theistic view we see that the emphasis is put more on the ‘telos of knowledge’, whereas on the theistic view the emphasis is put on the ‘telos of communion’, as we see with Taylor. The former seems especially suited for inspiring scientific and philosophical endeavors, whereas the latter seems especially suited for inspiring love for others. But this is not to deny that the non-theistic view could also inspire love for others (e.g., by informing a conception of human dignity) or that a theistic view could inspire scientific and philosophical endeavors (e.g., by seeing our rationality as part of our being made in the image of God).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> It is interesting to note that Nagel’s recent efforts to argue for a non-theistic cosmic teleology are connected to a concern to provide “an alternative to the consolations of religion” (Nagel 2010, 3). In particular, Nagel wants secular philosophy to recover something of the ‘religious temperament’, which he understands in terms of the yearning for cosmic reconciliation or harmony, i.e., the desire “to live not merely the life of the creature one is, but in some sense to participate through it in the life of the universe” (ibid., 6). Nagel seems to express his own view when he writes: “Having, amazingly, burst into existence, one is a representative of existence—of the whole of it—not just because one is part of it but because it is present to one’s consciousness. In each of us, the universe has come to consciousness and therefore our existence is not merely our own” (ibid.). Nagel’s recent work certainly constitutes a significant departure from his earlier writings on the topic of the absurd (see 1979, Ch. 2; 1986, Ch. XI; 1987, Ch. 10).

<sup>73</sup> In Chapter VI I will return to discuss in more detail Taylor’s theistic teleology as centered on the telos of communion and the difference this makes for an ethic of universal human concern.

It should be emphasized here that neither kind of cosmic teleology is guaranteed by the view of the universe as biophilic and noophilic, which is itself a contested view. While there might be appearances of directionality in the universe, these could perhaps be mechanistically explained. There is of course also a lot in the universe that appears random or without purpose. Finally, the vastness of the universe in space and time can challenge our sense of human significance. We saw that both Davies and Nagel put forward their views in rather tentative terms, and we have seen that Taylor does the same.<sup>74</sup> However, I want to close this chapter by considering how Taylor thinks we might come to embrace a theistic teleological view if we grant that there is at least a compatibility with what we know about the world through science.

According to Taylor, even if there is a divine purpose operative in the universe, this is not something that is readily available for observation by any ‘disengaged’ rational spectator. As discussed in the Introduction, one of the central features of the disenchantment brought about by post-Galilean natural science is the demise of what was thought to be a publicly available, taken-for-granted ‘cosmic order’ – what Taylor sometimes calls ‘ontic logos’ – which is expressed notably in the idea of the ‘Great Chain of Being’ and Plato’s idea of the Forms.<sup>75</sup> Although Taylor does not think we can or should go back to the old idea of a publicly accessible cosmic order, he does think it is important to try to capture something of the idea of a cosmic order/teleology as a moral

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<sup>74</sup> In the interview I did with Taylor I asked him if the biophilic and noophilic theories are part of what he sees as “raising questions for the supposed knock-down argument from science against God” and he responded: “Yes, definitely. Absolutely. But I don’t see anytime soon our getting to the same kind of total consensus around, let’s say, a biophilic theory that we have about quantum mechanics; we’ve had enough argument there, but it’s fairly clear. I think these are so deep, so difficult questions that it’s quite possible they remain unresolved intellectually until the very end of time. So then we’re back with the hermeneutic question, which is always an all-in question; it is not just ‘How do you explain the cosmos?’, but ‘How do you explain life, my life, what’s meaningful and so on?’” (Taylor 2012a, 290). In what follows we will be considering this hermeneutic approach.

<sup>75</sup> See *H*, Ch. 1; *SS* 16-8, 121-9, 160-1, 186-92; *SA* 25, 59-61, 323-31; *DC* 291-2.

source. But this will be understood very differently from the older idea of cosmic order. “We are now in an age”, he writes, “in which a publicly accessible cosmic order of meanings is an impossibility. The only way we can explore the order in which we are set with an aim to defining moral sources is through [...] personal resonance” (SS 512). In other words, what we need is an engaged-hermeneutic approach in which we search “for moral sources *outside* [of ourselves] through languages which resonate *within* [ourselves], the grasping of an order which is inseparably indexed to a personal vision” (SS 510; cf. SS 416-7, 427-8). For Taylor, such languages of personal resonance can be found especially in what he calls ‘epiphanic’ works of art, such as in certain kinds of poetry and novels, which bring us “into the presence of something which is otherwise inaccessible, and which is of the highest moral or spiritual significance; a manifestation, moreover, which also defines or completes something, even as it reveals it” (SS 419; cf. SA 607). The poetry of William Wordsworth and Gerard Manley Hopkins, for Taylor, provide two notable examples of such epiphanic works of art. Arguably, there is a tendency in Taylor’s work to give too much pride of place to works of art, especially poetry, in putting us into contact with moral sources.<sup>76</sup> However, he does discuss on a number of occasions how our moral, aesthetic, and spiritual experiences can have an ‘epiphanic’ quality, often in the form of pointing us to God and a way of viewing life in terms of a divine purpose.<sup>77</sup> Part of the importance then of certain kinds of poetry, e.g., is that they provide us with a language for attempting to articulate such epiphanic experience, while possibly also engendering them. However, it also clearly seems to be

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<sup>76</sup> This criticism is advanced by Stephen Mulhall (Mulhall 1996, 158-60).

<sup>77</sup> See Taylor 1994b, 226-7; SA 8, 10-1, 544-6, 607-9, 728-32.

the case that there are other resources besides poetry for articulating and shaping these experiences, such as philosophy and theology.

Now, there are no doubt challenges that remain for reconciling the world as understood by the natural sciences with the realm of personal resonance in which there can be epiphanic experiences that involve a sense of cosmic purpose. While there is perhaps some support that can be provided by biophilic and noophilic theories for this sense of cosmic purpose, there are also difficulties. There is always the possible threat here that our epiphanic experiences should ultimately be understood as subjective experiences that are in no way revelatory of a reality beyond the subject. In regard to our ‘cosmic imaginary’ as shaped by the natural sciences, Taylor writes:

Our sense of the universe now is precisely defined by the vast and the unfathomable: vastness in space, and above all in time; unfathomability in the long chain of changes out of which present forms evolve. But what is unprecedented in human history, there is no longer a clear and obvious sense that this vastness is shaped and limited by an antecedent plan [...]. Our present sense of things fails to touch bottom anywhere. (SA 325)

But he then goes on to say:

I want to emphasize that I am talking about our *sense* of things. I’m not talking about what people believe. Many still hold that the universe is created by God, that in some sense it is governed by his Providence. What I am talking about is the way the universe is spontaneously imagined, and therefore experienced. It is no longer usual to sense the universe immediately and unproblematically as purposefully ordered, although reflection, meditation, spiritual development may lead one to see it this way. (SA 325)

The last sentence here is especially important. Although there cannot be any guarantees that the world in some way embodies a divine purpose, nevertheless, for Taylor it is clear that if we are to believe or at least have reason for hope that it does, then this will have to



come through personal resonance as part of a process of “spiritual development”.<sup>78</sup> The central concern of this section has been to show the importance of coming to see the world in light of such a purpose.

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<sup>78</sup> This point connects up with a major theme in Cottingham’s work, viz., the importance of spiritual-ethical practice and transformation for coming to believe and/or have hope in a theistic worldview (see Cottingham 2003, Ch. 3; 2005, Chs. 1, 4, 7, 8; 2009a, Chs. 1, 5, 7). Moreover, like Taylor, Cottingham also believes that our moral and aesthetic experiences can have an ‘epiphanic’ quality whereby they point beyond themselves to the transcendent (viz., God) and enable us to see the world as embodying a divine teleology. On this issue he writes: “If we find ourselves in honesty compelled to acknowledge the power and apparent authenticity of such basic human responses, then they cannot just be swept aside as some kind of irrelevant emotional ‘noise’, but themselves need somehow to be fitted into our overall picture of the world and our place within it. They are, in short, a legitimate part of the phenomena to be considered, in any responsible approach to the question, ‘Why believe?’” (Cottingham 2009a, 13). In the next two chapters I will discuss these epiphanic modes of experience in more detail.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FULLNESS AND SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

In the preceding two chapters I have examined Taylor's general evaluative framework based on his concept of strong evaluation. In the last chapter in particular I examined Taylor's defense of the validity of strong evaluation, which is an integral part of his effort of re-enchantment. I tried to show how his defense ultimately depends on a theistic teleological perspective for its 'full adequacy', though I maintained that if a non-theistic cosmic teleology could be made viable then it could also support a strong evaluative perspective and so enable a kind of re-enchantment.

In the three remaining chapters I want to explore a connected aspect of seeking re-enchantment: viz., the aspiration to 'self-transcendence'. As mentioned in the Introduction, Taylor says that one of the chief worries regarding disenchantment has been that with the loss of the pre-modern idea of a publicly available cosmic moral order (or 'ontic logos') in which individuals found their place and function there would be a corresponding loss of a sense of a higher and larger purpose for human life (*EA* 3-4). Moreover, this is often linked to "a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society" (*EA* 4).<sup>1</sup> Thus, we can say that if the process of disenchantment – especially in its most extreme forms that combine projectivist and reductionist views – pushes towards self-enclosure, then re-enchantment must involve a move towards greater self-transcendence.

In this chapter I will examine Taylor's account of 'fullness' and his discussion of some important versions of it found within religious and non-religious perspectives. The main objective will be to explore the way in which these different versions of fullness all

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *EA* 14-5, 35-41, Chs. VI-X; *SS* 16-9, 499-502, 505-13; *SA* 307-21.

involve some form of self-transcendence. This understanding of the relationship between self-transcendence and fullness will be important for the discussion in the following two chapters regarding the place of ‘transcendence’ in human life (Chapter V) and the moral sources of an ethic of universal human concern (Chapter VI).<sup>2</sup>

At first sight the title of this chapter, ‘Fullness and Self-Transcendence’, might seem like an odd pairing of terms. The first suggests a maximal mode of being a self, whereas the second literally means going beyond the self. However, I will seek to show how self-transcendence and fullness are in fact integrally connected when properly understood. Central to my argument is my claim that ‘self-transcendence’ should not be understood as a denial or loss of self, but rather as the process whereby a ‘lower’ mode of selfhood is ‘transcended’ for the sake of a ‘higher’ and more fulfilling mode of selfhood. In other words, self-transcendence is always at the same time a form of self-realization. Although Taylor himself does not explicitly articulate such an understanding of self-transcendence, he does use the language of self-transcendence and other equivalent or related terms in connection to ideals of fullness. My account of self-transcendence seeks to articulate what I think is implicit in this connection.

In the first section I will discuss Taylor’s basic account of fullness, especially as put forward in *A Secular Age*. It will be seen that this account is important for filling out Taylor’s view of the self in moral/spiritual space.<sup>3</sup> In particular, I will consider three ways of being ‘placed’ or ‘situated’ within moral/spiritual space, which Taylor discusses

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<sup>2</sup> This follows Taylor’s own way of proceeding in *A Secular Age*, where he begins with a discussion of the aspiration to fullness in human life. This provides the basis for the discussions throughout the book, including the central themes of the place of transcendence in human life and the moral sources of an ethic of universal human concern.

<sup>3</sup> Although in the last chapter I spoke in terms of ‘moral space’, I speak here of ‘moral/spiritual space’ because it follows Taylor’s discussion of fullness in *A Secular Age*, where the focus is on different religious and non-religious conceptions of fullness. But either way it refers to the broad domain of strong evaluation.

in terms of the places of ‘fullness’, ‘exile’, and a ‘middle condition’ between them. I will also discuss two different modes in which fullness can be achieved: on the one hand, there are more or less *momentary experiences* of fullness; on the other hand, there are more *enduring states* of fullness achieved through ethical/spiritual transformation. Finally, I will distinguish Taylor’s concept of fullness from the somewhat similar notions of ‘personal fulfillment’ and ‘flourishing’, at least as these are commonly understood.

In the second section I will examine Taylor’s discussion of important particular examples of fullness in our ‘secular age’, which focuses on the differences between religious and non-religious accounts of fullness. For Taylor, one of the key typical differences between religious and non-religious views of fullness concerns whether the ‘source’ of fullness is regarded as being ‘without’ or ‘within’, i.e., whether it is external to us or internal to us. I will argue that this ‘without–within’ distinction is not wholly adequate as a way of characterizing the difference between religious and non-religious views of fullness. Nevertheless, I do believe it is helpful for distinguishing between two main types of self-transcendence, either or both of which I maintain are operative in all experiences of fullness: viz., (1) self-transcendence through the actualization of strongly valued capacities; (2) self-transcendence through love or concern for constitutive goods (e.g., other persons, the natural world, God) external to one’s own person. Against some misunderstandings of what ‘self-transcendence’ involves, I seek to show how these forms of self-transcendence can be understood – per Taylor’s account of strong evaluation – in terms of transcending a ‘lower’ mode of selfhood for a ‘higher’ mode of selfhood.

## I. TAYLOR ON FULLNESS

### *Fullness in Moral/Spiritual Space*

In *A Secular Age* Taylor seeks to explore “what it’s like to live as a believer or an unbeliever” in an age when religious belief is “understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace” (*SA* 3, 5).<sup>4</sup> In order to examine the “different kinds of lived experience involved in understanding your life in one way or the other” he proposes his account of ‘fullness’ (*SA* 5). As an initial statement he writes:

We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worth while, more admirable, more what it should be. This is perhaps a place of power: we often experience this as deeply moving, as inspiring. Perhaps this sense of fullness is something we just catch glimpses of from afar

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor identifies this as a third sense of ‘secularity’, i.e., ‘secularity 3’, which he contrasts with the two most typical senses of secularity. According to ‘secularity 1’, secularism is identified with the removal of religion from public life, as in contemporary Western liberal democracies that aspire to religious ‘neutrality’ in politics, law, economics, and other public domains. No longer is religion implicated in the institutions and practices of society, as it once was, but rather it is now considered to be largely a ‘private matter’ (*SA* 1-2). According to ‘secularity 2’, secularism is identified with the decline of religious belief and practice, which is often associated with the rise of modern science (*SA* 2, 4). Arto Laitinen helpfully describes these as ‘political’ (secularity 1), ‘sociological’ (secularity 2), and ‘existential’ (secularity 3) senses of secularity (Laitinen 2010, 353).

While secularity 1 and 2 certainly capture important aspects of what it is to live in a ‘secular age’ in many contexts, nevertheless, Taylor believes it is more illuminating to focus on his third sense of secularity, which examines the change in the ‘conditions of belief’. He writes: “the change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God [e.g., in Western Europe in 1500], to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others [viz., in the contemporary North Atlantic world]” (*SA* 3). For Taylor these ‘conditions of belief’ can also be understood as ‘conditions of experience’: “Secularity in this sense is a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place. [...] An age or society would be secular or not, in virtue of the conditions of experience of and search for the spiritual” (*SA* 3). This third sense of secularity can obviously be related to the secularity 1 and 2 insofar as the range of experiences and directions for searching for ‘the spiritual’ that appear available to us as options can be and often are influenced by the levels of belief and practice as well as by how religious belief functions in public life, but there is no strict correlation (*SA* 3-4).

Taylor says that part of his reason for wanting to focus on secularity 3 is because he is dissatisfied with the typical explanation behind secularity 2 that “science refutes and crowds out religious belief” (*SA* 4). Not only does he doubt the cogency of the arguments made on behalf of this claim, but he also does not think that this gives the whole story of why people abandon their religious faith. Whether or not one has religious faith, on Taylor’s view, cannot be disconnected from the whole background understanding that informs our experience of and search for ‘the spiritual’, or what he calls ‘fullness’.

off; we have the powerful intuition of what fullness would be, were we to be in that condition, e.g., of peace or wholeness; or able to act on that level, of integrity or generosity or abandonment or self-forgetfulness. But sometimes there will be moments of experienced fullness, of joy and fulfillment, where we feel ourselves there. (SA 5)

In order to better understand Taylor's account of fullness I think it is helpful to try to unpack this passage and give it greater systematization.

First of all, Taylor speaks of the "space wherein we live our lives" as having a "certain moral/spiritual shape". This statement indicates that the concept of fullness is part of his account of 'the self in moral space'. The concept can in fact already be found in Taylor's discussion of the self in moral space in *Sources of the Self* and other earlier writings and thus his discussion of it in *A Secular Age* can be seen as a way of filling out the idea of the self in moral space, especially with reference to the difference between religious and non-religious views of one's moral/spiritual orientation towards a conception of the good.<sup>5</sup> As discussed in the last chapter, for Taylor the fundamental

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<sup>5</sup> Commentators on *A Secular Age* have generally overlooked the fact that the discussion of fullness in the book is part of Taylor's general account of the self in moral/spiritual space, which he already developed in his earlier writings, especially in Ch. 2 of *Sources*. One exception is Ruth Abbey, who says that she believes "the ideal of fullness is best understood as a variation on Taylor's earlier arguments about the inescapability of strong evaluations" (Abbey 2010, 12; cf. Schweiker, et al. 2010, 369). In fact, the concept is employed by Taylor in his earlier discussions of the self in moral/spiritual space, though it is not conceptualized in the same detail and it is also not as much the center of attention (see Taylor 1988a, 300-2; SS 14-5, 43-4, 47-8, 50-1, 62-3). However, it seems that his view of fullness in *A Secular Age* is basically the same as his view of it in his earlier discussions. On this point consider what I believe is the first passage in which Taylor discusses the ideal of fullness:

[Human] beings, in addition to their other pains and frustrations – hunger, sexual frustration, ill-health, death, loneliness – and often woven into these, experience themselves betimes as spiritually out of joint. This is conceptually expressed in a host of ways: as being lost, or condemned, or exiled, or unintegrated, or without meaning, or insubstantial, or empty, to name some common categories. Corresponding to each of these descriptions of breakdown is some notion of what it would be to overcome it, to have integration, or full being, to be justified, or found, or whatever. But more, there is a notion of 'where' this integration, fullness, etc., might come from, what might bring it about. This might be: communion with the cosmic order, or identity with Brahman, or unity with God, or harmony with nature, or the attainment of rational insight, or finding the strength to say "yes" to everything one is, or hearing the voice of nature within, or coming to accept finitude, or..., again the list stretches on indefinitely. (Taylor 1988a, 300)

Perhaps if the place of Taylor's account of fullness within his general account of the self in moral space had been noted then this might have prevented the tendency among some commentators on *A Secular Age* to

aspiration of human beings “to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good” is tied to our concern for “what kind of life is worth living, e.g., what would be a rich, meaningful life, as against an empty one”, or, as he also puts it, “what makes a full life” (SS 14-15, 42-44). The aspiration to fullness is thus closely connected to the issue of the meaning of life in that fullness is experienced when our lives are lived as meaningful or worthwhile, which is judged according to our sense of “how [we are] ‘placed’ or ‘situated’ in relation to the good, or whether [we are] in ‘contact’ with it” (SS 42).

As discussed in the last chapter, the degree of our ‘contact’ or ‘placement’ with respect to ‘the good’ has to do with the quality of our love, respect, or admiration for constitutive goods and the extent to which we have realized the life goods they constitute. This makes sense of why Taylor speaks of the ‘place’ in which fullness is experienced or sought as ‘a place of power’, i.e., as something we experience as ‘deeply moving’ or ‘inspiring’. The ‘place’ of fullness is a ‘place of power’ precisely because it is where we come into greater ‘contact’ with constitutive goods that are regarded as commanding or being worthy of love and respect and as empowering us to realize the life goods they constitute. We can say then that the degree to which we achieve fullness corresponds with the extent of our love, respect, or admiration for constitutive goods and the extent to which we have realized the life goods they constitute. For instance, if we regard some notion of our human potential as worthy of our admiration or respect (i.e., as a constitutive good), then we can experience fullness when we realize this potential (i.e.,

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see the concept of fullness as in some way religiously biased (see During 2010, 107, 125; Jager 2010, 176-7; Sheehan 2010, 227-32, 238-40; Laitinen 2010, 353-4; McLennan 2010; De Vries 2010, 400-2; Costello 2010; Diggins 2007; for Taylor’s own response to this charge see Taylor 2008b; 2010a, 315-21; 2010b, 416; 2010c, 401; 2010e, 645-7). But the charge of implicit bias here can function as a red herring, since there is a real issue concerning whether the question of the meaning of life – to which Taylor’s account of fullness is connected – ultimately points to the need for a religious answer if it is to be adequately addressed. This is something I will take up in the next chapter.

the various life goods involved in realizing our potential), especially in some significant way. Likewise, if we regard human beings as in some way worthy of our love and respect, then we can experience fullness when we achieve a fuller love and respect for them. Or again: if we regard the natural world as worthy of our love and respect, then we can experience fullness through realizing such love and respect more fully. Lastly, if God is regarded as worthy of our love, respect, and allegiance – as is the case for theists – then we can experience fullness through realizing a fuller love of and devotion to God. Each of these experiences of fullness can be seen to be part of a meaningful and fulfilling life. Of course, one kind of experience of fullness might stand out as being of the greatest importance, viz., that which is associated with a hypergood, which we can see, e.g., in regard to the love of God for theists (see *SS* 62-3).<sup>6</sup>

According to Taylor, such experiences of fullness achieved through greater ‘contact’ with the good can be contrasted with an opposite pole of experience: viz., what he calls ‘exile’, or extreme distance or separation from the ‘place’ of fullness (*SA* 6). This may involve a feeling of an ‘irremediable incapacity’ to reach the place of fullness, which is connected to the point, discussed in Chapter III, about the direction of our lives towards or away from the good. In this case one would feel oneself irremediably turned away from the good. However, according to Taylor, there is an even worse condition that involves a sense of ‘melancholy’, ‘ennui’, or ‘spleen’ in which “we lose a sense of where

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<sup>6</sup> As we will see, Taylor often discusses the experience of fullness with respect to a single constitutive good, particularly one that seems to have a hypergood derived from it (see the passage in the previous footnote). However, since – as discussed in Chapter II – Taylor does recognize a plurality of constitutive goods (viz., a certain view of our own potential, other persons, the nature world, and God) and this informs his account of the self in moral/spiritual space, I believe that fullness must ultimately be understood with reference to all constitutive goods that one recognizes. In my view Taylor’s tendency to refer to just one constitutive good in different accounts of fullness is just meant to pick out the most important constitutive good that differentiates a particular perspective from others, not to suggest that any given perspective can only recognize one constitutive good (again see the discussion in Chapter II).



the place of fullness is, even of what fullness could consist in; we feel we've forgotten what it would look like, or cannot believe in it any more. But the misery of absence, of loss, is still there, indeed, it is in some ways even more acute" (*SA* 6; cf. 307-9; *VRT* 34-42; *SS* 16-9). As Taylor puts it elsewhere, we would be "spiritually out of joint" (Taylor 1988a, 300; cf. *SS* 18). If we were to completely lose all sense of orientation towards a view of the good we would then be in perhaps the worst state of all: viz., the sort of extreme identity-crisis that was discussed in Chapter III. This would be to experience life as totally disenchanting, i.e., devoid of all strong evaluative meaning.

Beside the extreme poles of fullness and exile, Taylor also describes a 'middle condition' where we are able to escape from 'exile' and find some meaningful forms of ordinary human activity, such as in family life, friendship, work life, and in contributing, at least to some extent, to human welfare (*SA* 6-7). While there may be moments when we experience a degree of fullness, in this middle condition we typically have a sense of ourselves as moving towards a 'place' of greater fullness that we have not yet attained. In Taylor's view, most people are somewhere in this middle condition (see *SA* 623, 729).

*Two Modes of Fullness: Enduring States and Momentary Experiences*

In the block quote above I believe Taylor can be seen as identifying two basic modes in which fullness can be attained: first, he describes it as a 'condition' to which we can aspire, which suggests a more enduring state of fullness, i.e., where we have realized the virtues or life goods that define for us the good life and thus we are "really or fully or deeply or integrally living" (Taylor 2010c, 401; cf. 2010a, 316). Hence he mentions the examples of being in a condition of "peace or wholeness; or able to act on that level, of integrity or generosity or abandonment or self-forgetfulness." Attaining such an enduring

mode of fullness will likely require significant moral/spiritual transformation (see *SA* 430-1, 435-6, 604-5, 623, 729-30).

Second, Taylor also says that there are more or less momentary experiences of fullness “where we feel ourselves there”.<sup>7</sup> This can take the form of a ‘peak experience’ – to use the language of Abraham Maslow (Maslow 1964) – or what Taylor calls a ‘limit experience’, which “unsettles and breaks through our ordinary sense of being in the world, with its familiar objects, activities and points of reference” (*SA* 5).<sup>8</sup> As an example of such a peak or limit experience of fullness Taylor cites a passage from Václav Havel in which he describes an experience he had as a political prisoner while gazing at a tree beyond the prison walls. Havel writes:

[...] all at once, I seemed to rise above all the coordinates of my momentary existence in the world into a kind of state outside time in which all the beautiful things I have ever seen and experienced existed in a total “co-present”; I felt a sense of reconciliation; indeed of an almost gentle assent to the inevitable course of events as revealed to me now, and this combined with a carefree determination to face what has to be faced. A profound amazement at the sovereignty of Being became a dizzy sensation of tumbling endlessly into the abyss of its mystery; an unbounded joy at being alive, at having been given the chance to live through all I have lived through, and at the fact that everything has a deep and obvious meaning – this joy formed a strange alliance in me with a horror at the inapprehensibility of everything I was so close to in that moment, standing at the very “edge of the infinite”; I was flooded with a sense of ultimate happiness and harmony with the world and with myself, with that moment, with all the moments I could call up, and with everything invisible that lies behind it and has meaning. I would even say that I was somehow “struck by love”, though I don’t know precisely for whom or what. (*SA* 728-9; see Havel 1983, 331-2)<sup>9</sup>

As we can see from this passage, according to Taylor such peak experiences can often be enigmatic and unsettling and our sense of ‘where’ the experience of fullness comes from

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<sup>7</sup> See Warner et al. 2010, 12, where there is recognition of these two modes of fullness. Cf. Morgan 2008, where only momentary experiences of fullness are acknowledged.

<sup>8</sup> I want to thank Arto Laitinen for pointing out via personal communication this connection between Taylor’s account of fullness and Maslow’s account of peak experiences. Stephen Costello also mentions this connection (Costello 2010, 41).

<sup>9</sup> For another discussion of peak experiences of this sort see Bellah 2011, 5-8, which is where Taylor originally found this passage cited.

can be somewhat unclear or only dimly intimated. Thus, one may seek to articulate more fully what this experience involved, which is to say, one may try to articulate the constitutive goods involved. For instance, whether it points us to God, or to the true value of our own existence or of all existence, or perhaps to each of these or to something else. “If we succeed in formulating it, however partially,” Taylor says, “we feel a release, as though the power of the experience was increased by having been focused, articulated, and hence let fully be” (*SA* 6).<sup>10</sup>

Taylor states that not all momentary experiences of fullness will be this sort of peak experience. He writes: “There may just be moments when the deep divisions, distractions, worries, sadnesses that seem to drag us down are somehow dissolved, or brought into alignment, so that we feel united, moving forward, suddenly capable and full of energy. Our highest aspirations and our life energies are somehow lined up, reinforcing each other, instead of producing psychic gridlock” (*SA* 6). While Taylor describes these ways of overcoming incapacities in terms of momentary experiences, nevertheless, they clearly can also be part of an enduring condition, such as when one has acquired virtues that enable a fuller mode of life through a process of moral and/or spiritual transformation (see *SA* 623). Moreover, although not all experiences of overcoming divisions, distractions, and other forms of incapacity will be peak experiences, nevertheless, it seems that peak experiences can include them.

Taylor says that each of these momentary experiences of fullness and still others not enumerated “help us to situate a place of fullness, to which we orient ourselves morally or spiritually” (*SA* 6). This suggests that our momentary experiences of fullness

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<sup>10</sup> Recall the discussion in Chapter II on the role of articulation in Taylor’s moral philosophy, especially with respect to constitutive goods, where articulation of a constitutive good can help us to both more clearly define the life goods involved and empower us to realize them.

point us to a more enduring mode of fullness. Indeed, as we see in the case of Havel and in a similar passage Taylor also cites from Bede Griffiths (*SA* 5; cf. Griffiths 1954, 9), these momentary experiences of fullness can be part of a ‘conversion’ experience in which one is converted to a mode of life that embodies a fuller ‘contact’ with the good (cf. *SA* 728-30). Taylor writes: “We need to enlarge our palette of such points of contact with fullness, because we are too prone in our age to think of this contact in terms of “experience”; and to think of experience as something subjective, distinct from the object experienced; and something to do with our feelings, distinct from changes in our being: dispositions, orientations, the bent of our lives, etc.” (*SA* 729-30). He cites the life of St. Francis as an example of such a transformed, fuller mode of being:

[What] is striking about Francis is that he was seized by a sense of the overpowering force of God’s love, and a burning desire to become a channel of this love. His story also includes visions, for instance, of this love of God in Nature (brother sun and sister moon); but the salient inspiring feature of his life emerges in the story of his conversion, how he was moved to abandon everything in his life for the love of God. We might say that what moved Francis was not so much a kind of vision of God’s power “out there”, as in the “epiphanic” moments of Bede and Havel, but the heightened power of love itself which God opened to him. The transformation beyond our usual scope was a crucial part of what seized him; not as a greater personal power (this is a danger of deviation), but as a participation in God’s love. (*SA* 729)

Now, there is some question here about what exactly it means to speak of fullness as an enduring state of being since it clearly does not seem possible that one could perpetually have peak experiences of fullness. Instead, an enduring state of fullness seems to be one in which we have a sense of our lives as fulfilled or lived well or meaningfully on the basis of the direction of our lives towards the good and our achievement of a fuller love and respect for constitutive goods and realizing the life goods they constitute, viz., the virtues related to love and respect for particular constitutive goods. This will likely also

enable us from time to time to have momentary peak experiences in which we most fully actualize our love or respect for a constitutive good and the life goods constituted by it.

We can illustrate these two modes of attaining fullness if we consider again the first two examples of constitutive good mentioned above. If we regard some notion of our human potential as especially worthy of our admiration and respect, such as our potential for being a great violinist, then we can experience fullness when we realize this potential in an enduring way. But there can also be momentary peak experiences of fullness here, such as can be experienced during a great concert performance. Likewise, if we regard human beings as especially worthy of our love and respect, then a kind of fullness can be experienced when we have realized the virtues embodying this love and respect, such as compassion, benevolence, justice, and the like. But there can also be momentary peak experiences of fullness here, such as when we feel ourselves in full communion with others or when performing some great or heroic deed for others. Similar remarks could also be made with respect to the natural world and God as constitutive goods.

From this account I believe we can say that the fullest life would be one that contained both enduring states and momentary peak experiences of fullness. However, it should be said that there is something necessarily imprecise about the notion of fullness here, not only because it is used to refer to different kinds of experience (*viz.*, peak experiences, experiences of overcoming incapacities, and a sense of our lives as a whole), but also because there is always a continuum in the degree to which we have achieved fullness. Moreover, there is an important sense in which fullness is an ideal towards which one is always striving since there is always – to put it somewhat paradoxically –

‘more fullness’ to be pursued in human life. But we can speak of attaining fullness in an approximate sense, even if we may not have ‘arrived’ at complete fullness.<sup>11</sup>

*Fullness vs. ‘Personal Fulfillment’ and ‘Flourishing’*

At this point we now have a basic outline of Taylor’s account of fullness. However, before turning to discuss the connection between the experience of fullness and self-transcendence I believe it is important to distinguish Taylor’s notion of ‘fullness’ from two other apparently similar notions.

First, although Taylor uses the terms ‘fullness’ and ‘fulfillment’ interchangeably at times (see *SA* 5, 607, 838, n. 9), these terms need to be distinguished from subjective conceptions of fulfillment, i.e., ‘personal fulfillment’, which is defined by “whatever fulfills our personal needs and aspirations” (*SA* 838, n. 9). In other words, personal fulfillment is understood here merely in terms of attaining weak goods. By contrast, the sense of ‘fulfillment’ that is equivalent with ‘fullness’ Taylor says refers to “whatever realizes (what we see as) the highest and fullest form of life, even if this demands the sacrifice of personal “fulfillment”” (*SA* 838, n. 9). In other words, the term ‘fullness’ (or ‘fulfillment’, when used equivalently) should be understood in an objective, strong evaluative sense, as is clear from the fact that it is part of his account of the self in moral space where it is defined by the quality of our love and respect for constitutive goods and the degree to which we have realized the life goods they constitute.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> I am formalizing Taylor’s account in a way that he does not, but I think that what I say here is the most plausible way of interpreting what he does say so as to achieve overall coherence.

<sup>12</sup> Throughout *A Secular Age* Taylor uses the term ‘fulfillment’ in both strong evaluative and weak evaluative senses, though most often without explicitly specifying which sense is being used. However, I think one can usually decipher which sense is being used in the particular context.

The importance of defining our conception of fulfillment with reference to things that are objectively important in a strong evaluative sense is a key theme in both *Sources of the Self* and *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Taylor writes:

[Our] normal understanding of self-realization presupposes that some things are important *beyond the self*, that there are some goods or purposes the furthering of which has significance for us and which hence can provide the significance [of] fulfilling life needs. A total and fully consistent subjectivism would tend towards emptiness: nothing would count as fulfilment in a world in which literally nothing was important but self-fulfilment. (SS 507; my emphasis)<sup>13</sup>

This point is key for the second facet of re-enchantment that I am exploring in this chapter and in the remaining two that follow: viz., the attempt to overcome the tendency to self-enclosure that is induced by the process of disenchantment, which means to seek self-transcendence. In the next section I will begin examining the link between fullness/fulfillment and self-transcendence that is suggested in this passage. It should be said for now that Taylor's claim here regarding the importance of going "beyond the self" for self-realization/fulfillment could appear to be over-stated insofar as he also acknowledges that there are strong goods that are not "beyond the self" – viz., strong evaluative conceptions of our own human potential – but which entail going beyond subjectivist views of fulfillment. However, in the next section and in the next two chapters I will consider why love and concern for strong goods beyond the self – viz., other human beings, the natural world, and God – are crucial factors in human fulfillment or fullness, in addition to strong goods related to our own human potential.

The second concept that it is important to distinguish Taylor's notion of fullness from is that of 'flourishing', at least as this is discussed by contemporary neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists. As discussed in Chapter II, neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists – e.g.,

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. SS 43-4, 510-3, 526-7, n. 20; EA 34-5, 40-1, 58, 72-3, 81-2, 88-91.

Foot, Hursthouse, MacIntyre, et al. – seek to articulate a view of ‘the good life’ in terms of ‘human flourishing’, where this is understood on analogy with what it is for plants and non-human animals to flourish *qua* member of their particular species. For Hursthouse, e.g., to flourish *qua* human being means that we flourish with respect to our naturalistic ends as rational, social animals: viz., the ends of individual survival, species-continuation, characteristic enjoyment and freedom from pain, and the good functioning of our social group (Hursthouse 1999a, 202, 207). She remarks: “our ethical evaluations of ourselves ought to exhibit at least a recognizably similar structure to what we find in the botanists’ and ethologists’ evaluations of other living things” (ibid., 206).

A key difference we can observe here between such an account of human flourishing and Taylor’s notion of fullness is that whereas this account of human flourishing consists in a third-personal description of human beings on par with botanists’ and ethologists’ descriptions of other living things, Taylor’s notion of fullness refers us to our first-personal strong evaluative experience. As valid as such third-personal descriptions may be, nevertheless, I believe there is much important in human life that is lost if we do not also adequately take account of our first-personal experiences of fullness and the aspiration to it.<sup>14</sup> One way we can see how this is so is by considering the connection between the experience of fullness and the question of the meaning of life,

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<sup>14</sup> This recalls Taylor distinction between the disengaged and engaged standpoints (see the Introduction and the last chapter). Whereas the disengaged standpoint prescind from our experience of the significance of things for us as purposeful agents, the engaged standpoint seeks to take account of this experience and regards it as a crucial aspect of our being ‘self-interpreting animals’ (i.e., we are the kind of animal who have a sense of self or identity that is constituted by our interpretations of the significance of things for us). I should note here that Hursthouse does acknowledge – in a way it seems that Foot and MacIntyre do not in their discussions of ethical naturalism – some place for an engaged standpoint in that she thinks we have to be within an acquired ethical outlook in order to be moved by considerations of flourishing *qua* human being, instead of just acting on the immediate impress of desire (see ibid.. Ch. 8, pp. 194-5, 228-9, 256-65). But she does not go very far in exploring this standpoint and the account of flourishing *qua* human being is still conceived third-personally/quasi-scientifically (see McPherson 2012, 631-3, 643-5).



which we already pointed to above. To seek to provide an answer to the question of our life's 'meaning' is importantly different from identifying our 'naturalistic' purposes as human beings and asking whether or not we are flourishing with respect to them. The question of the meaning of life certainly does concern the issue of the purpose for one's life, but this must be a purpose of a particular kind. We can see this when we state the question of the meaning of life in terms of 'what, if anything, makes life *worth* living?' This way of stating it makes it clear that the question of the meaning of life is a question for strong evaluation; i.e., we must specify the higher, more noble, more fulfilling mode of life that can be seen as 'worthwhile' or 'meaningful'.

On this understanding it is possible then that one might be flourishing with respect to the naturalistic ends specified by Hursthouse but nevertheless question from a first-personal perspective whether his or her life is in fact meaningful or worthwhile. It is indeed a distinctive feature of human life in contrast to the life of non-human animals that we are beings for whom the question of our life's meaning or worth arises. Thus whereas non-human animals are satisfied with the fulfillment of their naturalistic ends, for human beings this is not necessarily the case. The corollary of this is that human beings, as contrasted with non-human animals, are capable of a qualitatively higher mode of experience when our lives are lived as meaningful or worthwhile: viz., the experience of 'fullness'. It should be said that the realization of some of our natural human capacities whereby we achieve human flourishing can also be part of achieving fullness if these capacities are strongly valued. Thus, there can be overlap between the two notions. But fullness can also include more than fulfilling natural human capacities: viz., it can include love or concern for objects beyond the self that are regarded as being worthy of such love

and concern. Moreover, it includes a conception of the whole ontological background picture behind one's strong evaluative experiences, as will be discussed more in the next section when considering religious and non-religious conceptions of fullness.<sup>15</sup>

It should be said that Taylor is not always clear or precise in his own use of the term 'human flourishing'. His most extensive discussion of human flourishing is in the context of his discussion of a kind of 'transcendence' that is understood in terms of a 'good beyond and higher than human flourishing'.<sup>16</sup> For those who acknowledge such a higher good beyond human flourishing it is said to be a source of fullness (*SA* 5-20). This clearly shows that Taylor acknowledges a distinction between fullness and human flourishing.<sup>17</sup> In this context 'human flourishing' seems to be understood roughly along the lines of the sort of accounts provided by contemporary neo-Aristotelians, where it is a matter of properly fulfilling our 'naturalistic ends', or in Taylor's terms, our 'life needs' or 'life-related values' (see *SS* 507; Taylor 2003a, 308-10; *SA* 150).<sup>18</sup> However, as we will see in the next chapter, on some occasions Taylor does speak of a 'revisionist' view of 'human flourishing' – i.e., "the highest, more real, authentic or adequate human flourishing" – where it seems to be synonymous with his account of fullness (*SA* 16; cf. 152-3). Here 'human flourishing' is understood in a strong evaluative sense, rather than in terms of properly fulfilling biological or life needs. But this is not the sense of 'human flourishing' that Taylor has in mind in his discussion of transcendence as a good beyond and higher than human flourishing. Indeed, I believe it is in order to mark the contrast

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<sup>15</sup> For more on this distinction between fullness and flourishing see my article "To What Extent Must We Go Beyond Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism?" (McPherson 2012), which I draw on here.

<sup>16</sup> I will discuss Taylor's account of transcendence in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>17</sup> This point is not always recognized by commentators (see, e.g., Jay 2009, 78).

<sup>18</sup> Recall that in Chapter II I distinguished such life needs or life-related values from Taylor's account of 'life goods', which are strong goods that define for us a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of being (i.e., 'the good life'). By contrast, life needs are determined by the kind of biological creature that we are and as such are weakly valued (though they can come to be strongly valued).

with this strong evaluative, ‘revisionist’ sense of human flourishing that Taylor often speaks of transcendence as a good beyond and higher than *ordinary* human flourishing, where this seems to be what is attained through the proper fulfillment of life needs.<sup>19</sup> In what follows, unless otherwise noted, I will use ‘human flourishing’ in this ‘ordinary’ sense of the term and as distinct from the concept of ‘fullness’, which I believe is generally Taylor’s practice. I think maintaining this distinction is important for capturing different aspects of evaluation in our life.<sup>20</sup>

I now want to examine the connection between Taylor’s account of fullness and the desire for and achievement of self-transcendence.

## II. FULLNESS AND SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

### *Sources of Fullness: Within vs. Without*

We need to begin by considering a distinction that Taylor makes between two different general kinds of ‘sources’ of fullness, where ‘sources’ is understood in terms of constitutive goods.<sup>21</sup> The distinction Taylor makes is between sources of fullness *within* (i.e., internal to us) and sources of fullness *without* (i.e., external to us) (*SA* 8-10; cf. 244-59; Taylor 1988a, 300-2; *SS* 93-5; *DC* 11). For Taylor this is in fact one way in which religious and non-religious conceptions of fullness can typically be distinguished. In regard to religious believers he writes:

[...] often or typically, the sense is that fullness comes to them, that it is something they receive; moreover, receive in something like a personal relation,

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<sup>19</sup> See *SA* 44, 66-7, 80-2, 150-4, 221-4, 230-1, 430-1, 510, 584-5, 611, 623-34, 640-6, 668, 676-7, 687.

<sup>20</sup> This distinction will be important in the next chapter when we consider Taylor’s account of ‘transcendence’ as a good beyond and higher than ordinary human flourishing. I will maintain that any account of fullness can be said to be a form of ‘transcendence’ in this sense.

<sup>21</sup> Recall that on my interpretation fullness is attained through achieving a greater love and respect for constitutive goods – e.g., other human beings, our own potential, the natural world, and God – and thereby realizing the life goods they constitute.

from another being capable of love and giving; approaching fullness involves among other things, practices of devotion and prayer (as well as charity, giving); and they are aware of being self-enclosed, bound to lesser things and goals, not able to open themselves and receive/give as they would at the place of fullness. So there is the notion of receiving power or fullness in a relation; but the receiver isn't simply empowered in his/her present condition; he/she needs to be opened, transformed, brought out of self. (SA 8)

It is important to especially note the last part of this description of fullness in which it is said to require that one be "opened, transformed, brought out of self". This provides an initial indication of the connection between self-transcendence and fullness that I will try to explain more fully below after considering some further examples of fullness.

Taylor acknowledges that the above passage is a Christian formulation of fullness and so another way of stating the vision of fullness expressed there is in terms of the Christian notion of *agape*, which consists in communion with God and other human beings (regarded as created in the 'image of God'), and can even extend to all created things (à la St. Francis).<sup>22</sup> However, he also mentions a Buddhist formulation of fullness in which "the personal relation might drop out as central. But the emphasis would be all the stronger on the direction of transcending the self, opening it out, receiving a power that goes beyond us" (SA 8; cf. CM 21-2; SA 17).<sup>23</sup> Taylor recognizes that there is of course something paradoxical about speaking of a Buddhist formulation of fullness since in Buddhism "the highest aspiration is to a kind of emptiness (*sunyata*)". Thus we would have to say: "real fullness only comes through emptiness" (SA 780, n. 8).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *PHS* 234; *SS* 93, 451-2, 516-18, 521; *CM* 21-2; *SA* 16-8, 278-82, 430, 701-3, 737-42. In Chapter VI I will discuss in more detail the importance of the Christian notion of *agape* in Taylor's view.

<sup>23</sup> It should be said that the formulation of fullness in other historically related theistic religions such as Judaism and Islam would be similar to Taylor's Christian formulation. Elsewhere Taylor does mention specific Jewish and Islamic ideals that could factor into specifically Jewish and Islamic formulations of fullness, such as *tikkun olam* ('repairing the world') in the case of Judaism (SA 17, 681-2) and submission to God in the case of Islam (SA 818, n. 23).

<sup>24</sup> I will come back to discuss the case of Buddhism more below after I put forward my account of self-transcendence and its relationship to Taylor's account of fullness.

In contrast to such external sources of fullness among religious believers, in the case of non-religious conceptions of fullness, Taylor says, the “power to reach fullness is within” (*SA* 8). He mentions two conceptions of our human potential as rational agents as examples of such ‘internal’ sources of fullness. First, he mentions the “Kantian variant” in which we are said to have “the power as rational agents to make the laws by which we live”, viz., in the form of ‘categorical imperatives’. This power of rational agency is regarded as “something so greatly superior to the force of mere nature in us, in the form of desire, that when we contemplate it without distortion, we cannot but feel reverence [...] for this power” (*SA* 8). On this view then fullness is attained when “we manage finally to give this power full reign [over our desires], and so to live by it” (*SA* 8).<sup>25</sup>

Second, Taylor mentions the naturalist ideal of ‘disengaged reason’ as offering another example of an inner source of fullness. Some well-known proponents of this perspective include Jeremy Bentham, Albert Camus, Bertrand Russell, and E.O. Wilson. On this view there is an admiration for “the power of cool, disengaged reason, capable of contemplating the world and human life without illusion, and of acting lucidly for the best in the interest of human flourishing. A certain awe surrounds reason as a critical power, capable of liberating us from illusion and blind force of instinct, as well as the phantasies bred of our fear and narrowness and pusillanimity” (*SA* 9). Implicit here is a connection between the ideal of disengaged reason and the utilitarian ideal of the benevolent ‘impartial spectator’, which Taylor later makes explicit when he writes that proponents of this view claim that “disengaged reason itself, by freeing us from enmiring in our own narrow perspective, and allowing us a view of the whole, must kindle the desire to serve the whole” (*SA* 250-1). Elsewhere he similarly remarks that on a

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *SS* 83-90, 94, Chs. 20-1; *SA* 251-2, 257, 311-2, 596, 694.

disengaged view “[we] not only transcend our craven desire for comfort and assurance; we also rise beyond our narrow perspective and can take in the whole. We become so filled with awe of it that we can step outside our own limited concerns” (*SS* 407).<sup>26</sup>

Taylor describes the view of fullness that emerges from this perspective as follows: “this sense of ourselves as beings both frail and courageous, capable of facing a meaningless, hostile universe without faintness of heart, and of rising to the challenge of devising our own rules of life, can be an inspiring one [...]. Rising fully to this challenge, empowered by this sense of our own greatness in doing so, this condition we aspire to but only rarely, if ever, achieve, can function as its own place of fullness” (*SA* 9).<sup>27</sup>

It should be mentioned that there are of course other important non-religious views of our human potential that can also be seen as providing inner sources of fullness. Perhaps the most historically influential is Aristotle’s account of our human potential as rational, social animals. Here fullness is attained when we acquire the virtues of character and the virtues of intellect that fulfill our human potential and so realize a higher mode of life than is possible for non-human animals (see *SS* 125; Taylor 1991a, 245-6; *DC* 10-1). Taylor also discusses in a number of his works ‘Romantic’ views that emphasize our powers of feeling more than our powers of reason, such as our natural bent towards sympathy or communion with others and the natural world and our aesthetic sensitivity.

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<sup>26</sup> In both contexts Taylor cites a passage from Bertrand Russell in which “he distinguishes two natures in human beings, one “particular, finite, self-centered; the other universal, infinite and impartial”. The infinite part “shines impartially”” (*SS* 407). Russell writes: “Distant ages and remote regions of space are as real to it as what is present and near. In thought, it rises above the life of the senses, seeking always what is general and open to all men. In desire and will, it aims simply at the good, without regarding what is mine or yours. In feeling, it gives love to all, not only to those who further the purposes of the self. Unlike the finite self, it is impartial; its impartiality leads to truth in thought, justice in action, and universal love in feeling” (*SS* 408; cf. *SA* 251). Something similar is expressed by John Rawls at the end of *A Theory of Justice* when he writes about the importance of seeing ourselves *sub specie aeternitatis* (Rawls 1999, 514). For Rawls this is intended to support a Kantian view rather than a utilitarian view.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *PHS* 234-5; *SS* 94-5, 314-20, 329-31, 404-11, Chs. 8-9; *SA* 231-2, 250-8, 283-8, 694-5.

Here fullness is attained when we actualize our powers or ‘inner depths’ of feeling.<sup>28</sup>

Lastly, there is the Nietzschean perspective that conceives of our human potential in light of the idea of the will to power as the fundamental drive in life. Here fullness is attained through realizing a great expression of the will to power in ‘self-overcoming’ and in courageously saying ‘yes’ to life in spite of all the suffering it contains.<sup>29</sup>

Now, at this point it must be said that Taylor’s attempt to distinguish between religious and non-religious conceptions of fullness through a within–without distinction in regard to sources of fullness is not wholly adequate. Or at least this is the case insofar as we understand religious faith in Taylor’s ‘strong sense’ in which it is defined by a double criterion: viz., “the belief in transcendent reality, on one hand, and the connected aspiration to a transformation which goes beyond ordinary human flourishing on the other” (*SA* 510; cf. 430). For one thing there is an ambiguity in speaking of sources ‘within’ human beings: Does this mean internal to an individual human being or to humanity as a whole? If we regard our own human potential as a constitutive good then it would of course be a source of fullness within our own individual self when we actualize this potential. But if we also regard other human beings as constitutive goods – viz., because of some view of their human potential that makes them worthy of our love, respect, and concern – then it seems we can speak of the source of fullness being in one sense ‘internal’ and in another sense ‘external’. On the one hand, we can say that this is a source of fullness within or internal to human beings, i.e., within humanity as a whole. On the other hand, as individual persons it can be said to be a source of fullness external to us. Thus one can experience fullness in moments of love or communion with other

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<sup>28</sup> See *SS* 283-4, 296-301, 314-20, 411-2, Chs. 15, 20-1; *SA* 251, 254, 256-8, 310, 313-7, 596.

<sup>29</sup> See *SA* 10; cf. *SS* 452-5, 526-7, n. 20; *SA* 317-23, 369-74, 586-7, 630, 634-9, 720-6.

human beings. In fact, many secular humanists claim that humanity as a whole can be viewed as taking the place of God as the ultimate object of love and devotion. This is clear in those, such as John Stuart Mill and Luc Ferry, who put forward the ideal of a ‘religion of humanity’.<sup>30</sup> Here we can identify a broader use of the term ‘religion’, which does not require a transcendent reality such as God, but rather only requires an external source of fullness that can serve as an ultimate object of love and devotion. However, unless otherwise noted, I will continue to use ‘religion’ in Taylor’s strong sense.

While I do not think Taylor does enough justice to the way in which other human beings do indeed provide an external source of fullness for secular humanists, he is better at acknowledging external sources of fullness for non-religious people in regard to those who embrace a deep ecological perspective where the natural world is regarded as a source of fullness insofar as we are in harmony or communion with it (*SA* 9; cf. *PA* 100-1, 125-6; *SS* 102-3, 383-4, 513). This is because Taylor seems to discuss ‘external’ sources of fullness as being synonymous with non-anthropocentric constitutive goods, such as God or the natural world. But as we have just discussed, we can also speak of external sources of fullness in regard to other human beings when they are regarded as constitutive goods for us.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, this acknowledgement of an external source of fullness in the case of deep ecology does show a recognition on Taylor’s part that the

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<sup>30</sup> See Mill 2001, 33-4; 1998, 104-22, 255-7; Ferry 2002.

<sup>31</sup> I will take up this topic of external sources of fullness in non-religious views more fully in the next chapter when I consider how Taylor’s account of transcendence allows for ‘horizontal’ (i.e., non-religious) forms of ‘transcendence’, even though he has been criticized for not adequately acknowledging such forms. As we will see, in the context of his debate with Martha Nussbaum, Taylor does in fact acknowledge that we can speak of external sources of fullness for secular humanists (see *SA* 629-30). I should note here that Elizabeth Shakman Hurd has also taken issue with Taylor’s attempt to distinguish between religious and non-religious views of fullness through a within–without distinction in regard to sources of fullness and she points to the work of Deleuze as offering a counter-example (Shakman Hurd 2008, 487-9).



within–without distinction is not wholly adequate for capturing the difference between religious and non-religious conceptions of the sources of fullness.

Furthermore, it should be said that religious people can of course acknowledge all of these other sources of fullness – viz., our own human potential, other human beings, and the natural world – though they will be interpreted according to their particular religious background ontology.<sup>32</sup> It seems then that the key difference between religious and non-religious conceptions of fullness is not whether the sources of fullness are within or without – given that both perspectives can acknowledge internal and external sources of fullness – but rather the key difference is whether one acknowledges a transcendent or supernatural entity, such as God, as a source of fullness.

### *Self-Transcendence*

While I do not think Taylor’s within–without distinction is all that helpful with regard to distinguishing between religious and non-religious conceptions of fullness, nevertheless, I do think it is important for distinguishing between two general types of self-transcendence, either or both of which I maintain are operative in any experience of fullness. First, if we consider internal sources of fullness I believe we can see a kind of self-transcendence through the actualization of strongly valued capacities (i.e., constitutive goods internal to ourselves). Second, if we consider external sources of fullness I believe we can see a kind of self-transcendence through love or concern for constitutive goods (e.g., other persons, the natural world, God) external to one’s own

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<sup>32</sup> Indeed, as we have seen, this is the case with Taylor himself. For a Christian such as Taylor the internal source of our own potential and the external source of other human beings will be interpreted in light of the idea that human beings are created in the ‘image of God’ and thus made for a higher mode of life in communion with God and one another. Likewise, the natural world as an external source will be interpreted in light of the view that the world has been made for an objectively good purpose by God.

person. I believe both forms of self-transcendence are operative in Taylor's account of fullness in *A Secular Age* and they are also suggested in *Sources* when he writes: "The aspiration to fulness can be met by building something into one's life, some pattern of higher action, or some meaning; or it can be met by connecting one's life up with some greater reality or story. Or it can, of course, be both" (SS 43).<sup>33</sup> In both cases I want to show how the self-transcendence involved should be understood in terms of transcending a lower mode of selfhood for a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood, which means that they are both in fact forms of self-realization. In other words, self-transcendence and self-realization can be said to be 'two sides of the same coin'. Self-transcendence expresses the 'side' of going beyond a lower mode of selfhood, while self-realization expresses the 'side' of realizing a higher mode of selfhood. Both terms are important for capturing the phenomena at issue. I think this is the best way to understand Taylor's own use of the language of being 'brought out of self', 'transcending the self', 'decentering the self', going 'beyond the self', 'self-overcoming', etc., in connection to ideals of fullness/fulfillment (see SA 8, 629-30; CM 21; SS 507; EA 40-1).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> It worth noting that some of the important philosophical literature on the topic of the meaning of life – of which Taylor's account of fullness is a part, as we have seen – also emphasizes the role of self-transcendence in a meaningful life (see Metz 2011). For instance, Susan Wolf puts forward a view of meaning in life that can be seen to correspond to the two general forms of self-transcendence that I have identified when she discusses two related views: 'the fulfillment view' and 'the larger-than-oneself view' (Wolf 2010). Likewise, Robert Nozick writes: "Attempts to find meaning in life seek to transcend the limits of an individual life. The narrower the limits of a life, the less meaningful it is [...]. For a life to have meaning, it must connect with other things, with some thing or values beyond itself" (Nozick 1981, 594). Although Nozick emphasizes the role of love or concern for someone or something external to one's self, I think we can also clearly transcend limits when we actualize strongly valued capacities (as is emphasized by Nietzsche in his view of self-overcoming). Wolf and Nozick do not explicitly use the language of 'self-transcendence' here, but I think what they say clearly corresponds to my account of self-transcendence in its two general forms. Moreover, I think my account of self-transcendence in terms of transcending a lower for a higher mode of selfhood helps to provide greater intelligibility to what they say.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Costello also notes the connection between fullness and self-transcendence in Taylor's work (Costello 2010, 40). However, he does not give an account of the nature of self-transcendence – as I do – that explains how achieving self-transcendence can also be understood as achieving fullness. I should mention that besides using the term 'self-transcendence' (Taylor 1988b, 812-3; 1997a, 174; SS 295; EA 41; SA 44, 230-2, 311; Taylor 2010b, 413), Taylor also uses a number of equivalent or related terms. Consider

Before discussing the two general modes of self-transcendence in more detail there are several further comments I need to make here. First, it is important to note that the language of transcending a ‘lower’ mode of selfhood for a ‘higher’ mode of selfhood is intended to express a strong evaluative judgment about different modes of being a self. As we have already seen in the last two chapters, such strong evaluative judgments regarding modes of selfhood are in fact inherent to any strong evaluation. In a passage previously cited in Chapter II Taylor says that when we engage in strong evaluation “our desires are classified in such categories as higher and lower, virtuous and vicious, more and less fulfilling, more and less refined, profound and superficial, noble and base. They are judged as belonging to qualitatively different modes of life: fragment or integrated, alienated or free, saintly, or merely human, courageous or pusillanimous and so on” (*HAL* 16). Although Taylor speaks here of “qualitatively different modes of life” I think this can be understood as equivalent with “qualitatively different modes of selfhood” given his account of the self in the moral/spiritual space. In light of this account we can say that we transcend a lower mode of selfhood for a higher mode of selfhood when we achieve a greater ‘contact’ or ‘placement’ with respect to our conception of the good than we had previously. In other words, we achieve this higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood through a greater love, respect, or concern for constitutive goods and realizing more fully

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the following list of terms used by Taylor: ‘beyond the self’ (*SS* 390, 462, 507; *EA* 40-1, 73, 88-91; *PA* 126; *SA* 482-3, 517); ‘brought out of self’ (*SA* 8); ‘transcending the self’ (*SS* 526; *SA* 8); ‘decentering of the self’ (*SS* 465, 481; *CM* 21; *SA* 629); ‘self-overcoming’ (*SA* 630; Taylor 2004b, 9; 2010b, 411); ‘change of identity’ (*CM* 21); ‘higher self’/‘true self’/‘real self’ (*PHS* 216; *SA* 396, 507; *DC* 298); ‘transcending humanity’ or the ‘merely human’ (*HAL* 112-3; *SA* 625-7); ‘beyond self-related desire’ (*EA* 58; *SA* 311); ‘a relationship where giving and receiving merge’ (*SA* 702); ‘fusion’ (*SA* 482-3, 516-8); ‘carried away in rapture’ (*SS* 48). Moreover, as we will see in the next chapter, one of Taylor’s types of ‘transcendence’ can be seen as equivalent with self-transcendence: viz., transcendence understood as a good beyond and higher than ordinary human flourishing, which requires significant ethical/spiritual transformation. Finally, Taylor also speaks on a number of occasions of the opposite pole of self-transcendence: viz., self-enclosure (see *EA* 4, 35, 40, 58; *SA* 10, 702; *CM* 121).

the life goods they constitute. The language of ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ modes of selfhood is thus a way of describing our placement in moral/spiritual space with respect to how close or how far away we are from achieving the good in our life.

Second, it is important that we speak here in terms of different *modes* of selfhood, rather than in terms of completely different selves. As we have seen in Chapter III, Taylor endorses a narrative conception of self in his account of the self in moral/spiritual space, which enables a unified view of the self over the whole of life that contains many changes or *modes* of being a self with regard to our orientation and placement in relation to the good (see *SS* 47-52). Admittedly, the language of self-transcendence and self-realization might seem to suggest a distinction between completely different selves, which goes against Taylor’s unified narrative conception of the self.<sup>35</sup> I do not think there is a perfect term to express the idea of transcending a lower mode of selfhood for a higher mode of selfhood while remaining the same unified, narrative-constituted self. However, since Taylor himself uses the language of self-transcendence and other equivalent terms and since there seems to be no better short-hand term, I think it is best to use the term ‘self-transcendence’ with the stipulation that this should be understood in terms of transcending a lower mode of selfhood for a higher mode of selfhood.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> On one occasion Taylor does speak of a ‘change of identity’ with respect to an ideal of moral/spiritual transformation (*CM* 21). However, I do not think that this should be understood in terms of becoming a completely different self since this would go against his narrative conception of the self. There is a sense in which I might experience my transformed self as a different self from my untransformed self, but note that I still speak here of *my* untransformed self. In other words, it is still included within my unified narrative conception of self. When I experience my transformed self as a different self from my untransformed self I think this is best understood as a different *mode* of being one and the same self.

<sup>36</sup> Given the foregoing remarks it should be clear that neither Taylor nor I endorse the sort of ‘split-self’ view that Isaiah Berlin critiques in his essay “Two Concepts of Liberty” (see Berlin 2002, 179ff). Berlin seems to understand this ‘split-self’ view as a sort of ‘Manichean’ view that holds that we have two *ontologically* distinct selves existing at the same time: on the one hand, there is a higher, truer, more real, dominant, transcendent self; on the other hand, there is a lower, more false, less real, needing-to-be-disciplined, empirical self (*ibid.*, 179-81). By contrast, my account of self-transcendence in terms of transcending a ‘lower’ mode of selfhood for a ‘higher’ mode of selfhood is not meant to suggest that there

Third, given that the idea of transcending a lower mode of selfhood for a higher mode of selfhood is to be understood in terms of Taylor's account of the self in moral/spiritual space and his narrative conception of the self, it should be noted that achieving a particular higher mode of selfhood is not necessarily something permanent. For one thing, we can transcend this higher mode of selfhood for an even higher mode that more fully realizes the good.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, although the goal of the ethical/spiritual life is to progress towards a more fully virtuous life as an enduring mode of being, our life narrative will not always be a narrative of steady progress as there can be decline or regression in regard to our 'contact' or 'placement' with respect to the good. In other words, we can also move from a higher mode of selfhood to a lower mode of selfhood. Alas, this is a common human experience.<sup>38</sup> Even the best kinds of lives will likely include 'up and downs' as part of an overall progress towards a fuller embodiment of the good. Furthermore, as discussed above, there are also peak experiences of 'contact' with the good that are not sustainable, though they may be part of a 'conversion experience' that helps us to achieve a more enduring, higher mode of selfhood.<sup>39</sup>

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are actually two ontologically distinct selves, but rather it expresses a strong evaluation of one and the same self that throughout the course of a life can stand in different relationships to its conception of the good.

Berlin's account of 'split-self' views I believe is actually something of a 'straw-man' since it is not clear who today, if anyone, would actually hold such a 'Manichean' view. However, regardless of Berlin's characterization of 'split-self' views, I think the force of his critique extends to all higher ideals, especially to teleological conceptions of the self, which my account of self-transcendence and Taylor's evaluative framework embodies. As discussed in Chapter III, Berlin says that the chief difference between himself and Taylor is that Taylor is "basically a teleologist", whereas he is not (Berlin 1994, 1). Berlin's chief concern as a liberal thinker is of course that higher ideals can justify coercion or oppression. In Chapters V and VI I will examine Taylor's own discussion of the danger inherent in embracing higher ideals, but also the danger that exists if we abandon all such higher ideals. Much depends of course on the character of the higher ideal and how it is pursued. See Taylor's "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty" in *PHS* for his response to Berlin's "Two Concepts".

<sup>37</sup> Recall that earlier I said that there is a continuum in the degree to which we have achieved fullness.

<sup>38</sup> One obvious example of this is the alcoholic who achieves sobriety only to later relapse. This is often part of an ongoing battle in which one hopes to achieve progress on the whole.

<sup>39</sup> It should be mentioned here that achieving such an enduring, higher mode of life does not mean that we no longer engage in weak evaluation. As I argued in Chapter II, it seems difficult to avoid engaging in some weak evaluation in our lives. For instance, if we consider a 'saintly', self-transcending figure such as

Finally, I should remark that since the aspiration to self-transcendence and fullness is part of Taylor's account of the self in moral/spiritual space and since he thinks it is an integral part of normal functioning human agency that we orientate ourselves in moral/spiritual space, it therefore seems that if we accept this view it would be difficult to live life as though it were completely disenchanting, where this not only means avoiding strong evaluation altogether, but also living a completely self-enclosed life (*EA* 4). In other words, it seems that we have a natural aspiration towards self-transcendence and fullness. As mentioned above, it is also the case that the process of disenchantment can push towards self-enclosure because of the loss of an obvious, taken-for-granted meaningful cosmic order. On Taylor's view many people in the modern world experience a threat of meaninglessness or a danger of falling into the extreme form of 'exile' discussed above, i.e., where "we lose a sense of where the place of fullness is, even of what fullness could consist in; we feel we've forgotten what it would look like, or cannot believe in it any more" (*SA* 6; cf. 302-3, 307-9, 677; *SS* 16-9). For those who do fall into such exile it causes self-enclosure; i.e., one no longer aspires to a higher, more fulfilling form of life. However, as mentioned above, Taylor thinks that most people in the modern world are somewhere in the 'middle condition' between exile and fullness. Some of these people seek to stave off exile primarily by living in the meanings that arise for them in

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St. Francis we can say that he will of course get tired and desire to go to bed, he will get hungry and desire to eat food and will have preferences about which food to eat, and so on with any number of areas of weak evaluation. Of course, there may at times be conflicts between such weak goods and strong goods: e.g., he may decide to give up a meal for someone in need. But obviously he will need to eat at some point. Moreover, I also argued in Chapter II that it seems to be a part of the strong good of human wholeness to allow some place for weak goods in our lives. Thus, even the 'saintly' person should be allowed, e.g., to enjoy a favorite flavor of ice cream every now and then. Another good example can be found in the documentary *Into Great Silence*, which is about Carthusian monks in the French Alps. The film ends by showing the monks going sledding and there seems to be something humanly significant about this. In short, when I speak of transcending a lower mode of selfhood for a higher mode of selfhood, this does not mean transcending or renouncing all weak goods. But it does involve transcending *over-attachment* to any lesser good that prevents us from achieving a higher good. I think something like the Augustinian notion of the proper 'order of love' can be appealed to here (see *CM* 121; *SS* 128; *SA* 112-3, 276).

their ordinary daily life. But the question often arises here about “the ultimate significance of these particular meanings” and so this middle condition also typically involves a search for fullness (*SA* 678).<sup>40</sup> This search may be guided by a vague sense of the place of fullness – as “something we just catch glimpses of from afar off”, to recall the passage quoted earlier (*SA* 5) – which we seek to better define by articulating an adequate account of constitutive goods. Whatever the case may be, the important point to see is that on Taylor’s view the aspiration to “a fullness or richness which transcends the ordinary [...] will not easily be uprooted from the human heart” (*SA* 678). In short, the aspiration to self-transcendence and fullness is something of a ‘human constant’.

With these remarks in place we can now consider in more detail what I have identified as two general kinds of self-transcendence.

*Self-Transcendence #1: Actualizing Strongly Valued Capacities*

Let us begin by examining the first general kind of self-transcendence that I mentioned above, viz., self-transcendence through actualizing strongly valued capacities, which may include, e.g., intellectual, affective, ethical, creative, and athletic capacities.<sup>41</sup> Above we have already mentioned a number of well-known examples of strongly valued capacities or notions of human potential: viz., Kantian, naturalist/utilitarian, Aristotelian, Romantic, Nietzschean, and Christian views. Whatever the strongly valued capacities may be in a particular ideal of self-actualization, we can say, according to my account of self-transcendence, that the ‘lower’ mode of selfhood is where these capacities are not yet

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<sup>40</sup> I will discuss this issue further in the next chapter.

<sup>41</sup> The desire for self-transcendence through the actualization of a capacity requires that the capacity be strongly valued because the goal is to achieve a higher good and a higher mode of selfhood. This avoids committing myself to the view that all forms of actualizing capacities are forms of self-transcendence. For instance, the normal process of bodily growth or maturation certainly involves the actualization of certain capacities, but this does not involve strong evaluation and thus we do not say that a ‘higher’ mode of selfhood is attained in a strong evaluative sense.

actualized, whereas the ‘higher’, more fulfilling mode of selfhood is where these capacities are actualized. The achievement of self-transcendence here often includes the experience of transcending limitations, resistances, or incapacities, which are part of a lower mode of selfhood (see *SA* 6; cf. *SS* 48). We can see this, e.g., in Nietzsche’s ideal of self-overcoming in which we overcome internal resistances to expressing the will to power; in the Aristotelian ideal of virtue in which we overcome rule by mere animal impulse; in the disengaged ideal in which we transcend narrowness and pusillanimity; in the Kantian ideal in which we transcend determination by egoistic desire through following the categorical imperative; in the Romantic ideal in which we recover our inner depths of feeling through overcoming the corrupting effects of civilization, rationalism, etc.; and in the Christian ideal of *agape* in which we realize our capacity for *agape* by overcoming our tendency towards self-enclosure, which in theological terms is called sin.

Now, there is of course going to be a continuum in the degree to which these capacities are actualized, which forms part of our sense of placement in moral space. Additionally, as was mentioned with reference to Taylor’s account of fullness, we can observe two different modes of self-transcendence/self-realization through actualizing strongly valued capacities: on the one hand, there are more enduring forms, such as in the case of acquiring the virtues; on the other hand, there are also momentary experiences, such as when we momentarily overcome an incapacity or achieve a peak experience in actualizing a strongly valued capacity, e.g., in doing a great virtuous deed.



*Self-Transcendence #2: Love or Concern for Constitutive Goods External to One's Own Person*

Let us now consider the second form of self-transcendence mentioned above, viz., love or concern for constitutive goods (e.g., other persons, the natural world, God) external to one's own person, which is perhaps the most common way of thinking about self-transcendence. Indeed, the concept of self-transcendence might seem to imply simply an 'ecstatic' state in the literal sense of the word, i.e., a state of being 'outside of one's self' in love or concern for someone or something external to the self. As we saw above, Taylor's own typical way of talking about self-transcendence is in terms of being "brought out of self", going "beyond the self", or the "decentering of the self", which might seem to suggest such a view (*SA* 8, 629; *SS* 507; *CM* 21). Likewise, Hans Joas describes the experience of self-transcendence in terms of "being pulled beyond the boundaries of one's self, being captivated by something outside of myself, a relaxation of or liberation from one's fixation on oneself" (Joas 2008, 7). Iris Murdoch also writes about the experience of "unselfing" through love for and attention to reality outside the self, which she regards as crucial for the moral life (Murdoch 1997, 369).

While these 'ecstatic' experiences of being 'brought out of self' or going 'beyond the self' are certainly important for an understanding of self-transcendence through love or concern for persons or beings external to one's own person, I believe that this is only part of what is needed for a proper account. Indeed, as it stands it appears in danger of being viewed as merely a loss or denial of the self, which I think a proper account of self-transcendence needs to avoid if it is to be motivationally intelligible. What is needed I believe is an account of how being 'brought out of self' in love or concern for other

persons or beings can at the same time be understood to involve the transcending of a lower mode of selfhood for a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood. Some account of this sort is implied by Taylor when he speaks of being “brought out of self” and of recognizing things that are important “beyond the self” in the context of speaking about fullness and self-realization. Thus, something needs to be said here about how such self-transcending love or concern is connected with achieving fullness or self-realization.

I believe this can be seen to follow from the nature of love itself. If we understand love for other persons or beings, as I believe we should, to involve affective identification, then these ‘external’ objects of love cannot in fact be regarded as completely external to one’s self. This is because through love we affectively identify with others and thereby include them within an ‘expanded’ sense of ‘self’ such that we regard their good as our own and thus will good for them as for our own self.<sup>42</sup> When such love for others is reciprocated it becomes ‘communion’ in the full sense (i.e., mutual love between persons). Taylor himself speaks of the highest kind of love between persons as embodying “a relationship where giving and receiving merge” and where fullness consists in “something that happens between people rather than within each one” (*SA* 702; *CM* 113; cf. *SS* 527, n. 20; *VRT* 37).<sup>43</sup> My claim is thus that through affective

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<sup>42</sup> My view here owes much to Aristotle’s account of friendship in Books VIII-IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and to St. Thomas Aquinas’s account of the “love of friendship” in Questions 26-28 in the First Part of the Second Part of the *Summa Theologiae*. See especially Aquinas’s discussion of the love of friendship in terms of ‘benevolence’ (q. 26, a. 4), ‘union’ (q. 28, a. 1), ‘mutual indwelling’ (q. 28, a. 2), and ‘ecstasy’ (q. 28, a. 3); each of these features figure into my account here. I am also indebted to Josiah Royce’s account of the “ideally extended self” in *The Problem of Christianity*, Pt. II, Chs. IX-X.

<sup>43</sup> It is important to note here that this extended self in communion with others implies that the individual self is preserved rather than dissolved in the experience of communion (as the word ‘communion’ suggests), such that there is what Taylor describes as “unity-across-difference, as against unity-through-identity” (*CM* 14). Indeed, love/communion requires both a lover and a beloved. Moreover, although our sense of selfhood may be constituted by our identifications with others, nevertheless, it is also constituted by our other identifications, such as with our past, present, and future embodied subjectivity as well as with other strong goods besides those involved in our love or concern for others (see *SS* 27). Thus,

identification or communion with others whereby we include them within an expanded sense of self we can actually experience a greater fullness than we would otherwise.<sup>44</sup>

Essential to this experience of fullness in love/communion, however, is that we find these others to be worthy of love (i.e., they are regarded as constitutive goods), which also includes the strong evaluative judgment that such love embodies a higher mode of being.

If we interpret such self-transcending love according to my basic account of self-transcendence then we can say that the ‘lower’ mode of selfhood is the self that is not yet affectively extended through love and is perhaps to some degree self-enclosed, whereas the ‘higher’, more fulfilling mode of selfhood is the self in which affective identification or communion with other persons or beings has been achieved and self-enclosure has been overcome.<sup>45</sup> It must be noted again that there is of course a continuum in the degree to which we have overcome self-enclosure and achieved self-transcendence through love, which is part of our sense of placement in moral space. Additionally, we can again observe two different modes of self-transcendence/self-realization through love: on the one hand, there are more enduring forms, such as in the case of a deep, long-lasting friendship; on the other hand, there are also momentary ‘peak experiences’ of love, such as when we feel intensely in full communion with another person or overflowing with love for humanity, the world, God, or whatever else (recall the Havel passage above).

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one’s sense of self can be said to include both individual and communal components. In Chapter VI I will explore how Taylor’s theistic teleological view is centered on the ‘telos of communion’.

<sup>44</sup> The corollary of this is that without such love or communion we often feel a kind of emptiness or insubstantiality, i.e., loneliness.

<sup>45</sup> Following Taylor (*SA* 8), I am using ‘self-enclosure’ here as the opposite pole to the achievement of self-transcendence through love or concern for other persons or beings. In this case a person is self-enclosed to the extent he or she is ‘closed off’ from love or concern for other persons or beings; e.g., because of overriding concern for wealth, fame, power, pleasure, or other personal projects. One may also be self-enclosed because of narrower forms of attachments to others, such as in various forms of chauvinism (e.g., nationalism) where we are closed off from concern for others beyond our preferred group. I also think that self-enclosure can be understood more broadly as any way in which we are closed off to self-transcendence, including the self-transcendence involved in actualizing our strongly valued capacities.

Now, I have been arguing here that self-transcendence in love or concern for others must be understood as the transcending of a lower mode of selfhood for the sake of a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood – rather than as a loss or denial of self – if it is to be motivationally intelligible. However, it must be acknowledged that there are of course a number of influential views that seem to propose such a denial of self, such as the Buddhist ideal of ‘emptiness’ (*sunyata*) mentioned above – which also appears to have influenced Murdoch’s ideal of ‘unselfing’ – and modern moral theories such as Kantianism and utilitarianism that enjoin on us moral duties that seem to require extensive self-sacrifice and maintain a dichotomy between egoism and altruism, or between self-regarding and other-regarding action, or between individual fulfillment and moral duty. What is unclear is how we can make sense of why someone would be motivated to act according to such ideals or conceptions of moral duties if we do not believe that by doing so we would achieve a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood. Following Taylor, I believe the best way to make sense of these perspectives is to try to show that they do in fact involve achieving a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood, whether this is explicitly recognized or not.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> I should mention here Mikko Yrjönsuuri’s interesting – but I think misguided – essay on Taylor, which is entitled “Reconsidering the Need for Selves” (Yrjönsuuri 2002). Yrjönsuuri wants to question what he takes to be Taylor’s ‘individualist’ view that there is “one and only one self for each human being” and the guiding role that self-realization or fulfillment plays in his moral thinking (*ibid.*, 83). First, he considers the possibility that there may be less than one self for each person by citing cultures in which group identity rather than individual identity seems to be primary or perhaps all that matters. Second, he considers the possibility that there might be more than one self for an individual by citing the experience of conflicting desires within an individual (notably expressed in Plato’s tripartite view of the soul), each of which he suggests can be viewed as distinct ‘selves’. Finally, Yrjönsuuri ultimately wants to suggest that in fact we do not need ‘selves’ for morality as there is, he believes, a viable mode of moral thought “based on overcoming rather than developing a sense of one’s own distinct self” (*ibid.*). Such an outlook recognizes that there are things beyond the self that are worthy of our concern even if they do not relate to our own fulfillment. As examples of such an outlook Yrjönsuuri cites the Stoic ideal of participating in ‘universal reason’ and the Franciscan ideal of total devotion to God to the exclusion of any form of self-concern.

In response it must be said, first of all, that Yrjönsuuri’s interpretation of Taylor’s conception of selfhood as so excessively individualistic is objectionable given that Taylor is a well-known critic of

In the case of Buddhism, as we have already seen, Taylor maintains that the ideal of ‘emptiness’ (*sunyata*) – or the proper recognition that we are ‘not-self’ (*anatta*) – should ultimately be understood as a path towards achieving fullness, even though on the surface this sounds rather paradoxical, if not contradictory. On my account of self-transcendence we can say that the ideal of emptiness is really a matter of transcending a lower, ‘narrower’ mode of selfhood for a higher, ‘wider’, more fulfilling mode of selfhood. On this interpretation the lower mode of selfhood is understood to be a mode of being a self that is dominated by narrow selfish craving (*tanha*), while the higher, ‘wider’ mode of selfhood is that which is achieved in communion with other sentient beings, as expressed in the Buddhist ideals of compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*metta*). Or

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atomistic or individualist views (see *PHS*, Ch. 7; *PA*, Chs. 7, 10, 12). He even criticizes Taylor for having no concept of a ‘wider self’ that identifies with a larger whole (ibid., 92). However, it is quite clear that Taylor does in fact acknowledge such a wider self, even if he does not provide much of a detailed explanation of how this is to be understood, which I have sought to do in my account of self-transcending love (see *SS* 27, 43-4, 507, 510-3, 526-7, n. 20; *EA* 34-5, 40-1, 58, 72-3, 88-91; *PA* 139-40, 189-97; *CM* 113; *VRT* 37; *SA* 702). In regard to Yrjönsuuri’s first point about group identity, it should first be said that Taylor clearly does not deny group identity. Moreover, as is implied in the very notion of being *part* of a *group*, group identity does not negate the individual’s identity. The identifications that constitute the self can go beyond the individual person (*SS* 27), but they never dissolve the individual. I believe this is best made sense of in terms of my account of the extended sense of self in communion with others. In regard to Yrjönsuuri’s second point about the multiple selves that result from conflicting desires, it must be said that this is a rather strange Manichean sort of view. The fact of conflicting desires by itself does not undermine the notion of a unitary self, as we see in the works of Plato, Aristotle, and others in the classical tradition of reflection on the nature of the good for human life. Indeed, as we see in Taylor’s account of the self in moral space and his related view of narrative identity, it is the notion of the good for our lives as a whole towards which we strive as human agents that enables a unified self over time, even in the face of conflicting desires, which may just be a form of *akrasia* (i.e., ‘incontinence’ or ‘weakness of the will’). It is remarkable that Yrjönsuuri does not address in any detail here Taylor’s account of the self in moral space.

Finally, in regard to Yrjönsuuri’s endorsement of a view of morality that is said to overcome all concern for our individual self through concern for things beyond the self that are regarded as worthy of concern, I think this fails to appreciate the relationship that Taylor puts forward between constitutive goods external to our selves and life goods that define for us the good life. In fact, Yrjönsuuri does not discuss at all these crucial categories in Taylor’s ethical thought. For Taylor there is an inescapable correlation between constitutive goods and life goods: i.e., on the one hand, we can only define the good life in relation to things that are regarded as worthy of our love, respect, or concern (i.e., constitutive goods); on the other hand, we can only recognize constitutive goods by seeing how love, respect, or concern for them enables a higher mode of life. Indeed, it is not clear how a person could recognize and be moved by something beyond themselves that they regarded as worthy of concern without it also informing their conception of a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood. The examples of the Stoic and Franciscan ideals actually seem to be key instances of my account of self-transcendence in which one transcends a lower mode of selfhood for a higher, more fulfilling mode.

as Taylor puts it: “going beyond the self connects one to the Mahakaruna, or great compassion” (*SA* 818, n. 23). Such an interpretation seems preferable to the interpretation – advanced by Nietzsche – that Buddhism is simply a form of nihilism or life-denial in which the dominant motive is to do away with suffering.<sup>47</sup>

In the case of modern moral theories such as Kantianism and utilitarianism I believe we can likewise say that these perspectives ultimately depend motivationally on some conception of a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood that is attained through

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<sup>47</sup> It should be said that Taylor’s view of Buddhism is somewhat difficult to pin down. In a footnote in *Sources* Taylor says that “the ‘no-self’ (*anatta*) view of Theravada Buddhism” is for him “still a baffling and difficult subject” (*SS* 535, n. 4). Part of what is baffling about this view for Taylor is that it seems to challenge his claim that having a sense of self that is orientated in moral space is a human constant (*SS* 112-3; cf. Taylor 1988a; 1991b; *SS*, Ch. 2). However, I believe Taylor still wants to maintain that the ‘no-self’ view does not escape his account of the self in moral space (see Taylor 1988a, 301) and would agree with my interpretation that it involves transcending a lower mode of selfhood that is dominated by selfish craving for a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood in communion with other sentient beings. This is implicit in his claim that the Buddhist ideal of ‘emptiness’ is in fact a vision of fullness (*SA* 780, n. 8).

In an earlier footnote in *Sources* Taylor also writes: “We are [...] ethnocentric, or at least too narrow in our understanding and sympathy, if we take it as axiomatic that a self is what we ought to want to have or to be. There are influential spiritual outlooks which want to have us escape or transcend the self” (*SS* 526, n. 20). He says that Buddhism is the best known version, but there are also strands of such an outlook in Western culture, viz., in the “literature of escape from the self, to which Nietzsche has contributed, and also, in another way, Musil, Bataille, and also Foucault, and in another way again figures like Derrida” (*SS* 526). To such views Taylor responds: “There is no doubt that we have the imaginative power to step beyond our own place and to understand ourselves as playing a part in the whole. If we didn’t, we wouldn’t be able to set up with other human beings what I have been calling ‘common space’, because that requires that we see ourselves as one perspective among others. So we can also see ourselves “from the perspective of the whole”; we can see the self in imagination as simply an aspect of a large system, activated by it. What is not clear is to what degree one can actually *assume* that standpoint and live it. To weigh this we need a finer discussion of our moral possibilities” (*SS* 526-7). Taylor says that he is “very skeptical whether contemporary neo-Nietzschean doctrines of overcoming the self or the “subject” can meet this test”, a skepticism that would seem to also apply to the Buddhist view of the ‘no-self’ if it is literally interpreted. “Quite different”, he continues, “are attempts to overcome modern subjectivism which purport to reconnect us with some larger reality, social or natural. Those based, for instance, on the recognition that some of the most crucial human fulfilments are not possible even in principle for a sole human being, that they involve a good in which more than one participate in complementary fashion [...]. [They] require some conception of the human good as something realized *between* people rather than simply within them” (*SS* 527). In other words, this is precisely the extended self in communion that I described above.

On the whole Taylor is quite sympathetic with Buddhism and says that he finds spiritual greatness in facets of it (Taylor 1991a, 241). He often discusses the Buddhist ideal of compassion (*karuna*) in tandem with the Christian ideal of *agape*, and he sees both to be important examples of views that affirm a strong sense of ‘transcendence’ (*CM* 21-3; *SA* 8, 17-8, 623). Ian Fraser actually criticizes Taylor for too closely identifying these views even to the point of making them the ‘same’ (Fraser 2007, 40-3). I think Fraser’s criticism is quite unfair since, as Ruth Abbey notes, the fact that Taylor points out parallels does not entail that he thinks the perspectives are the same (Abbey 2006, 165). Indeed, he also often points out the dissimilarities between them (Taylor 1994b, 229-30; *CM* 21; *SA* 8, 17-8, 818, n. 23; *DC* 4-5).

other-regarding duty, which we have seen is how Taylor in fact reads such views. This often takes the form of actualizing our strongly valued capacity as moral agents for taking up an impartial, universal standpoint and living according to the duties enjoined by that standpoint and thereby achieving dignity or moral worth. According to my account of self-transcendence we can say that this involves transcending a lower mode of selfhood based on more particular attachments and egoistic desires for a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood where one achieves the impartial, universal standpoint. Moreover, it seems likely that the higher mode of selfhood that is experienced in adopting this impartial, universal standpoint whereby we display other-regarding concern will involve not only the actualization of one's capacity for adopting such a standpoint, but also self-transcending love/communion with others insofar as these others are regarded as being worthy of our concern. Indeed, we can see this expressed in Kant and in a number of utilitarian thinkers such as Bentham, Mill, and Russell.

One of the main benefits of my account of self-transcendence, I believe, is that it enables us to understand the place of concern for others *within* an account of human fulfillment, or 'the good life'.<sup>48</sup> This is important I maintain for overcoming the problematic dichotomy between egoism and altruism, or between self-regarding and other-regarding actions, or between individual fulfillment and moral duty that modern moral theories such as Kantianism and utilitarianism on the surface seem to endorse. On my view the important contrast is not between egoism and altruism, or between self-regarding and other-regarding actions, or between individual fulfillment and moral duty. Instead, it is between a narrower and a wider conception of the 'self'; i.e., it is between lower modes of selfhood that are more closed off towards others and higher, more

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<sup>48</sup> I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter VI.

fulfilling modes of selfhood that achieve a greater degree of self-transcendence in love or concern for others such that the good of others is identified with one's own.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, self-transcendence through actualizing strongly valued capacities can factor in here insofar as the higher, more fulfilling mode of life that is involved in love or concern for others is also constituted by actualizing our strongly valued capacities for such love or concern and our capacities for recognizing others as worthy of such love or concern.

I believe my account of self-transcendence can also make sense of the experience of genuine 'sacrifice' when we endure a difficulty or give up or forego certain goods or attachments for the sake of others, while making clear the motivation for doing so in terms of achieving a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood. Such sacrifice can of course be experienced in varying degrees of difficulty. In some cases, however, the sacrifice may hardly be felt or be considered a sacrifice, if at all: e.g., when a parent sacrifices time, money, and his or her own projects and at times endures pain, stress, and heartache in order to care for a child, or where spouses and friends sacrifice for one another. In such cases it is clear that a person so thoroughly identifies with his or her child, spouse, or friend that promoting the good of the child, spouse, or friend is the same as promoting his or her own good since the other person is part of a widened sense of self.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, such a person experiences love for his or her child, spouse, or friend as

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<sup>49</sup> It is important to note here that much of the common terminology surrounding our concern for others (or lack thereof) can be misleading, such as the contrast between being 'selfish' and 'selfless', which might seem to suggest an ideal of total self-denial (cf. the contrasts I have just mentioned between egoism and altruism, self-regarding and other-regarding, and individual fulfillment and moral duty). It seems to me that the term 'selfish' is actually trying to capture what I am describing as a narrower conception of the self that is enclosed upon an individual's concerns to the exclusion of concern for others. By contrast, the term 'selfless' seems to be trying to capture the sense of transcending this narrower conception of selfhood for the sake of a wider conception of the self that identifies with the good of others.

<sup>50</sup> As Aristotle puts it, they are regarded as 'another self'. This can be described as a kind of 'self-interest', but the 'self' here includes more than one's own individual person.



a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood, which is why ‘sacrifice’ of other lesser goods or attachments for the loved one’s sake is often hardly experienced as a sacrifice, if at all.

One important question that arises here is: how far can and should such self-transcending love or concern for others extend? This is something I will take up in Chapter VI when I examine Taylor’s discussion of the viability of an ethic of universal human concern. But for now I want to consider Taylor’s account of ‘transcendence’ and its place in human life, where I think my account of self-transcendence can also be seen as playing an important role.

## CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSCENDENCE

In the last chapter I examined Taylor's account of fullness and explored how some form of self-transcendence is operative in any experience of fullness. This helps to set the stage for what I want to discuss in this chapter: viz., Taylor's view of the place of 'transcendence' in human life, which he explores primarily through his account of competing religious and non-religious ideals of fullness. For Taylor, the term 'transcendence', at least as it serves to define traditional theistic religion in the West<sup>1</sup>, can be understood in three key dimensions: first, it can refer to "some good higher than, beyond human flourishing"; second, it can refer to a higher power, viz., God, who is in some sense 'beyond' the natural world; and third, it can refer to the perspective of a life that extends 'beyond' the natural scope of our life from birth to death (*SA* 20).

In the first section I will examine the first dimension of transcendence identified by Taylor, viz., a good beyond and higher than human flourishing. I will seek to get clearer on this by first discussing its background in what is known as the 'Axial age'. I will also discuss how Taylor thinks 'exclusive humanism' (i.e., secular humanism) arose as part of the aftermath of the Axial age. Next, I will consider Taylor's alternative formulations of this dimension of transcendence in terms of a good 'beyond life' and a good 'beyond the exclusively human', which are intended to highlight the contrast with exclusive humanism. In each case we will see that he in fact allows for non-religious forms of transcendence, though they are distinguished from exclusive humanism. However, I will also discuss how Taylor in fact allows for a kind of transcendence for exclusive humanists: viz., when the first dimension of transcendence is understood as a

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<sup>1</sup> In *A Secular Age* Taylor says that he is "trying to understand a set of forms and changes which have arisen in one particular civilization, that of the modern West" (*SA* 15).

good ‘beyond *ordinary* human flourishing’ it can be seen that *all* ideals of fullness – including exclusivist humanist ideals – are forms of transcendence (i.e., ‘self-transcendence’). The fact that Taylor allows for non-religious forms of transcendence in each of these formulations is important to show because it helps to address the common criticism that his view of transcendence does not adequately account for non-religious forms of transcendence. But this raises the question of whether Taylor is justified in seeing this first dimension of transcendence as something distinctive of religious perspectives. I will contend that for him it is a matter of where it is most ‘at home’.

While Taylor acknowledges non-religious or ‘horizontal’ forms of transcendence, he still wants to maintain the fundamental importance of ‘vertical’ transcendence, i.e., the second and third dimensions of transcendence (God and a life beyond death), especially as either or both are connected to the first dimension (a good beyond and higher than human flourishing).<sup>2</sup> In the second section I will examine Taylor’s case for the view that there is an ineradicable draw to vertical transcendence in human life. In other words, his view is that the draw to vertical transcendence is in some sense a ‘human constant’ such that human beings can be described as ‘*homo religiosus*’.<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that everyone will want to embrace religious faith. Rather, it means that the draw to vertical transcendence is something that can ‘impinge’ on anyone due to another human constant:

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor uses this language of ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ transcendence, which he borrows from Luc Ferry (see *SA* 676-8; Taylor 2010b, 411-3; cf. *SA* 627-32; Ferry 2002, 69). Taylor also uses the seemingly paradoxical language of ‘immanent transcendence’ (*SA* 726). I say ‘seemingly’ paradoxical because the ‘transcendence’ that is affirmed here (viz., the first dimension of transcendence: a good beyond and higher than human flourishing) is not in opposition to ‘immanence’ that is also affirmed. The proper contrast to ‘immanence’ here is ‘transcendence’ understood in terms of the ‘supernatural’ (i.e., the second and third dimensions of transcendence listed above: God and a life beyond death).

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Abbey has discussed the draw to transcendence as an ‘ontological’ feature of the human self for Taylor, i.e., as a ‘human constant’ (Abbey 2000; 211-2; Abbey Forthcoming, Sec. IV). I am seeking to fill out this issue in more detail and also to add support to Taylor’s view. Recently several others have taken note of Taylor’s view of human beings as *homo religiosus* (see Elshtain 2009, 313; During 2010, 106-7). I should also note that Taylor himself uses the term ‘*homo religiosus*’ (see *CM* 28; *SA* 639; *DC* 22).

viz., the search for a meaningful life, which we have seen is closely connected to Taylor's account of fullness and the self in moral/spiritual space. I will examine a number of specific factors within this domain that Taylor argues can draw one towards vertical transcendence. Taylor's case here is an important part of his argument against mainstream theories of secularization that view it as a process involving the ineluctable fading away of the three dimensions of transcendence<sup>4</sup>, due in large part to the advances of modern science (*SA* 4, 21). Taylor's view here also represents another way that he goes beyond neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists who do not acknowledge any place for vertical transcendence in an account of the good life.<sup>5</sup> I think that Taylor does in fact provide a powerful case for his view and, where I can, I will seek to supplement it.

In the third section I will conclude by considering three important objections to vertical transcendence: viz., that it threatens our wholeness as human beings; that it threatens human autonomy; and that it threatens the 'modern moral order' that aims at peace and prosperity. I will respond to these objections, drawing on Taylor's work where it is applicable.

## I. BEYOND HUMAN FLOURISHING

### *The Axial Revolution and Its Aftermath*

Let us begin then by examining the first dimension of transcendence identified by Taylor, viz., a good beyond and higher than human flourishing. We must first consider

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<sup>4</sup> This is at least in terms of large-scale relevance. There may always be some minority cases.

<sup>5</sup> The issue of the draw to vertical transcendence seems largely ignored by neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists, which I think is due in part to the fact that the issue of 'the meaning of life' is generally ignored. Some neo-Aristotelians do explicitly exclude appeal to any form of vertical transcendence (see Hursthouse 1999a, 206, 218, 234; Nussbaum 1990a, Ch. 15; 2002). I will return in the last section of this chapter to discuss one case of this: viz., the view of Martha Nussbaum. I should remark here that I do think it is odd that neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists, even in considering human life from a third-personal standpoint, do not make more of the place of religion in human life throughout history. Cf. McPherson 2012, 647-53.

here his discussion of the contrast between ‘early religion’ (i.e., ‘tribal’ and ‘archaic’ religion) and ‘higher religion’ (i.e., ‘Axial’ and ‘post-Axial’ religion), given that this first dimension of transcendence first came into prominence with the latter form of religion.<sup>6</sup>

One of the distinctive features of early religion is its predominant ‘this-worldly’ concern with a certain view of human flourishing: “What people [in early religions] ask for when they invoke or placate divinities and powers is prosperity, health, long life, fertility; what they ask to be preserved from is disease, dearth, sterility, premature death. There is a certain understanding of human flourishing here which we can immediately understand, and which, however much we might want to add to it, seems to us quite “natural”” (*SA* 150). What is remarkable is that the predominant concern with this sort of human flourishing came radically into question during what has come to be called the ‘Axial age’ (following the work of Karl Jaspers), c. 800-200 BCE. During this time there developed various forms of ‘higher religion’ seemingly independent of each other, as we see with Confucius in China, the Buddha in India, Socrates and Plato in Greece, and the Prophets in Israel (*SA* 151; cf. Bellah 2011, 265-82). The most revolutionary feature of such higher religions is their ‘revisionary’ stance towards the human good, which goes along with a reconceptualization of the ‘transcendent’ realm (i.e., “the world of God, or gods, of spirits, or Heaven, however defined”). While in early religions this realm could be both favorable and unfavorable to our good (hence the need for placation), in higher religions it “becomes unambiguously affirmative of this good”, though this good is reconceived. Moreover, while in early religions spiritual realities were embedded in the

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<sup>6</sup> The transition from ‘early religion’ to ‘higher religion’ is extensively explored in Robert Bellah’s *Religion in Human Evolution* (Bellah 2011). Taylor’s discussion here is indebted to Bellah’s work (see *SA* 791, n. 4). Note: The fact that Taylor’s first dimension of transcendence came into prominence during the ‘Axial age’ raises questions about what it means to say that the draw to this dimension of transcendence is a ‘human constant’, which I will return to at the beginning of the next section.

cosmos, in higher religions the transcendent becomes viewed as either “beyond or outside of the cosmos, as with the Creator God of Genesis, or the Nirvana of Buddhism” or still within the cosmos but “it loses its original ambivalent character, and exhibits an order of unalloyed goodness, as with the “Heaven”, guarantor of just rule in Chinese thought, or the order of Ideas of Plato, whose key is the Good” (*SA* 152). In regard to the revisionary stance of higher religions to the human good, Taylor writes:

The highest human goal can no longer just be to flourish, as it was before. Either a new goal is posited, of a salvation which takes us beyond what we usually understand as human flourishing. Or else Heaven, or the Good, lays the demand on us to imitate or embody its unambiguous goodness, and hence to alter the mundane order of things down here. This may, indeed usually does involve flourishing on a wider scale, but our own flourishing (as individual, family, clan or tribe) can no longer be our highest goal. And of course, this may be expressed by a redefinition of what “flourishing” consists in. (*SA* 152-3)

As noted in the last chapter, I believe that it is in order to mark the contrast with such a redefined concept of ‘flourishing’ that Taylor often speaks of the first dimension of transcendence as involving a good beyond and higher than *ordinary* human flourishing.<sup>7</sup> Taylor seems to understand such ordinary human flourishing along the lines of the accounts of human flourishing put forward by contemporary neo-Aristotelians such as Foot, Hursthouse, and MacIntyre: i.e., it consists in properly fulfilling our ‘naturalistic ends’ (e.g., survival, species-continuation, physical and psychological health, and sociality), which Taylor calls ‘life needs’ or ‘life-related values’ (*SS* 507; Taylor 2003a, 308-10). Hence he says that the sort of human flourishing that was the predominant concern in early religion is something that is ‘natural’ to us. By contrast, I believe the redefined concept of ‘flourishing’ mentioned above is best understood as an ideal of fullness since it involves a strong evaluation regarding a higher mode of life.

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<sup>7</sup> See *SA* 44, 66-7, 80-2, 150-4, 221-4, 230-1, 430-1, 510, 584-5, 611, 623-34, 640-6, 668, 676-7, 687.

In order to get a better understanding of Taylor's first dimension of transcendence and its place within such higher religions it is helpful to consider the two examples that he most frequently cites: viz., Christianity and Buddhism.

In Christianity the good beyond and higher than human flourishing involves a "change of identity" where there is "a radical decentering of the self, in relation with God" (CM 21). In other words, we regard love and worship of God as our ultimate end such that we are willing to sacrifice our ordinary flourishing in order to serve God (SA 17). Taylor writes that "in this tradition God is seen as willing human flourishing, but devotion to God is not seen as contingent on this. The injunction "Thy will be done" isn't equivalent to "Let humans flourish", even though we know that God wills human flourishing" (SA 17). The best representative of this view is of course Christ, who achieves a higher good "even while failing utterly on the scales of human flourishing", i.e., by dying young on the cross in order to do 'the will of the Father' and so to enable the salvation of humankind (SA 151). Taylor says that it is important that the renunciation of human flourishing here does not deny its validity as a good. Indeed, if living a full life span were not a good, then Christ's sacrificial death would not have the meaning it does (SA 17). The call to renunciation is instead a call to "centre everything on God, even if it be at the cost of forgoing this unsubstitutable good; and the fruit of this forgoing is that it become on one level the source of flourishing to others, and on another level, a collaboration with the restoration of a fuller flourishing by God. It is a mode of healing wounds and "repairing the world"" (SA 17; cf. 18; CM 22).<sup>8</sup> As mentioned above, this will involve a 'change of identity', which Taylor also discusses in terms of a "perspective of transformation of human beings which takes [us] beyond or outside of whatever is

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<sup>8</sup> The phrase 'repairing the world' refers to the Hebrew phrase *tikkun olam*.

normally understood as human flourishing” (*SA* 430; cf. 224, 435-6, 510, 604-5, 611, 623, 643-6, 668, 729-30). In Christianity “this means our participating in the love (agape) of God for human beings, which is by definition a love which goes way beyond any possible mutuality, a self-giving not bounded by some measure of fairness” (*SA* 430). Such a ‘change of identity’ or ‘transformation perspective’ I believe can be understood in terms of my account of self-transcendence; i.e., we transcend a lower mode of selfhood concerned primarily with our ordinary flourishing for the sake of a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood in communion with God and other human beings.<sup>9</sup>

If we consider Buddhism, Taylor likewise maintains that there is an ideal of spiritual transformation that takes us beyond our ordinary flourishing; however, the change can be said to be even more radical: viz., “from self to “no self” (*anatta*)” (*CM* 21; cf. *SA* 17). Indeed, the ultimate pinnacle of spiritual achievement, viz., *nirvana*, involves “leaving the field of flourishing altogether (ending the cycle of rebirth)” (*SA* 151). But like Christianity, in Buddhism the call to renounce ordinary flourishing as an object of ultimate concern does not negate the value of such flourishing; rather, the higher mode of being that is achieved through spiritual transformation will involve concern for the ordinary flourishing of others, especially for the alleviation of their suffering: “Enlightenment doesn’t just turn you from the world; it also opens the flood-gates of *metta* (loving kindness) and *karuna* (compassion)” (*CM* 22; cf. *SA* 18). Taylor goes on to say that while in Theravada Buddhism there is the concept of a ‘Paccekkabuddha’ who is concerned only for his or her own salvation, such a person is said to rank below the highest Buddha, viz., the one “who acts for the liberation of all beings” (*CM* 22). It is because of such considerations that it seems plausible to interpret

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<sup>9</sup> See n. 35 in the previous chapter.



the Buddhist ideal of living as a ‘no self’ in terms of my account of self-transcendence (as I suggested in the last chapter); i.e., as the transcending of a lower for a higher mode of selfhood. Indeed, this must be the case if we are to speak, as Taylor does, of a change of *identity*. On this interpretation the lower mode of selfhood is understood to be that which is dominated by narrow selfish craving (*tanha*), while the higher, wider mode of selfhood is that which is achieved in identification with other sentient beings.

Now, in such higher religions there are still elements of early religion, including – especially among ordinary believers – certain ‘superstitious’ practices that seek to invoke or placate God or spiritual powers for this-worldly benefit.<sup>10</sup> According to Taylor, there was a “post-Axial compromise” between the transcendent aspirations of higher religions and the concern for ordinary flourishing that is characteristic of early religions (*SA* 439). This compromise was necessitated by the fact that the demand to renounce the predominant concern for one’s ordinary flourishing for the sake of a higher good was often too difficult for many people to achieve in any thorough-going manner and it would also make it difficult for society to function. Thus, e.g., in mediaeval Catholicism, Taylor says, there existed “an equilibrium in tension between two kinds of goals”:

On the one hand, the Christian faith pointed towards a self-transcendence, a turning of life toward something beyond ordinary human flourishing [...]. On the other, the institutions and practices of mediaeval society, as with all human societies, were at least partly attuned to foster at least some human flourishing. This sets up a tension between the demands of the total transformation which the faith calls to, and the requirements of ordinary ongoing human life. (*SA* 44)

Mediaeval Catholicism sought an equilibrium for this tension through a system of “hierarchical complementarity” (*SA* 44-5). This system is ‘hierarchical’ in that it distinguishes between the ‘higher’, more spiritually demanding ‘renunciative’ vocations

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<sup>10</sup> Taylor mentions, e.g., the practice by English parish communities of ‘beating the bounds’ on rogation days to help ensure a good harvest (*SA* 42; cf. 44-5, 72-5, 148-9).

of popes, bishops, priests, monks, and nuns, and the ‘ordinary’ vocations of the laity, from whom less is required spiritually. But it also involves ‘complimentarity’ in that it regards both types of vocations as fulfilling important functions within the spiritual and material economy of mediaeval society: viz., the clergy are expected to pray for all and perform priestly functions, while the laity are expected to labor to support the clergy and to maintain the good functioning of the family and political society. A similar kind of concept of hierarchical complimentarity can also be found in the traditional Buddhist distinction between the ‘renouncer’ and the ‘householder’ (see *SA* 18).

However, there were still continuing tensions within such systems of hierarchical complimentarity and these tensions in the case of medieval Catholicism in fact play a key role in Taylor’s account of the rise of secularism in the Latin West. The primary tension in this case is over the “continuing lack of fit between the dominant, accepted notions of flourishing and the demands of the gospel” (*SA* 44). From at least the time of the Lateran Council in 1215 with its requirement of yearly confession for all the laity there arose continued efforts to reform the lives of all Christians by the religious elite “so as to make them conform thoroughly to the demands of the gospel” (Taylor 2010a, 304). “In Latin Christendom,” Taylor writes, “the attempt was to recover and impose on everyone a more individually committed and Christocentric religion of devotion and action, and to repress or even abolish older, supposedly “magical” or “superstitious” forms of collective ritual practice” (ibid., 305; cf. *SA*, Ch. 1). The Protestant Reformation, which sought to do away with the whole system of hierarchical complimentarity, is thus best understood as a key phase in a long effort of Christian reform. What was especially important about it was its attempt to build the high demands of the Gospel into ‘ordinary life’, i.e., into

work and family life. But this affirmation of ordinary life, according to Taylor, also opened up the possibility of affirming ordinary life without any higher demands built into it, especially when these demands seemed to impose too much burden. Indeed, it eventually became possible to understand the affirmation of ordinary life as the affirmation of ordinary natural desire against any higher demands that might call for their renunciation or transformation.<sup>11</sup> But this possibility required other developments.

One such development, on Taylor's account, is that in the early modern period the project of reform became allied with a neo-Stoic outlook that sought through certain 'disciplinary' practices to reduce violence and disorder and to create a civilized, 'polite' social order based on cooperation for mutual benefit (*ibid.*; cf. *SA*, Ch. 2). In short, this helped to create what Taylor calls the 'modern moral order', which is centered upon the goals of ordinary human flourishing, especially peace and prosperity, and is based on a view of individuals as bearers of rights that enable them to engage in cooperation for mutual benefit, especially within a market economy and a democratic political order (*ibid.*; cf. *SA*, Ch. 4; *MSI*).<sup>12</sup> This modern moral order is thus centered on 'immanent' goals, rather than transcendent ones.

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting here an apparent shift in the tone of Taylor's assessment of the 'affirmation of ordinary life' from *Sources* to *A Secular Age* (see *SS* 70, 327-9, & Pt. III; *SA* 77-84, 143-4, 179, 230-1, 253-4, 266, 362, 370-3, 492-504, 584-5, 610-34, 640-6, 711, 720, 766-7). In *Sources*, on the whole, he seems favorably disposed to the affirmation of ordinary life, especially since he sees it as providing an impetus for increased humanitarian concern to relieve suffering and also for movements towards democratic equality. Taylor's reservations are primarily directed towards the radical versions where it takes the form of affirming ordinary natural desire against all 'higher demands'. In *A Secular Age* Taylor's assessment of the affirmation of ordinary life seems much more mixed. This is due I believe to his focus on the draw to transcendence in human life, which can often be in tension with the affirmation of ordinary life. A central concern is thus how to achieve wholeness with respect to both transcendent aspirations and ordinary human flourishing (see *SA* 639-40). I will come back to discuss this issue more in the last section of this chapter.

<sup>12</sup> The continued importance of the ideals of the 'modern moral order' can be observed, e.g., in the massively influential work of John Rawls (Rawls 1999; 2005). Rawls' theory of justice is primarily aimed at establishing what can be agreed upon as the fair terms of social cooperation for mutual benefit in modern democratic societies with market economies.

The development of this modern moral order was also aided by what Taylor calls the “great invention of the West”: viz., “an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it” (*SA* 15; cf. Chs. 7, 9, 15, & Epilogue).<sup>13</sup> This new understanding enabled the rise of what Taylor calls ‘providential deism’, which strictly separates out the supernatural or transcendent from the immanent order of nature and regards the latter as established by God, at least in part, as a support for the modern moral order (*SA*, Chs. 6-7). The historical importance of this view lies chiefly in the fact that it served as an intermediary step on the path towards ‘exclusive humanism’, which embraces the modern moral order but denies the need for any appeal to a providential framework for support. In many cases exclusive humanism actually goes beyond relationships of mutual benefit to embrace an ethic of universal human concern that seeks to alleviate suffering, foster ordinary human flourishing, and ensure freedom for all.<sup>14</sup> In its scope this humanist ethic is equivalent to the Christian ideal of *agape*; in fact, Taylor maintains that it has its historical roots in *agape* and it is often considered to be a functional replacement for it (see *SS* 319, 515-8; *CM* 16-9, 25-6; *SA* 245-59, 371).

Exclusive humanism, Taylor believes, is of fundamental importance for an understanding of secularization. He writes:

I would like to claim that the coming of modern secularity in my sense has been coterminous with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient [i.e., exclusive] humanism came to be a widely available

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<sup>13</sup> I think Taylor’s use of ‘invention’ here is somewhat misleading because this can suggest that it was simply ‘made up’ or ‘created’ by human beings. I believe it is in fact better described as a ‘discovery’ since it came to be recognized through the rise of modern science.

<sup>14</sup> This ethic of universal human concern is expressed in different ways in the two most prominent secular moral theories: Kantianism and utilitarianism. I will discuss this more in the next chapter.

option. I mean by this a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing. Of no previous society was this true. (*SA* 18; cf. *CM* 19)

Exclusive humanism thus provides the key contrast with a traditional theistic perspective in the debate in secular societies over competing conceptions of fullness.<sup>15</sup> In the last chapter I criticized the adequacy of Taylor's within–without distinction with respect to sources of fullness as a way of distinguishing between religious and non-religious conceptions of fullness. However, he also provides another, more specified way of understanding this distinction that appears more adequate for distinguishing between religious and non-religious conceptions of fullness. He puts it as follows:

[Does] the highest, the best life involve our seeking, or acknowledging, or serving a good which is beyond, in the sense of independent of human flourishing? In which case, the highest, most real, authentic or adequate human flourishing could include our aiming (also) in our range of final goals at something other than human flourishing. (*SA* 16)

In Taylor's view, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theists as well as Buddhists would answer 'yes', whereas exclusive humanists would answer 'no'. However, I want to look closer at the alternative ways that Taylor formulates his first dimension of transcendence in order to highlight the contrast with exclusive humanism. We will see that these formulations do in fact allow for non-religious forms of transcendence, though they are distinguished from exclusive humanism. I also want to show that there is a way of formulating the first dimension of transcendence such that even exclusive humanism can be seen to embrace a kind of transcendence. As aforementioned, this is important for

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<sup>15</sup> One might speculate here about the possible influence of Henri de Lubac's work on Taylor's conceptualization of 'exclusive humanism'. In *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* De Lubac uses the term 'exclusive humanism' and makes the strong claim that it is ultimately 'inhuman humanism' (De Lubac 1995, 14). For De Lubac exclusive humanism is to be contrasted with 'integral humanism', which recognizes a central place for the transcendent (see De Lubac 1988, Ch. XII). It is also worth noting that Dostoevsky is a hero for both De Lubac and Taylor in their confrontation with exclusive humanism. Taylor does acknowledge De Lubac as an important influence (see Taylor 2012a, 290-3).

addressing a common criticism of Taylor's view of transcendence, which is that he does not adequately account for non-religious or 'horizontal' forms of 'transcendence'. Or as William David Hart puts it, Taylor "fails to acknowledge intermundane, "this-worldly" and naturalistic forms of transcendence" (Hart 2012, 153).<sup>16</sup>

### *Beyond Life*

In Taylor's first extensive discussion of the idea of transcendence – viz., in *A Catholic Modernity?* – he speaks of it in terms of something 'beyond life' that is of ultimate importance (CM 20-30; cf. DC 4-5; Taylor 1996). In later works such as *A Secular Age* he switches to speaking of transcendence primarily in terms of a "good higher than, beyond human flourishing"; however, it seems that the 'beyond life' formulation can be understood as one way of interpreting the idea of a good beyond and higher than human flourishing.<sup>17</sup> In fact, in *A Secular Age* Taylor still makes use of the 'beyond life' formulation; e.g., he writes: "we have moved from a world in which the place of fullness was understood as unproblematically outside of or "beyond" human life, to a conflicted age in which this construal is challenged by others which place it (in a wide range of different ways) "within" human life. This is what a lot of the important fights have been about more recently" (SA 15). He goes on to say that "instead of asking

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<sup>16</sup> See also Stout 2001, 426-7; Fraser 2007, Chs. 2 & 3; Bernstein 2008; Bilgrami 2010, 154-65; Connolly 2010; Baum 2010, 365-7; McLennan 2010; Cassidy 2010. In a somewhat similar vein there are a number of commentators who have sought to argue for functional equivalents to religious notions such as 'enchantment' or the 'sacred'; see Gordon 2008, 2011; Bilgrami 2010; Levine 2011; Kitcher 2011; and Costa 2011. Both the idea of horizontal transcendence and a non-religious view of the sacred are explored in Ferry 2002, which Taylor discusses in *A Secular Age* (SA 677-85, 711, 723). The adequacy of the general distinction between immanence and transcendence is explored in Luling Haughton 1999; Bernstein 2008; and Hauerwas and Coles 2010. I should mention that Richard Bernstein (Bernstein 2008) does acknowledge that Taylor recognizes horizontal versions of transcendence, but he wants to argue against Taylor's view that the experience of fullness connected to these do not measure up to those connected to 'vertical' (i.e., theistic) versions of transcendence.

<sup>17</sup> In his "Concluding Reflections and Comments" to *A Catholic Modernity?* Taylor does speak of transcendence in terms of a good 'beyond human flourishing' (CM 109).

whether the source of fullness is seen/lived as within or without, [...] we could ask whether people recognize something beyond or transcendent to their lives” (*SA* 16).

But what exactly does it mean to recognize the importance of something ‘beyond life’? As an initial statement Taylor says that it involves the recognition that “life isn’t the whole story”, i.e., “the point of things isn’t exhausted by life, the fullness of life, even the goodness of life” (*CM* 20). From this it is clear that the acknowledged higher good not only goes beyond concern for our ordinary human flourishing, but also beyond ideals of fullness that are rooted in our this-worldly existence. Taylor says, e.g., we can agree with John Stuart Mill that “a full life must involve striving for the benefit of humankind”, however, “acknowledging the transcendent means seeing a point beyond that” (*CM* 20). He goes on to say that one way of understanding this is in terms of “the insight that we can find in suffering and death – not merely negation, the undoing of fullness and life, but also a place to affirm something that matters beyond life, on which life itself originally draws” (*CM* 20; cf. 109-10; *DC* 4-5, 16-7). In other words, this means acknowledging the ultimate importance of something that is in some sense ‘supernatural’ or ‘other-worldly’; i.e., something that in some way transcends our present earthly existence.

In Christianity, e.g., this means acknowledging the ultimate importance of love for God and the perspective of eternal life, which connects up the first dimension of transcendence (a good beyond and higher than human flourishing) with the other two dimensions (God and a life beyond death). In fact, there is, Taylor says, “a redefinition of the term *life* to incorporate what I’m calling “beyond life”: for instance, the New Testament evocations of “eternal life” and John 10:10, “abundant life”” (*CM* 21). Elsewhere he writes specifically about the ‘hour of death’ as a crucial orientating point in

the Christian life (“pray for us now and at the hour of our death”): “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 the most abundant life” (*SA* 725-6; cf. 763).<sup>18</sup>

We can see clearly here the contrast between this ‘beyond life’ formulation of transcendence and exclusive humanism, which places fullness exclusively ‘within’ life. Indeed, among exclusive humanists there is often the sense that aiming beyond life fails to properly affirm our this-worldly existence and threatens our peaceful coexistence in the modern moral order (see *CM* 19, 24). Taylor of course contests such views, since, as we have seen, he claims that those who acknowledge a higher good beyond human flourishing are often lead to affirm human flourishing in a deeper way. I will return to discuss this issue in more detail later.<sup>19</sup>

For now I want to consider what Taylor describes as the ‘immanent revolt’ within unbelief against exclusive humanism, which shows that this ‘beyond life’ formulation of transcendence can in fact include non-religious perspectives among those drawn to it. He also calls this ‘immanent revolt’ by the names of ‘anti-humanism’ and the ‘immanent counter-Enlightenment’. The key figure here is Nietzsche, though Taylor also mentions Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and others who have been influenced by Nietzsche’s works such as Bataille, Foucault, and Derrida. If we consider Nietzsche’s work, Taylor says we can see that he “rebelled against the idea that our highest goal is to preserve and increase life, to prevent suffering” (*CM* 27). This is because he regarded suffering as an intrinsic feature of life and thus any attempt to do away with it ultimately amounted to a denial of life. Moreover, he saw the predominant concern to alleviate human suffering as being

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<sup>18</sup> It should also be mentioned here that the Buddhist ideal of *nirvana* represents another form of acknowledging the ultimate importance of something ‘beyond life’.

<sup>19</sup> See the last section of this chapter and the whole of the next chapter.



tied to an egalitarian ideal that has a leveling effect on higher aspirations to human greatness (see *SA* 318-20, 369-73). Nietzsche's rebellion here can be seen as an internal critique of the 'modern affirmation of life' in that he critiques a certain view of what it means to affirm life – viz., promoting peace and prosperity and alleviating suffering – rather than the ideal of affirming life itself. Indeed, it is from this basis that he critiques the exclusive humanist view as being in fact life-denying. Life properly understood, for Nietzsche, is the will to power and it can push us to cruelty, domination, exclusion, destruction, and chaos in an effort to achieve human greatness. To affirm life thus means to affirm all of these aspects of life (*CM* 27; cf. *SA* 634-5). The attempt to do away with them is viewed as confining, demeaning, and pusillanimous (*CM* 28).

Although this rebellion is in a sense an internal critique of the modern affirmation of life, Taylor believes that in another sense it can be seen as going 'beyond life' since he thinks that the "recurring fascination with death and violence" among neo-Nietzscheans (e.g., Derrida, Foucault, and Bataille) can be seen as a "manifestation of our (human) inability to be content simply with an affirmation of life" (*CM* 28). He writes:

The Nietzschean understanding of enhanced life, which can fully affirm itself, also in a sense takes us beyond life, and in this it is analogous with other, religious notions of enhanced life (like the New Testament's "eternal life"). But it takes us beyond by incorporating a fascination with the negation of life, with death and suffering. It doesn't acknowledge some supreme good beyond life and, in that sense, sees itself rightly as utterly antithetical to religion. (*CM* 28)

When Taylor says here that this Nietzschean view "doesn't acknowledge some supreme good beyond life", I take it that he means it denies the second and third dimensions of transcendence (God and eternal life). However, the passage also indicates that in another sense this view does acknowledge a good beyond life "by incorporating a fascination with the negation of life, with death and suffering" as part of an "enhanced life".

We can say then that such a perspective embraces a form of horizontal transcendence insofar as the negation of life becomes a crucial site of exploration (see *SA* 374, 726). In contrast to exclusive humanism, which is often seen as being unable to give a deeper meaning to death and suffering other than as “dangers and enemies to be avoided or combated” (*CM* 24; cf. *SA* 320), many neo-Nietzscheans, in an analogous way to the Christian view discussed above, “have seen in death, at least the moment of death, or the standpoint of death, a privileged position, one at which the meaning, the point of life comes clear, or can be more closely attained than in the fullness of life”; it can be “the paradigm gathering point for life (*SA* 320, 726; cf. 723-6).<sup>20</sup> Taylor also remarks:

I am tempted to speculate further and suggest that the perennial human susceptibility to be fascinated by death and violence is at base a manifestation of our nature as *homo religiosus*. From the point of view of someone who acknowledges transcendence, it is one of the places this aspiration beyond most easily goes when it fails to take us there. (*CM* 28)

In the next section I will return to discuss Taylor’s case for viewing human beings as *homo religiosus*, but at this point I would like to discuss another way of formulating the first dimension of transcendence that highlights the contrast with exclusive humanism and which also reveals a further form of horizontal transcendence.

### *Beyond Anthropocentrism*

This second formulation emphasizes the ‘human’ part of the phrase “good higher than, beyond human flourishing”. In other words, transcendence is understood here in terms of going beyond anthropocentrism by acknowledging the importance of non-

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<sup>20</sup> Taylor also notes the affinity between Buddhism and neo-Nietzscheans who explore themes such as ‘absence’, ‘nothingness’, and the ‘death of the subject’ (e.g., Mallarmé, Celan, Beckett, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, and Foucault) (526-7, n. 20; *SA* 726). Recall that in the previous chapter I argued that the Buddhist ideal of ‘emptiness’ can also be understood as an ideal of fullness (even though this sounds paradoxical). I think something similar can also be said about these neo-Nietzschean views.

anthropocentric goods. In his “Concluding Reflections and Comments” to *A Catholic Modernity?* Taylor says of his choice of the term ‘transcendence’: “I needed a term to talk about all those different ways in which religious discourse and practice went beyond the exclusively human” (CM 106; cf. SA 625-34). The contrast with exclusive humanism here is quite evident since, as the name suggests, exclusive humanism is concerned exclusively with human beings, especially with promoting human flourishing.

Taylor’s concern with the importance of acknowledging non-anthropocentric goods in fact pre-dates his conceptualization and use of the term ‘transcendence’ in *A Catholic Modernity?* and *A Secular Age*. Notably, in *Sources of the Self* and *The Ethics of Authenticity* he seeks to retrieve non-anthropocentric goods that have been overlooked by prominent moral theories such as Kantianism, utilitarianism, social contract theory, Nietzscheanism, and neo-Aristotelianism.<sup>21</sup> Each of these theories is in some sense anthropocentric with the exception of utilitarianism, which is better described as ‘sentience-centric’ since it is concerned with any creature capable of feeling pleasure and pain. When Taylor discusses non-anthropocentric goods in both of these works he is actually often not referring to God (though God is of course one important example), but rather to the “claims from non-human nature”, or “the demand that our natural surroundings and wilderness make on us” (SS 102, 513).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> SS 102-3, 383-4, 506-13, Chs. 20-3; EA 35, 40-1, 58, 72-3, 88-91; cf. PA, Ch. 6; SA 9, 221-4, 264.

<sup>22</sup> On Fergus Kerr’s reading of Taylor: “the challenge [...] is to get beyond treating “all goods which are not anchored in human powers or fulfillments as illusions from a bygone age.” That is to say, [Taylor] wants to open up a nonanthropocentric perspective on the good [...]. *Sources of the Self*, Taylor’s major contribution to moral philosophy, is explicitly a “retrieval” of this nonanthropocentric perspective which, as he believes, philosophy since the Enlightenment has been motivated to occlude” (Kerr 2004, 84; cf. Braman 2008, 26). I think there is a tendency in Kerr’s reading to overemphasize Taylor’s concern with nonanthropocentric goods, since he is also concerned with anthropocentric goods. But in a response to Kerr (Kerr 2010), Taylor writes: “*Sources of the Self* perhaps highlighted the battle between “technologists” and “ecologists”; *A Secular Age* takes up the fault lines if you order the field in terms of believers and unbelievers. But both end up dealing with what is recognizably the same scene” (Taylor 2010b, 404).

One way in which Taylor puts the issue is as follows: “does wilderness have a claim on us, a demand for its preservation, not one grounded on long-term prudence, hedging our bets to hold onto what might pay off eventually for humans, but for its own sake?” (SS 102; cf. EA 90-1; PA 125-6). In other words, he is asking whether the natural world should be regarded as a *constitutive good*, i.e., something that is worthy of our love, respect, and concern and constitutes certain life goods that define for us the good life (e.g., care and respect for the environment and aesthetic appreciation of natural beauty). Such a non-anthropocentric good is thus not unrelated to our fulfillment, but the relationship is not merely an instrumental one; rather, it is directly constitutive of our fulfillment in being worthy of respect and concern for its own sake. This view of the natural world as a constitutive good is often known today as ‘deep ecology’ (a view Taylor endorses). Since deep ecology is a view that can be embraced by both theists and non-theists alike it thus provides another form of horizontal transcendence insofar as it goes beyond sole concern for the ‘exclusively human’.

#### *Beyond ‘Ordinary’ Human Flourishing*

So far I have considered two alternative ways that Taylor formulates his notion of transcendence as a good beyond and higher than human flourishing in order to highlight the contrast with exclusive humanism: first, as a good beyond life; second, as a good beyond the exclusively human. Each of these formulations allows for non-religious forms of transcendence (i.e., ‘horizontal transcendence’): first, anti-humanists can be said to

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I should mention that Taylor also sometimes uses the term ‘anthropocentrism’ in a way that seems equivalent with moral subjectivism (see, e.g., EA 58). However, I think this is a problematic usage of the term since it does not seem that anthropocentrism is necessarily equivalent with moral subjectivism. Indeed, Taylor affirms anthropocentric strong goods (viz., strong goods related to our human potential), which are part of a moral realist account.

affirm a good beyond life in their exploration of the significance of death and suffering; second, deep ecologists can be said to affirm a good beyond the exclusively human in their recognition of the natural world as a non-anthropocentric constitutive good. But at this point we must enquire into whether it is also possible to understand exclusive humanism as in some sense affirming a form of ‘horizontal’ transcendence.

It should be said, first of all, that Taylor uses the term ‘exclusive humanism’ to describe a perspective that in some important sense *excludes* appeals to transcendence. This is clear from the discussion of the two alternative formulations of the first dimension of transcendence considered thus far, as well as from Taylor’s definition of exclusive humanism as “a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing” (*SA* 18; cf. *CM* 19). However, it is important to note that this concern for human flourishing often, if not always, involves strong evaluation. Typically exclusive humanists regard other human beings as having a dignity that makes them *worthy* of concern. Moreover, it is ambiguous whether the flourishing of others that is of concern is only ordinary flourishing or if it also involves the strong evaluative notion of flourishing understood in terms a higher, more fulfilling mode of life. It seems that it is often both. Finally, there is often a strong evaluative conception of one’s own capacity to act for the good of others operative. So long as there is some such strong evaluative background we can say that exclusive humanists have their own conception of fullness, which Taylor acknowledges (*SA* 8-9, 244-59; *CM* 20).

In light of this it can be seen that there is in fact a way of formulating the first dimension of transcendence such that even an exclusive humanist can be said to acknowledge a form of horizontal transcendence: viz., when we formulate it, as Taylor

often does, in terms of a good beyond and higher than *ordinary* human flourishing, which I have maintained should be understood in terms of fulfilling our basic ‘life needs’ or ‘naturalistic ends’ as human beings. When formulated in this way I believe we can say that *all ideals of fullness, including those of exclusive humanists, are in fact forms of ‘transcendence’*. This is because fullness is a qualitatively higher mode of being than that which is achieved in ordinary human flourishing; i.e., it is a good beyond and higher than ordinary human flourishing. As I have already suggested, I believe this notion of transcendence as a good beyond and higher than ordinary human flourishing can be understood in terms of my account of self-transcendence; i.e., we transcend a lower mode of selfhood that is concerned primarily with ordinary flourishing for the sake of a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood, whether through actualizing strongly valued capacities or through love or concern for constitutive goods external to our own person (e.g., other human beings, the natural world, and God) or both.

On a couple occasions Taylor does in fact acknowledge a kind of horizontal transcendence among exclusive humanists and he seems to understand this along the lines that I have suggested. One occasion is in *A Secular Age* when he is discussing Luc Ferry’s *Man Made God: The Meaning of Life*, from which he derives the term ‘horizontal transcendence’ (Ferry 2002, 69). Taylor describes Ferry’s horizontal transcendence in terms of a “fullness or richness which transcends the ordinary”, which suggests a view of transcendence that includes all ideals of fullness (*SA* 677). More specifically, Ferry’s ideal of horizontal transcendence proposes “something which goes beyond the usual scope of our lives, but which remains immanent”: viz., he “sees in the succouring of human life and well-being universally a goal which really transcends the ordinary ambit

of life” (SA 677). Rather than taking us outside of the human domain, it is seen as “very much part of the human life to propose such ends which transcend the ordinary” (SA 677). When Taylor speaks here of transcending “the ordinary” or “the ordinary ambit of life” it seems that this can be interpreted in terms of ordinary human flourishing. Indeed, he also speaks here of goals that “engage us more fully and deeply than our ordinary ends” (SA 677). Taylor also notes that Ferry uses the term ‘sacred’ to capture the sense of the worth of human beings (SA 677). As this term and the book title suggests, Ferry endorses a ‘religion of humanity’ – or a “religion of the other”, as he puts it – which can require us to sacrifice aspects of our ordinary human flourishing for a higher, more meaningful mode of life (Ferry 2002, 69; cf. 19, 31, 69-72, 135-43).<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere Taylor describes the exclusive humanist ideal of horizontal transcendence in terms of “a move to self-transcendence” in concern for all of humanity (Taylor 2010b, 413; cf. SA 629-30).<sup>24</sup>

Another place where Taylor acknowledges horizontal transcendence among exclusive humanists is in his debate with Martha Nussbaum over the place of transcendence in human life, which I will return to discuss in the last section of this chapter (SA 625-34). Like Ferry, Nussbaum seeks to defend a form of transcendence in

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<sup>23</sup> “[The] requirement of “concern for the other” and even, should the need arise, for “giving of oneself” have not disappeared from leading theories of secular ethics. [...] our modern moral philosophies put forth ideals that in some way are meant to be *superior to life*. [...] To suppose that some values transcend life itself is in effect to lead us back to the most essential structure of any theology, even if it is on atheistic grounds: the difference between a “here below” and an “above and beyond.”” (Ferry 2002, 19)

<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting here a slippage that Jeffrey Stout identifies in Taylor’s account of transcendence in *A Catholic Modernity?* He writes: “As Taylor puts it, ‘acknowledging the transcendent means aiming beyond life or opening yourself to a change of identity’ [...]. Or? One can aim for a change in identity, and in that sense aim for transcendence of one’s self, without aspiring to a metaphysical state that transcends life and without having faith in the existence of a divinity who transcends life. The possibility of self-transcendence would seem to be sufficient to avoid the stifling of the human spirit. Indeed, it appears that there are many self-transcending religious possibilities that do not involve commitments to transcendent metaphysics. Emerson, Dewey, and Santayana come to mind as thinkers who have explored this territory” (Stout 2001, 426-7; cf. Fraser 2007, 37-8). We have seen how Taylor does in fact allow for such forms of self-transcendence. However, whether these immanent forms of self-transcendence are indeed “sufficient to avoid the stifling of the human spirit” is something I take up in the next section.

the pursuit of virtue and other-regarding concern that is ‘internal’ to human life, in contrast to ‘external’ forms of transcendence that go beyond humanity.

Now, although I have sought to defend Taylor against the criticism that he does not adequately account for non-religious or horizontal forms of transcendence, it must be said that in a certain respect this criticism is understandable. This is because Taylor rarely uses the language of vertical and horizontal transcendence and he generally speaks of transcendence in a way that seems to primarily refer to ‘vertical’ or post-Axial religious transcendence. For instance, in his discussion of the ‘three-cornered’ debate between those who embrace religion, exclusive humanists, and anti-humanists (or neo-Nietzscheans), Taylor refers to those who embrace religion as “acknowledgers of transcendence” in order to contrast them with the other two positions (*SA* 636-9).<sup>25</sup>

In the “Introduction” to *A Secular Age* Taylor writes: “a reading of “religion” in terms of the distinction transcendent/immanent is going to serve our purposes here” (*SA* 15). In other words, a religious perspective affirms the transcendent, where this is understood in terms of the ‘supernatural’ realm, whereas a non-religious perspective does not (*SA* 13-20). Taylor acknowledges that this is not adequate as a definition of religion in general, but it serves his purposes in trying to understand the rise of secularity in the modern West. He writes: “For the purposes of understanding the struggle, rivalry, or debate between religion and unbelief in our culture, we have to understand religion as combining these three dimensions of transcendence”: viz., (1) a good beyond and higher than ordinary human flourishing; (2) God; and (3) eternal life (*SA* 20; cf. 430, 510).<sup>26</sup> In

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *SA* 13-20, 307-21, Chs. 15-6; Warner et al. 2010, 14.

<sup>26</sup> According to Ruth Abbey: “Taylor counts any perspective or worldview that remains open to transcendence of the human, all too human, as religious” (Abbey 2010, 10). I agree that Taylor can allow for this broad or capacious approach to religion. Indeed, I think he can recognize an even broader sense of



exploring the rise of secularity Taylor is especially concerned with the second dimension; i.e., he wants to trace the move “from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace” (*SA* 3; cf. 12-4, 25).

However, I have shown that on a careful reading the first dimension of transcendence can be seen in a broad way that includes both religious and non-religious forms.<sup>27</sup> One might still argue that Taylor could do more to discuss non-religious forms of transcendence. I think there is some validity in this charge, but his primary goal is not to explore the different kinds of transcendence. Rather, he is trying to understand the rise of our secular age and for this his particular use of the immanence/transcendence distinction is needed, though he acknowledges that this distinction is problematic if viewed absolutely (*SA* 15-6, 20, 632, 676; *CM* 109; Taylor 2010b, 411-3).

*Going Beyond Human Flourishing: Is It Still Distinctive of Religious Views?*

Now, since we have seen that the different ways in which Taylor’s formulates his first dimension of transcendence (i.e., a good beyond and higher than ordinary human

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religion in which exclusive humanism can count as a religion (viz., a ‘religion of humanity’). However, for his purposes in *A Secular Age* we see here that he primarily uses a narrower definition of religion that refers to the strong, post-Axial sense of religion, especially theistic religion. We can also see that this narrower definition is operative when he says: “there are attempts to reconstruct a non-exclusive humanism on a *non-religious basis*, which one sees in various forms of deep ecology” (*SA* 19; my emphasis). Deep ecology is certainly a view that transcends “the human, all too human”; hence Taylor says it is a kind of “non-exclusive humanism” (it is not clear though how exactly it is a kind of humanism). But here it is described as being non-religious (there are also religious versions, as we see with Taylor).

<sup>27</sup> This broad view can be seen when Taylor says that both religious and non-religious people can share the dilemma “between aspirations to transcendence (in the broader sense of Nussbaum’s discussion: I have normally been using the term in a narrower sense in this book) and the cherishing of ordinary human desires” (*SA* 676). I will explore this dilemma in the last section of this chapter. Elsewhere Taylor says of his use of the term ‘transcendence’: “There is a clear sense in which no term is going to do here because what I’m trying to say can’t be said through one consistent formula” (*CM* 109). Ian Fraser has claimed that there is a crucial inarticulacy in Taylor’s concept of transcendence that renders his Catholicism problematic (Fraser 2007, 36-7). However, I think Fraser greatly overstates this inarticulacy. It is not so much that Taylor is inarticulate about transcendence, but rather, he recognizes that the term has many possible uses, which require that the distinctions among them be kept in mind. In my view, Taylor seems quite articulate with respect to post-Axial religious views of transcendence.

flourishing) in fact allow for non-religious forms – including exclusive humanist forms in one case – the question thus arises: is Taylor justified in seeing this dimension of transcendence as distinctive of religious perspectives as contrasted with non-religious perspectives? In my view the issue for Taylor is ultimately a matter of where this dimension of transcendence is most ‘at home’. Let me explain.

Consider, e.g., St. Francis of Assisi, who is one of Taylor’s key exemplars of someone who embodies “the perspective of a transformation of human beings which takes them beyond or outside of whatever is normally understood as human flourishing” (*SA* 430). The sort of transformation that St. Francis experienced himself called to – viz., abandoning all ‘worldly’ success to love and serve God more fully and to become a channel of God’s love to others (*SA* 729) – seems on Taylor’s view (as I understand it) to go far beyond what we find in horizontal forms of transcendence. It involves not only going beyond ordinary human flourishing, but also beyond life and the exclusively human. However, for Taylor the key contrast with the transformation perspective expressed in the life of St. Francis is the more typical way of living in the modern moral order, which sees “our highest goal in terms of a certain kind of human flourishing, in a context of mutuality, pursuing each his/her own happiness on the basis of assured life and liberty, in a society of mutual benefit” (*SA* 430). One of the key representatives of this view is Hume, who affirms this vision of the modern moral order against all ideals of transformation that would take us beyond it. In Taylor’s view our secular age can be characterized by a polarization between the sort of transformation represented by St. Francis and the more mundane vision of the modern moral order represented by Hume:

There seem to be two very different stances in our civilization, which one can describe both as tempers and as outlooks. What does one think of Francis of

Assisi, with his renunciation of his potential life as a merchant, his austerities, his stigmata? One can be deeply moved by this call to go beyond flourishing, and then one is tempted by the transformative perspective; or one can see him as a paradigm example of what Hume calls “the monkish virtues”, a practitioner of senseless self-denial and a threat to civil mutuality. (*SA* 431)

According to Taylor, many people in fact want to situate themselves between these two extremes by “shying away from materialism, or from a narrow view of the morality of mutual benefit, and yet not wanting to return to the strong claims of the transformation view, with its far-reaching beliefs about the power of God in our lives” (*SA* 431).

These middle positions have been part of what Taylor calls the ‘nova effect’, i.e., the “ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options” in modernity. In fact, as this nova effect has taken root in the wider culture there has developed “a spiritual super-nova, a kind of galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane” (*SA* 299-300). On Taylor’s account this nova effect develops as the result of a feeling of malaise with respect to the modern moral order based on the goals of freedom and mutual benefit (*SA* 301-5, 307-21; cf. *EA* 2-4). In particular, there often arises a sense that the modern moral order involves a flattening and narrowing of human life insofar as it eclipses all higher purposes beyond that of promoting ordinary human flourishing in a free society through relationships of mutual benefit. Indeed, the three horizontal forms of transcendence we discussed above can be seen as responses to this sense of flatness and narrowness of the modern moral order.<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, e.g., reacts against what he sees as the leveling effects of modern society, particularly in regards to its predominant concern to promote ordinary human flourishing and alleviate suffering (*SA* 317-21). Thus, he seeks to recover a more heroic mode of life capable of affirming life in a way that can give meaning to death and suffering. Romantics or deep ecologists react against the dominant modes of relating to

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<sup>28</sup> Recall that this is the second aspect of seeking re-enchantment.

the world through instrumental rationality in the modern moral order and thus they seek to recover a deeper and more meaningful connection with nature (*SA* 310, 313-7).

Finally, there are more “radical modes of humanism” that endorse a more demanding form of justice and benevolence that goes beyond relationships of mutual benefit to include an activist concern for all people. Taylor writes:

Many felt a profound malaise at the idea that the sources of benevolence should be just enlightened self-interest, or simply feelings of sympathy. This seemed to neglect altogether the human power of self-transcendence, the capacity to go beyond self-related desire altogether and follow a higher aspiration. This sense that the modern notion of order involves an eclipse of the human potential for moral ascent, either in theory or in the practice of commercial society, has been an important driving force in modern culture. (*SA* 311-2)<sup>29</sup>

We can find instances of this more radical humanism in certain Kantian views of human dignity and also in those such as Ferry and Mill who endorse some notion of a ‘religion of humanity’ in which humanity replaces God as the ultimate object of love and devotion.

Now, an important question for such aspirations towards horizontal transcendence is whether they can be made sense of and sustained within an entirely immanent perspective. The reason why I said above that the first dimension of transcendence seems ‘at home’ in a religious perspective is because such a view can provide a teleological understanding of human life as directed towards a higher end, which can make sense of the idea of a good beyond and higher than ordinary human flourishing and help motivate the transformation needed in order to attain it. While not everyone may aspire to the life of St. Francis, still in post-Axial religions there is the strong sense that the highest goal for human life requires of everyone some thoroughgoing personal transformation if we are to attain it. By contrast, in non-religious perspectives there is by no means a necessary

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<sup>29</sup> When Taylor speaks here about going beyond ‘self-related desire’ altogether in order to follow a higher aspiration I take him to mean ‘self-related’ in the narrow or enclosed sense. The goal here I believe is ultimately to attain a wider, fuller sense of self in communion with others.

sense that life requires any thoroughgoing transformation (see *SA* 618-23). Indeed, there seem to be many who inhabit the modern moral order without such a sense (e.g., Hume). But even for those who do have this sense the question arises of whether it can be sustained in the face of cosmic purposelessness. This is an issue I take up in different ways in the next section and in the next chapter.<sup>30</sup>

## II. HOMO RELIGIOSUS: IS THE DRAW TO (VERTICAL) TRANSCENDENCE A HUMAN CONSTANT?

### *Homo Religiosus?*

While we have seen that Taylor acknowledges horizontal forms of transcendence, we must now consider his case for the claim that there is in some sense an ineradicable draw to ‘vertical transcendence’ in human life, i.e., to either or both of the second and third dimensions of transcendence (God and eternal life), especially in connection to the first dimension (a good beyond and higher than ordinary human flourishing). In other words, his claim here is that the draw to vertical transcendence is in some sense a ‘human constant’ such that human beings can be described as *‘homo religiosus’*. Echoing religious writers such as St. Augustine and Pascal, Taylor writes:

A spiritual perspective [presumably Taylor’s own perspective] will suppose that somewhere, deep down, we will feel drawn to recognize and live in relation to what it defines as spiritual reality. We may feel drawn to it, may pine for it, feel dissatisfied and incomplete without it. People speak of “divine discontent”, or a “desir d’eternite”. This may be buried deep down, but it is a perpetual human potential. So even people who are very successful in the range of normal human flourishing (perhaps especially such people) can feel unease, perhaps remorse, some sense that their achievements are hollow. (*SA* 620-1)

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<sup>30</sup> This will be a continuation of my exploration in Chapter III of the significance of a theistic teleological perspective for our ethical/spiritual life.

This does not mean that all human beings will necessarily want to embrace religious faith; rather it means that the draw to vertical transcendence is something that can ‘impinge’ on (or arise for) anyone, which we will see is due to another human constant: viz., the search for a meaningful life.<sup>31</sup> As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, Taylor’s case for the claim that there is an ineradicable draw to vertical transcendence in human life is of central importance for his attempt to argue against certain mainstream theories of secularization that view it as a process involving the ineluctable fading away of the three dimensions of transcendence that he identifies.<sup>32</sup>

However, before considering Taylor’s case for this claim we first need to address an important question that can be raised about his view: viz., if the notion of a good beyond and higher than human flourishing first came into prominence in the Axial age, then what does it mean to speak of the draw to it, especially a religious view of it, as a human constant? Peter Gordon raises this issue when he writes:

We should recall that [...] the Axial revolution was an *historical event*, i.e., it occurred at a specific moment in time. But this should prompt the thought that things might very well have turned out differently. [...] What is perhaps most puzzling about *A Secular Age* is that, although it purports to instruct about the *history* of religion in the West, it takes the post-Axial model of religious

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<sup>31</sup> For further passages related to this view of human beings as *homo religiosus* see: Taylor 1988b, 812-3; *SS* 520; *CM* 19, 27-8; *SA* 147, 435-6, 530, 548-9, 591-2, 620-2, 629-32, 638-9, 654-5, 668, 684-5, 720-2, 727, 767-70; Taylor 2010b, 408.

<sup>32</sup> Taylor writes: “it is just evident that human beings are religious animals. There’s something that intrinsically strikes people about spirituality and that’s part of the motivation. It’s part of the reason why it goes on. And [if] you try to circle around that, you go nowhere.” (This is from an interview for the 2007 Templeton Prize [no longer available online] and it is quoted by Ruth Abbey [Abbey Forthcoming]).

I should note here that Taylor does not speak in terms of a draw to ‘vertical transcendence’, but only to ‘transcendence’ (recall that he only appeals to the distinction between vertical and horizontal transcendence on a couple occasions). However, it will be clear in what follows that his argument is concerned with vertical transcendence. This is also clear from what I say here about his attempt to argue against certain mainstream secularization theories. Moreover, as I discussed earlier, in *A Secular Age* Taylor uses the term ‘transcendence’ in a way that seems to primarily refer to ‘vertical’ or post-Axial religious transcendence, especially theistic versions. But given the discussion in the previous section in which I have shown that Taylor does allow for non-religious or ‘horizontal’ forms of transcendence (though these are not a central focus), it is necessary to specify that the sort of transcendence that Taylor is concerned with in the argument I am considering in this section is religious or ‘vertical’ transcendence.

transcendence as the privileged and even unique standard across all historical variations. [...] the Axial phenomenon of *transcendence itself* seems to serve as a transhistorical criterion. While Taylor readily admits that there were *once* other models of the sacred, he is apparently committed to the view that once the axis has turned it cannot be turned back. (Gordon 2011, 129-30)

Gordon concludes his essay by remarking:

[Readers] of [Taylor's] book who lack his firm convictions might feel at least momentarily unsettled when we recall that (as Jaspers and Taylor both observe) the Axial revolution was *itself* an historical event. And this idea may strike some readers as nearly paradoxical, because if the Axial revolution was an event *in* history, then this raises the startling prospect that its terms and distinctions may not retain their validity for all time. (ibid., 139)

How should we respond to this challenge? First, I believe Taylor's claim that the draw to vertical transcendence is a human constant is best seen in terms of something latent within human evolutionary development, which also required certain cultural developments in order to be realized. This is indeed true of much that is considered to be definitive of our humanity (e.g., language, rationality, strong evaluation, etc.).<sup>33</sup> As Jaspers says, in the Axial age "[humanity], as we know [it] today, came into being" (quoted in Bellah 2011, 268). Or as Bellah puts it: "the figures of axial age – Confucius, Buddha, the Hebrew prophets, the Greek philosophers – are alive to us, are contemporary with us, in a way that no earlier figures are. Our cultural world and the great traditions that still in so many ways define us, all originate in the axial age" (ibid., 268-9). Thus, when Taylor claims that the draw to vertical transcendence is a human constant I believe this must be understood with reference to how we have come to understand what is distinctively human as the result of evolutionary and cultural development.

But what are these cultural developments? Drawing on the work of Merlin Donald, Bellah argues that the Axial age arose with the development of 'theoretic

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<sup>33</sup> An analogous point can also be made about the maturation from childhood into adulthood.

culture', which was preceded by 'mythic culture', and before that 'mimetic culture', and before that 'episodic culture' (ibid., xviii-xix, 272-5, 280-1). He writes:

In the first millennium BCE, theoretic culture emerges in several places in the old world, questioning the old narratives as it reorganizes them and their mimetic bases, rejecting ritual and myth as it creates new rituals and myths, and calling all the old hierarchies into question in the name of ethical and spiritual universalism. The cultural effervescence of this period led to new developments in religion and ethics but also in the understanding of the natural world, the origins of science. For these reasons we call this period axial. (ibid., xix)

Theoretic culture, Bellah says, consists in "the ability to think analytically rather than narratively, to construct theories that can be criticized logically and empirically" (ibid., 274). This can also be stated in terms of a capacity for 'second-order thinking', which is to say 'thinking about thinking' where one "attempts to understand how [...] rational exposition is possible and can be defended" in light of the awareness that "there are alternatives that have to be argued for" (ibid., 275). Such second-order thinking is integral to the Axial age because it is an 'age of criticism' of the existing social order. Bellah quotes Arnaldo Momigliano as saying: "Everywhere one notices attempts to introduce greater purity, greater justice, greater perfection and a more universal explanation of things. New models of reality, either mystically or prophetically or rationally apprehended, are propounded as criticism of, and alternative to, the prevailing models" (ibid., 268). What we have here, Bellah says, is "second-order thinking about cosmology, which for societies just emerging from the archaic age meant thinking about the religio-political premises of society itself. It is second-order thinking in this central area of culture, previously filled by myth, that gave rise to the idea of transcendence, so



often associated with the axial age” (ibid., 276). This idea allows one to critique the existing order of things and propose a path to the true human good.<sup>34</sup>

If such an account is basically correct, then we can question Gordon’s claim that since the Axial revolution was a historical event “things might very well have turned out differently.” In fact, there seems to be something inevitable in the evolutionary and cultural development of human beings whereby in one way or another something like the Axial revolution would have occurred. Evidence for this is provided by the fact that the Axial revolution occurred in a number of different cases (viz., in Israel, Greece, China, and India) seemingly independent of each other. If there is such a latent directionality in our evolutionary and cultural development, then this perhaps already goes some way to challenging Gordon’s view that the terms and distinctions of the Axial age might go away since the contingency is not as great as he makes it out to be. Moreover, even if one does not embrace vertical transcendence, it is difficult to see how, whatever perspective one adopts, it is not against the backdrop of the options made available by the Axial age; i.e., the search for fullness or a meaningful life is always defined with reference to the transcendent, even if it involves rejection (see *SA* 591-2). This is because we are still very much a part of the ‘theoretic culture’ that made possible the Axial revolution and there is no reason to think theoretic culture will go away once it has been achieved. This theoretic culture raises the question of the meaning of life, which we will see in turn raises the issue of vertical transcendence and makes the draw to it something ineradicable from

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<sup>34</sup> All of this I believe tracks with and fills in Taylor’s own account of the Axial age in terms of ‘the great disembedding’; i.e., Axial religions initiated a break with the three ways in which religion was ‘embedded’ in tribal and archaic cultures: viz., in the social order, in the cosmos, and with respect to a view of the human good understood in terms of ordinary human flourishing (*SA* 151-3).

human life, even if there are many who ultimately reject it.<sup>35</sup> Thus, we can affirm that “once the axis has turned it cannot be turned back”. Indeed, in a recent interview Taylor describes the changes brought about by the Axial age – e.g., related to the issue of the meaning of life and transcendence, the ethic of universal human concern, etc. – as the locus of a ‘ratchet effect’, i.e., “somehow the civilizations that have gone over to [these changes] have not been able to come back out of them” (Taylor 2012a, 287).

*The Immanent Frame and Closed World Structures*

To appreciate Taylor’s view of *homo religiosus* and the importance of vertical transcendence in human life we need to understand what he believes is the shared situation of religious and non-religious people alike in the modern world. We also need to define more precisely what he takes to be the opposition to his view.

First, the shared situation in the modern world is what Taylor calls ‘the immanent frame’, of which he writes:

[...] the different structures we live in: scientific, social, technological, and so on, constitute such a frame in that they are part of a “natural”, or “this-worldly” order which can be understood in its own terms, without reference to the “supernatural” or “transcendent”. But this order of itself leaves the issue open whether, for purposes of ultimate explanation, or spiritual transformation, or final sense-making, we might have to invoke something transcendent. (SA 594; cf. 542)

According to Taylor, this is the framework that has resulted from the process of ‘disenchantment’ in the modern West, which, as discussed in the Introduction, brings with it a ‘buffered’ conception of the self in which there is a clear boundary between self

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<sup>35</sup> In response to Gordon I should also add here that the fact that a view arises historically is not itself evidence that it won’t retain its validity for all time since any human judgment regarding what is the case will be by necessity an ‘historical event’.

and world, as contrasted with the ‘porous’ self of the enchanted world.<sup>36</sup> For Taylor, this buffered self is another constitutive feature of the immanent frame (*SA* 542).<sup>37</sup>

In the quote above Taylor says that the immanent frame in itself leaves open the issue of whether for ultimate sense-making we might need to appeal to something transcendent. In fact, he maintains that whatever stance we take on this issue – whether theistic, atheistic, or otherwise – it will require a ‘leap of faith’:

What pushes us one way or the other is what we might describe as our over-all take on human life, and its cosmic and (if any) spiritual surroundings. [...] If pressed, one can often articulate a whole host of considerations which motivate this stance, such as our sense of what is really important in human life, or the ways we think that human life can be transformed, or the constants, if any, of human history, and so on. But the take goes beyond these particular insights. Moreover, these themselves can be changed through further events and experience. In this way, our over-all sense of things anticipates or leaps ahead of the reasons we can muster for it. It is something in the nature of a hunch; perhaps we might better speak here of “anticipatory confidence”. That is what it means to talk of a “leap of faith” here. [...] Of course, experience can bring an increase in our confidence in our stance. But we never move to a point beyond all anticipation, beyond all hunches, to the kind of certainty that we can enjoy in certain narrower questions, say, in natural science or ordinary life. (*SA* 550-1)<sup>38</sup>

Such anticipatory confidence means that we are aware of what Taylor calls the ‘Jamesian open space’, alluding to the work of Williams James. To be aware of this open space means feeling the ‘cross-pressures’ between considerations that count in favor of

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<sup>36</sup> To recall from the Introduction, Taylor writes: “For the modern, buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my response to them” (*SA* 38). The key question is: what, if anything, do such responses tell me about myself and the world?

<sup>37</sup> There are of course people today who still live in the ‘enchanted’ world and thus are not within the immanent frame. Taylor seems to be committed to viewing such people as not fully ‘modern’. Ruth Abbey and James Miller both question the extent to which Taylor’s account of ‘our’ secular age captures the religious realities in the West (Abbey 2010; Miller 2008). It does seem that Taylor’s account of the immanent frame applies best to the more intellectual sectors of Western populations and it applies to a lesser degree to other sectors. However, I think his account of the immanent frame is quite valuable for the issue I am primarily concerned with: viz., the argument for an ineradicable draw to vertical transcendence in human life against ‘closed’ readings of the immanent frame.

<sup>38</sup> It should be clear that to say that the immanent frame leaves it open whether for ultimate sense-making we need to appeal to the transcendent does not mean actually acknowledging the transcendent, as Charles Larmore seems to think (Larmore 2008). As we can see from this quote, Taylor thinks there is no knock-down argument for or against religious belief.

religious faith and those that count against it.<sup>39</sup> However, there are also certain ‘spins’ that one can put on the immanent frame that involve avoiding this open space through “convincing oneself that one’s reading is obvious, compelling, allowing of no cavil or demurrals” (*SA* 551). Drawing on a phrase used by Wittgenstein, Taylor says that such people are ‘held captive’ by a ‘picture’ that prevents them from seeing important aspects of reality (*SA* 551; cf. 549, 557). In particular, he argues that “those who think the closed reading of immanence is “natural” and obvious are suffering from this kind of disability” (*SA* 551). Although there are certainly religious believers who take their own perspective as the obviously right one, Taylor believes that those who claim the obviousness of a closed reading are perhaps more numerous, or at the very least they have the greater ‘intellectual hegemony’. Thus, he is primarily concerned to combat such secularist ‘spins’, whose force he believes can be understood in terms of what he calls ‘closed world structures’ (or ‘CWSs’), i.e., “ways of restricting our grasp of things which are not recognized as such” (*SA* 551). Taylor says such CWSs also help to explain the unjustified force of the mainstream account of secularization that sees it in terms of the ineluctable fading away of religion. Thus they are for him the key opposition to be combated.

Perhaps the most powerful CWS, in Taylor’s view, is captured in the idea of the ‘death of God’, where this refers to the view that “conditions have arisen in the modern

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<sup>39</sup> See *SA* 430-7, 548-9, 555-6, 591-3, 595-609; *VRT* 59-60. Regarding James, Taylor writes: “James is our great philosopher of the cusp. He tells us more than anyone else about what it’s like to stand in that open space and feel the winds pulling you now here, now there. He describes a crucial site of modernity and articulates the decisive drama enacted there. It took very exceptional qualities to do this. Very likely it needed someone who had been through a searing experience of “morbidity” and had come out the other side. But it also needed someone of wide sympathy, and extraordinary powers of phenomenological description; further, it needed someone who could feel and articulate the continuing ambivalence in himself. It probably also needed some who had ultimately come down, with whatever inner tremors, on the faith side; but this may be a bit of believers’ chauvinism that I am adding to the equation” (*VRT* 59-60). Ian Fraser has taken exception to Taylor’s ‘believers’ chauvinism’ here (Fraser 2007, 48), but it would be interesting to know how Taylor would try to fill out the claim (thus making it not mere chauvinism), since in my view he is much like James in inhabiting this open space.

world in which it is no longer possible, honestly, rationally, without confusions, or fudging, or mental reservation, to believe in God” (SA 560; cf. 4, 21).<sup>40</sup> These conditions are two-fold: first, the deliverances of modern science; and second, the shape of contemporary moral experience.<sup>41</sup> Regarding the first, Taylor says, “the central idea seems to be that the whole thrust of modern science has been to establish materialism” (SA 561). From Big Bang cosmology to evolutionary biology it now seems possible to explain the universe and life in purely mechanistic and materialistic terms without any reference to a divine creator or teleology, or so it is claimed. For prominent contemporary thinkers such as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett – as well as many others going back to the nineteenth century – there is a strong sense that modern science, and especially Darwin, has refuted traditional theism. There is also often an identification of disenchantment with the end of religion (SA 553). For many who hold such a view “the

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<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche is of course the most well-known expositor of this view. He says that the statement ‘God is dead’ means that “the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable” (*The Gay Science*, # 343; cf. #’s 125 & 357; see Nietzsche 1974). The mainstream secularization theorist that Taylor discusses most extensively, Steve Bruce, also seems to endorse something along these lines (SA 426-37). Indeed, he has a book entitled *God is Dead* (Bruce 2002). In this book Bruce writes: “In so far as I can imagine an endpoint [to secularization], it would not be self-conscious irreligion; you have to care too much about religion to be irreligious. It would be widespread indifference (what Weber called being religiously unmusical); no socially significant shared religion; and religious ideas being no more common than would be the case if all minds were wiped blank and people began from scratch to think about the world and their place in it” (quoted in SA 435; Bruce 2002, 42). Jon Butler has argued that Taylor does not confront the challenge of present religious indifference enough (Butler 2010, 209). I think Taylor has a response for this in his discussion of the ‘meaning of meaning’, which I will consider in the next subsection.

<sup>41</sup> Prior to his discussion of the ‘death of God’ CWS Taylor also discusses how the ‘epistemological picture’ frequently operates as a CWS (SA 557-60). He writes: “Characteristic of this picture are a series of priority relationships. Knowledge of the self and its states comes before knowledge of external reality and of others. The knowledge of reality as neutral fact comes before our attributing to it various “values” and relevances. And, of course, knowledge of the things of “this world”, of the natural order precedes any theoretical invocation of forces and realities transcendent to it. [...] This can operate as a CWS, because it is obvious that the inference to the transcendent is at the extreme and most fragile end of a chain of inferences; it is the most epistemically questionable” (SA 558). However, Taylor sees the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty – with their phenomenological accounts of our ‘engaged’ mode of ‘being-in-the-world’ – as refuting this epistemological picture. Rather than being a neutral account of how knowing works, it is shown to be motivated by values of “independence, self-control, self-responsibility, of a disengagement which brings control; a stance which requires courage, the refusal of the easy comforts of conformity to authority, of the consolations of an enchanted world, of the surrender to the promptings of the senses” (SA 559-60; cf. Taylor 1989b; 1990; 1993a; *PA*, Chs. 1 & 4; 2000a-b; 2003b-c; 2004c).

second order of conditions, the contemporary moral predicament, is unnecessary or merely secondary. Science alone can explain why belief is no longer possible” (SA 561).

Taylor says that from a believer’s perspective – i.e., from his own perspective – “the argument from modern science to all-around materialism seems quite unconvincing. Whenever this is worked out in something closer to detail, it seems full of holes” (SA 562). The believer therefore seeks for “an explanation why the materialist is so eager to believe very inconclusive arguments”, which he finds in a certain moral vision or ideal of fullness: viz., the ‘disengaged’ ideal of fullness discussed in the last chapter (cf. SA 9, 362-8, 388). Taylor describes this ideal as follows:

The unbeliever has the courage to take up an adult stance, and face reality. He knows that human beings are on their own. But this doesn’t cause him just to cave in. On the contrary, he determines to affirm human worth, and the human good, and to work for it, without false illusion or consolation. (SA 561-2)<sup>42</sup>

This connects with the second condition of the ‘death of God’ view: viz., the shape of contemporary moral experience, particularly in regard to the fact that “a great deal of our political and moral life is focused on human ends: human welfare, human rights, human flourishing, equality between human beings” (SA 569). This focus can give some the impression that there is no longer any need for God. In fact, as already mentioned, there are those who see humanism as the enemy of religion. But Taylor does not think that this view is warranted since there are clearly “many people of faith who have helped to build and are now sustaining this modern humanist world” (SA 570).<sup>43</sup> Thus, we are left to wonder why so many people accept this view. For Taylor, an important answer can again be found in the draw to the ideal of the courageous, disengaged standpoint, which is

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<sup>42</sup> This vision is notably expressed in Russell’s “A Free Man’s Worship” (Russell 1957), Camus’s *The Plague*, and Versilov’s depiction of the “Golden Age” in Dostoevsky’s *The Adolescent*.

<sup>43</sup> Again, I will return to this issue in the last section of this chapter and more fully in the next chapter.

contrasted with what is taken to be the cowardly, immature stance of faith. But often this is operating as a background assumption or ‘picture’, which is rarely brought to explicit articulation and thus enabled to be challenged (*SA* 565-6).

The way in which the courageous, disengaged ideal is operative as a background assumption can be seen in the ‘subtraction stories’ that Taylor says are often offered to explain how we come to embrace an ethic of universal human concern, such as that “left to ourselves we do want to benefit our fellow humans; or that we have developed this way culturally, and we value it, and we can keep this going if we set ourselves to it” (*SA* 562). Or again: “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” (*SA* 572). But for Taylor such subtraction stories have radically under-described modern humanism:

That I am left with only human concerns doesn’t tell me to take universal human welfare as my goal; nor does it tell me that freedom is important, or fulfillment, or equality. Just being confined to human goods could just as well find expression in my concerning myself exclusively with my own material welfare or that of my family or immediate milieu. The in fact very exigent demands of universal justice and benevolence which characterize modern humanism can’t be explained just by the subtraction of earlier goals and allegiances. (*SA* 572)

Accordingly to Taylor, what is really driving this in many cases is an ideal of self-transcendence and fullness associated with the courageous, disengaged stance in which – to recall a passage cited in the last chapter – “[we] not only transcend our craven desire for comfort and assurance; we also rise beyond our narrow perspective and can take in the whole. We become so filled with awe of it that we can step outside our own limited concerns” (*SS* 407; cf. *SA* 250-1). Of course, there are also other possible non-religious views that can be the source of such an ethic of universal human concern, such as the

Kantian view discussed in the last chapter, but Taylor regards the disengaged ideal as the one that most often goes along with the ‘death of God’ view.<sup>44</sup>

Now, we have seen that in Taylor’s view the ‘death of God’ CWS is motivated above all by a certain moral vision rather than by what its own adherents often believe to be the case, viz., the ‘brute facts’ revealed by modern science. What should we make of Taylor’s view here? First, I think he does offer a plausible account of the moral vision that often provides the implicit background for the ‘death of God’ view. However, I also believe that there is some question as to whether in his effort to reveal the moral motive for this perspective he actually undersells the power of the scientific challenge. It is noteworthy that Taylor does not discuss here in any detail why he finds the argument ‘from modern science to all-around materialism’ to be ‘unconvincing’ and ‘full of holes’. This lack of engagement with such arguments is in fact a point on which Taylor has been criticized (see Kitcher 2011, 25). He does of course acknowledge that science has played an important role in the story of the decrease of religious faith and practice. “For one thing”, he says, “the universe which this science reveals is very different from the centred hierarchic cosmos within which our civilization grew up; it hardly suggests to us that humans have any kind of special place in its story, whose temporal and spatial dimensions are mind-numbing” (*SA* 566; cf. 378-9, Ch. 9).<sup>45</sup> But he does not think that this amounts to an endorsement of the ‘official story’ that “the present climate of unbelief in many milieux in contemporary society is a response to the strong case for materialism

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<sup>44</sup> In the next chapter I will discuss the adequacy of these moral sources for such an ethic.

<sup>45</sup> In my interview with Taylor I asked him why he thought the argument from science against religious belief was full of holes and he discussed the implausibility of reductive materialist explanations of human life (Taylor 2012a, 288-9). However, even if we grant this it still does not address the challenge that is raised in this quote. I also asked him if he saw the biophilic and noophilic theories of the universe (discussed in Chapter III) as raising questions for the supposed knock-down arguments from science against religious belief, and he said: “Yes, definitely. Absolutely” (*ibid.*, 290). But he does not see us as arriving anytime soon at a consensus on such theories (see n. 74 in Chapter III).



which science has drawn up during the last three centuries” (*SA* 566). He thinks the moral vision is also needed. It is in fact unclear when Taylor says that the arguments from modern science to unbelief are unconvincing and full of holes whether he just has in mind those who take this conclusion to be obviously right, or if he also has in mind those who take it to be a matter of the overall weight of the evidence, while acknowledging that what counts as ‘evidence’ can be contestable. It does seem to me that one can – and many have – abandoned religious faith in the latter way without necessarily being motivated by ethical considerations (see Wilson 1999; cf. *SA* 563-4, 569-71). Such a person might then take up the ideal of the courageous, disengaged stance simply as a way of attempting to give meaning to his or her life after having abandoned a religious framework of meaning.

In addressing the argument from modern science to unbelief – whether taken to be obviously right or a matter of the overall weight of the evidence – Taylor could of course have recourse to the sort of scientific and philosophical literature that I mentioned in Chapter III, which argues that the universe in general and the earth in particular is in some sense ‘biophilic’ and ‘noophilic’, i.e., there is a ‘tendency’, and indeed some have said an ‘inevitability’, for the universe to give rise first of all to life and then to intelligence. Such a view seems to show that a theistic teleological perspective can at least be compatible with, if not supported by, the deliverances of science. However, Taylor’s primary method of defense against the view that science provides compelling support for atheism is to appeal to personal experience; e.g., he writes: “I can [...] have a religious life, a sense of God and how he impinges on my existence, against which I can check the supposed claims to refutation” (*SA* 567; cf. 8, 10-1, 325, 329, 364). In another passage, already quoted in Chapter III, he writes: “It is no longer usual to sense the

universe immediately and unproblematically as purposefully ordered, although reflection, meditation, spiritual development may lead one to see it this way” (SA 325; cf. 668).

Taylor believes that such ‘internal sources’ are often overlooked or degraded because of a privileging of the ‘external sources’ provided by science; i.e., there is a privileging of ‘experience-far’ over ‘experience-near’ (SA 568). Let us now look in more detail at these internal sources and how they can point us to the transcendent.

*‘Is That All There Is?’*

In the broadest terms, Taylor seeks to demonstrate the ineradicable draw to vertical transcendence in human life through appealing to what he regards as another human constant: viz., the quest for a meaningful life.<sup>46</sup> This is another way of stating his concern to examine what is at stake between religious and non-religious ideals of ‘fullness’. As discussed in the last chapter, fullness is experienced when our lives are lived as meaningful or worthwhile, which is judged according to our sense of placement within moral/spiritual space, i.e., “how [we are] ‘placed’ or ‘situated’ in relation to the good, or whether [we are] in ‘contact’ with it” (SS 42). Thus, the quest for a meaningful life can also be understood in terms of an aspiration to fullness.

According to Taylor, our secular age suffers from a ‘malaise of immanence’, which refers to the feeling of emptiness, flatness, loss of meaning, or lack of deeper resonance that people can experience in the immanent frame, especially with respect to the modern moral order and its predominant concern with ordinary human flourishing (SA 302-3, 307-20). For instance, many people – especially those of some leisure and culture – can feel an utter flatness in their everyday existence as it is lived in commercial,

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<sup>46</sup> For important relevant passages see: SA 5-20, 302-3, 307-20, 399-401, 506-9, 544-6, 550-2, 580-93, 596-7, 600-2, 604-9, 618-23, 676-85, 711-27, 728-30, 768-9.

industrial, or consumer society. Such people feel “[the] emptiness of the repeated, accelerating cycle of desire and fulfillment in consumer culture; the cardboard quality of bright supermarkets, or neat row housing in a clean suburb; the ugliness of slag heaps, or an aging industrial townscape” (*SA* 309). This malaise of immanence is captured well in Nietzsche’s critique of the ‘last man’, who epitomizes modern, civilized culture. The ‘last man’, according to Nietzsche, is the person who is no longer able to “shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man”, whose ‘soul’ is “poverty and filth and wretched contentment” because he (or she) is concerned only with ordinary human flourishing, or even simply with ‘small and vulgar pleasures’, as de Tocqueville puts it (Nietzsche 1995, Prologue, §3 & 5; see *SA* 319-20). In several places Taylor expresses this malaise of immanence in the words of the famous song by Peggy Lee, “Is that all there is?”, which he dubs the ‘Peggy Lee response’ (*SA* 311, 507, 509, 545).<sup>47</sup> As discussed above, there are a number of positions that seek to reply to this malaise of immanence by appealing to horizontal rather than vertical notions of transcendence. Nietzsche himself offers one such view with his ideal of self-overcoming, as do deep ecologists who view nature as a ‘moral source’ and the more demanding forms of humanism that endorse something such as the idea of a ‘religion of humanity’. Thus, a crucial question is whether horizontal or vertical forms of transcendence can best respond to this malaise.

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<sup>47</sup> Ruth Abbey has pointed out to me via personal communication that Taylor’s invocation of Lee’s song is quite incomplete. The chorus of the song is as follows: ‘Is that all there is? Is that all there is? / If that’s all there is my friends then let’s keep dancing. / Let’s break out the booze and have a ball, / if that’s all there is.’ In other words, Lee’s view seems to be that we should ‘live in the moment’ (à la Kierkegaard’s ‘aesthete’, as discussed in Chapter III). The question of course is whether this is sufficient to avoid the malaise of immanence. I will return shortly to discuss the adequacy of attempts to remain content with the meanings that arise for us within our particular form of life without answering the meaning of life question.

We can begin to address this question by considering the way that Taylor frames the issue of the quest for a meaningful life. Drawing on the work of Luc Ferry, Taylor says that we can ask about the ‘meaning of meaning’:

What we do always has a point; we undertake various projects, and in-between we keep going the routines which sustain our lives. Through all this, something may be growing: a life of love; children who are becoming adults and then leaving to live their own lives; we may be getting better at some valuable and useful activity. But we can also be struck by a question of what this all adds up to; what is the meaning of it all? Or since the individual projects and the recurring routine all have their purpose, the question comes as a higher order one: what is the meaning of all these particular purposes? (*SA* 677)

In other words, to ask about the ‘meaning of meaning’ is to ask about ‘*the* meaning of life’ or the overarching significance of life (*SA* 308-9). Within a religious worldview, particularly the theistic teleological view I discussed in Chapter III, there is a clear answer to this question: viz., the meaning of life is found in fulfilling the purpose for which we were made by God, e.g., communion with God and other human beings. However, it is not as clear how the question is to be answered from a non-religious perspective, unless one finds the sort of non-theistic cosmic teleology put forward by Thomas Nagel and Paul Davies convincing (see Chapter III). For many non-religious people today, Ferry says, the ““meaning of meaning”—the ultimate significance of all these particular meanings—is lacking” (Ferry 2002, 7).<sup>48</sup> This recalls the discussion in Chapter III of the difference it makes for our particular experiences of meaning if we see them against the backdrop of cosmic purpose or cosmic purposelessness. While the former can support and deepen our experiences of meaning, the latter can potentially

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<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that some of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century, viz., Einstein, Freud, and Wittgenstein, have regarded the question of the meaning of life to be an inherently religious question. Einstein writes: “To know an answer to the question, ‘What is the meaning of human life?’ *means* to be religious.” Likewise, Freud says: “The idea of life having a purpose stands and falls with the religious system.” Finally, Wittgenstein states: “To believe in God means to understand the question about the meaning of life. [...] To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning” (quoted in Sacks 2011, 19; cf. Cottingham 2003). On the ‘meaning of meaning’ see also Nagel 1979, Ch. 2; 1986, Ch. XI; 1987, Ch. 10.

have an undermining effect. According to Taylor, an important feature of the malaise of immanence is that even where there are non-religious answers to the meaning of life – as with Nietzschean, deep ecological, and exclusive humanist views – “all these answers are fragile, or uncertain; [...] a moment may come, where we no longer feel that our chosen path is compelling, or cannot justify it to ourselves or others” (*SA* 308). We should again recall Taylor’s claim – discussed in Chapter III – that whereas religious ethical perspectives are contested as to their truth, non-religious ethical perspectives are contested as to their adequacy. As I have argued, I believe this can be understood in terms of the problem of ‘radical contingency’ that non-religious views suffer from (at least those that accept cosmic purposelessness), whereas a theistic teleological view does not.

Thus, it is not surprising, as Taylor notes, that some people think that we should not ask this meta-question about the meaning of meaning; instead, we should train ourselves not to feel the need (*SA* 677). We see something like this in the ‘quietist’ approach championed by Wittgenstein, which is also taken up by others such as John McDowell and Richard Rorty. On this approach one seeks to remain content with the meanings that arise within a given ‘form of life’ without asking meta-questions about the ultimate significance of these meanings.<sup>49</sup> However, Taylor thinks such an approach has serious drawbacks, since “once [the meta-question] arises for someone they will not easily be put off by the injunction to forget it” (*SA* 677). Such a view is also reinforced by Thomas Nagel in his article on “The Absurd”, where he argues that human beings naturally take the ‘transcendental [i.e., self-transcending] step’ to consider the overall view of things independent of any particular subjective perspective (what he calls the

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<sup>49</sup> On the quietist view one “leaves everything as it is” (Wittgenstein 1953, §124; cf. §126). Recall the earlier discussion of McDowell’s quietist position in Chapter III.

‘view from nowhere’). Against those who want to fend off the view that life is ultimately absurd by remaining within one’s subjective experiences of meaning, Nagel writes:

Given that the transcendental step is natural to us humans, can we avoid absurdity by refusing to take that step and remaining entirely within our sublunar lives? Well, we cannot refuse consciously, for to do that we would have to be aware of the viewpoint we were refusing to adopt. The only way to avoid the relevant self-consciousness would be either never to attain it or to forget it – neither of which can be achieved by the will. (Nagel 1979, 21; cf. Cottingham 2008, 35-6)

This point connects up with the earlier discussion of ‘theoretic culture’. As I previously maintained, it seems to be part of our post-Axial condition that it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to get away from at least some degree of a ‘theoretical’ attitude to life whereby we ask questions about the meaning of life.

Taylor also remarks that speaking in terms of *the* meaning of life “partakes of the post-Axial outlook, which opened up the idea that there is “one thing needful”, some higher goal which transcends, or gives sense to all the lower ones”, which in *Sources* he calls a hypergood (*SA* 308; cf. *SS* 62-75). However, there are those who want to reject this way of framing the issue since they do not think we should conceive of life in terms of a single-overriding purpose (*SA* 308-9). Against our post-Axial culture, they may want to recover “paganism” or “polytheism”, i.e., a pluralistic account of strong goods (*SA* 309). We can see this explicitly endorsed in the recent work by Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly (Dreyfus and Kelly 2011a-b; cf. Taylor 2011c). We also see something of this sort in Susan Wolf’s discussion of ‘meaning in life’, as opposed to ‘*the* meaning of life’ (Wolf 2010). As discussed in Chapter II, Taylor himself endorses a plurality of strong goods, which he believes must be integrated in our life as a whole. We might in fact understand *the* meaning of life not necessarily in terms of a single overriding good, but rather in terms of incorporating diverse goods within a single life. However, we will

still need to rank-order goods within our lives such that some goods are going to stand out as most important and as providing our life with fundamental direction. Moreover, when there is affirmation of a plurality of goods then the ideal of wholeness itself will likely be a life-orientating strong good. In short, it seems that we are still very much concerned with the question of the meaning of life. Additionally, the same considerations about cosmic purpose versus cosmic purposelessness and radical contingency arise whether we are talking about ‘meaning in life’ or ‘the meaning of life’.

At this point I would now like to turn to examine some more specific issues that Taylor discusses that can be seen to fall under the general topic of the meaning of life and which I believe help us to understand the draw to vertical transcendence in human life.

#### *Responding to Suffering and Evil*

One important way in which the question of the meaning of life arises for us is in response to the problem of suffering and evil in which the world is experienced as being ‘out of joint’ (SA 680-1). For theists this raises of course the issue of ‘theodicy’, i.e., the attempt to justify the goodness of God in light of the reality of suffering and evil. But it is important to see that the problem of suffering and evil is not just a problem for theists. More fundamentally, it is a problem for everyone. We can call this shared problem the problem of ‘cosmodicy’, i.e., the felt need in the face of suffering and evil to justify life in the world as good or meaningful or worthwhile and thus to fend off ‘exile’, the sense that life is absurd or meaningless (cf. SS 441-55; Guignon 1993, xxx). Taylor writes:

We can be overwhelmed when we are made aware of all the suffering there is in the world [...]. There are unguarded moments when we can feel the immense weight of suffering, when we are dragged down by it, or pulled down into despair. [...] But beyond suffering, there is evil; for instance, the infliction of suffering, the cruelty, [...] the sinking into brutality [...]. It’s almost like a nightmare. One

wants to be protected, separated from this. But it can creep under your guard and assail you. (SA 680-1)

Like Dostoevsky, Taylor does not think there is any conclusive theoretical response to the problem of evil and suffering and so he focuses on the possible existential responses from religious and non-religious perspectives (see SA 388-9). According to Taylor, there are two main existential responses to such suffering and evil. First of all, there is the ‘negative, self-defensive’ response, which seeks to shut it out as far as possible, e.g., by not watching the news, by seeking distractions, by regarding those who do evil as being ‘not like us’, or by regarding those who suffer as ‘deserving it’. These exclusionary or distancing moves, Taylor says, “keep us from being overwhelmed; they keep us sane” (SA 681, 684). However, they do nothing to answer the underlying threat of despair or meaninglessness and thus it can always end up getting past one’s defenses. Besides the negative, self-defensive response, Taylor also identifies a positive response that he associates with the practices of *tikkun olam*, which is a Hebrew expression that he translates as ‘healing the world’ (SA 681). In other words, we seek to be part of the solution to the problem of suffering and evil, which is regarded as an important aspect of living a meaningful life (SA 681-2). We might do this through our work (e.g., in some ‘helping profession’), through charitable efforts, through how we raise our children, by how we act towards others, by seeking to transform the negative elements (e.g., hatred, anger, vengefulness, etc.) within ourselves, and so on.

The key issue at stake here between religious and non-religious views is which is best able to cultivate the practices of *tikkun* and avoid distancing strategies. In regard to non-religious views, Taylor sees, e.g., a certain distancing strategy at work in the liberal disengaged stance with its ideal of the impartial, benevolent spectator, which expresses



concern for the suffering of others, but without being overwhelmed by it. Moreover, it stresses benevolence towards all humankind, but “within the limits of the reasonable and the possible” (*SA* 682). Further along the spectrum of distancing strategies is the ‘Bolshevik’ stance, which constitutes a less liberal, more revolutionary mode of the benevolent disengaged stance in which whatever stands in the way of the ‘Revolution’ can be sacrificed for the ‘greater good’. This requires “the cutting off of gut-sympathy with suffering and evil through disengagement and the stance of control” such that we no longer feel implicated in it (*SA* 682-3). We see here parallels with the ‘victim’ stance in which all evil is projected onto others, where they alone are the victimizers and we are pure victim. Taylor says this can be especially found on the Left: “The liberal self feels relatively innocent, because (a) it sees the whole picture clearly, and (b) it is part of the solution” (*SA* 683). Finally, at an even further end of the spectrum of distancing strategies is the Nietzschean stance that rejects the ethic of universal human concern in favor of a ‘heroic’ ideal of human excellence. This requires that we steel ourselves against feelings of compassion for the weak and vulnerable, which would draw us away from the heroic ideal. Moreover, some things that are typically considered to be evil, such as the drive to violence, are affirmed as part of the striving for excellence (*SA* 683).

In regard to religious perspectives, Taylor notes that Christianity, e.g., has traditionally involved “marrying a practice of tikkun with various exclusionary moves against the damned, the pagan, the unbeliever, the heretic, the irremediably tepid” (*SA* 684). But he also says that there is the possibility of a ‘purified Christian alternative’ where one aims “to dwell in the suffering and evil without recoil, sure of the power of God to transform it. One is part of the solution by being there and praying, being there

and affirming the good which is never absent. You see the good through the eyes of God” (SA 685). Elsewhere Taylor mentions the importance of Dostoevsky’s insight (expressed in several of his novels) that ‘we are all to blame’, which contrasts with the victim stance mentioned above. Commenting on Dostoevsky’s insight, Taylor says:

What will transform us is an ability to love the world and ourselves, to see it as good in spite of the wrong. But this will only come to us if we can accept being part of it, and that means accepting responsibility. [...] Loving the world and ourselves is in a sense a miracle, in face of all the evil and degradation that it and we contain. But the miracle comes on us if we accept being part of it. Involved in this is our acceptance of love from others. We become capable of love through being loved. (SS 452; cf. SA 709-10)

For Taylor and Dostoevsky, what is especially important is the transformation that can occur through opening ourselves to being loved by God, which we in turn mediate to others (SS 452, 516-8, 521; SA 701-3).

Taylor acknowledges that there are also profound modes of ‘being there’ among unbelieving solutions, such as Ferry’s ideal of ‘succouring human life’. But he writes:

[The] question may arise whether any humanistic view, just because it is woven around a picture of the potential greatness of human beings, doesn’t tempt us to neglect the failures, the blackguards, the useless, the dying, [...] in brief, those who negate the promise. Perhaps only God, and to some extent those who connect themselves to God, can love human beings when they are utterly abject. The work of Mother Teresa in Calcutta brings this question to mind. (SA 684)

This is a contentious issue I will need to take up in more detail in the next chapter, but for now it is interesting to note that Taylor says that with regard to these unbelieving modes of ‘being there’ there is “perhaps a new, as yet untravelled road from them to God, a way of “making straight the way of the Lord”” (SA 685). Although Taylor does not expand upon this comment, one way of understanding it is that a theistic framework can help us to remain hopeful even in the face of great suffering and evil, which might otherwise cause us to despair (see SS 520-1; SA 389, 643, 654-5, 668-75, 684-5, 701-3, 754). In

other words, a theistic perspective makes possible what John Cottingham calls the ‘buoyancy of the good’. While Cottingham believes that a morally good life is important for fulfilling our human nature, he says:

[...] what the religious dimension adds is a framework within which that nature is revealed as more than just a set of characteristics that a certain species happens intermittently to possess, but instead as pointing to the condition that a Being of the utmost benevolence and care that we can conceive of desires us to achieve. Focusing on this dimension, moreover, encourages us with the hope that the pursuit of virtue, difficult and demanding though it often is, contributes however minutely to the establishment of a moral order that the cosmos was created to realise. To act in the light of such an attitude is to act in the faith that our struggles mean something beyond the local expression of a contingently evolving genetic lottery; that despite the cruelty and misery in the world, the struggle for goodness will always enjoy a certain kind of buoyancy. (Cottingham 2003, 72-3)<sup>50</sup>

We can also add to this that a theist typically holds that God is present with us in our confrontation with suffering and evil.<sup>51</sup> For those engaged in practices of *tikkun olam* it is

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<sup>50</sup> For a good discussion on the difference between the virtue of hope and secular optimism about human progress see Lasch 1991, Ch. 2. Lasch writes: “The idea of progress alone, we are told, can move men and women to sacrifice immediate pleasures to some larger purpose. On the contrary, progressive ideology weakens the spirit of sacrifice. Nor does it give us an effective antidote to despair [...]. Hope does not demand a belief in progress. It demands a belief in justice [...]. Hope implies a deep-seated trust in life that appears absurd to those who lack it. [...] If we distinguish hopefulness from the more conventional attitude known today as optimism – if we think of it as a character trait, a temperamental disposition rather than an estimate of the direction of historical change – we can see why it serves us better, in steering troubled waters ahead, than a belief in progress. Not that it prevents us from expecting the worst. The worst is always what the hopeful are prepared for. Their trust in life would not be worth much if it had not survived disappointments in the past, while the knowledge that the future holds further disappointments demonstrates the continuing need for hope” (ibid., 80-1). See n. 44 in the next chapter.

<sup>51</sup> One of the most profound expressions of this view is of course the twenty-third Psalm of the Bible. In regard to this text, Cottingham writes: “The religious believer does not detect a jolly, happy world and infer a kindly Father Christmas-type deity as its cause. To the contrary, and this is perhaps the strongest evidence against the inferential interpretation of religious belief, the most profoundly spiritual and passionately religious people in the world’s history, the people who produced Moses and the prophets and Jesus and Paul, were a people whose history was conspicuous by the most terrible suffering [...]. This is the people who reflected endlessly on *chesed*, the loving kindness of God, who produced the immortal lines [...] ‘surely thy goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life’. To object that they must have been rather inept in applying the rules of inference to the best explanation is surely to miss the point” (Cottingham 2005, 23; cf. 2003, 73-76). Along similar lines, Taylor writes: “The case for the defense [of God against the problem of evil and suffering] depends on there being more to human fate than we can exhibit as undeniable in history: that these people died in the earthquake, and those in gas chambers, and no-one came to rescue them. Christians can only reply to the accusations with hope. In a sense, the only possible stance for a Christian is to recover something like the pre-modern [view], to see God as helper, and not cruel puppet-master. Only where this was often adopted naively, that is, without the sense that there was an alternative, it now has to be recovered in full awareness” (SA 389).

not difficult to see why they might be drawn towards such a religious framework, whether or not they are able to fully believe in it. Indeed, arguably it provides the ideal framework for such practices, but I will need to say more on this in the next chapter.

*'Homogeneous, Empty Time'*

Another important issue that Taylor discusses which can draw one towards vertical transcendence is the feeling of flatness with modern time-experience insofar as this is lived purely within secular time. In order to understand this consider the two-fold sense of time that was predominant in pre-modern Latin Christendom: viz., there were 'higher times' that "gathered, assembled, reordered, punctuated profane, ordinary time", which Taylor also calls 'secular time' (SA 54). We can see this with the Church calendar, which "remembers and re-enacts what happened [...] when Christ was on earth" and thereby structures our ordinary time-experience (SA 58). Certain times on the Church calendar represent modes of higher time, such as Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter, which introduce 'warps' into our ordinary time-ordering whereby there is a sort of simultaneity with the event it marks (SA 55). For instance, "this year's Good Friday can be closer to the Crucifixion than last year's mid-summer day" (SA 58). This can be understood as a form of 'gathered time' where we participate in God's eternity (SA 57). Of course, such 'gathered time' or 'rising to eternity' is something that is not only achieved during certain days on the Church calendar, but it also something we can strive towards in our lives through seeking deeper communion with God.

Now, a crucial feature of secularization is that it brings it about that time can be experienced purely in terms of secular time without any reference to higher times that gather and order it. This has led Walter Benjamin to characterize modernity in terms of

the experience of “homogeneous, empty time” (*SA* 54, 58-9, 714, 719). Like space, time is seen here as a kind of container, indifferent to the content that fills it (*SA* 58-9). According to Taylor, “the disciplines of our modern civilized order have led us to measure and organize time as never before in human history. Time has become a precious resource, not to be “wasted”. The result has been the creation of a tight, ordered time environment” (*SA* 59). We thus take an instrumental stance towards time, which homogenizes time in that this stance “defines segments for some further purposes, but recognizes no intrinsic qualitative differences” (*SA* 714).

While Taylor thinks it is certainly true that “in relation to the earlier complex consciousness of higher times, our outlook enshrines homogeneity and indifference to content”, nevertheless, he doubts that human beings could ever live exclusively in homogenous, empty time (*SA* 58-9, 714; cf. 719). In particular, he identifies two ways in which time can be given shape in our secular age. First, there are “cycles, routines, recurring forms in our lives” by which we orientate ourselves, such as the “measured schedules of a demanding career”, or “the daily round, the week, the year with its seasons, times of heightened activity, vacations” (*SA* 714-5). Second, as selves existing in ‘moral space’, we deploy narratives of human self-realization that trace our growth or development towards some strongly valued end (*SA* 716). According to Taylor, “narration is one way of gathering time. It shapes the flow of time, “de-homogenizes” it, and marks out kairotic moments” (*SA* 714). Narratives of ‘human self-realization’ are thus needed to give purpose or meaning to the repeated cycles or routines in our lives. “That the repeatable cycles of life connect over time, and make a continuity,” Taylor says, “is an essential condition of a life having meaning” (*SA* 719). Such narratives of

human self-realization can take both individual and social/cultural forms. In their individual forms they trace our movement towards or away from what we understand to be the good for our lives. In their social/cultural forms they trace, e.g., “the story of Progress, or Reason and Freedom, or Civilization or Decency or Human Rights; or [...] the coming to maturity of a nation or culture” (*SA* 716). It goes without saying of course that these two forms of narrative can be and often are linked.

Now, Taylor notes that an important feature of the modern world is that such narratives of human self-realization, especially the social/cultural forms related to the ‘modern moral order’, have come under challenge: “From the beginning, there were protests about the flatness, insipidity, lack of inspiration about the goal of progress, ordinary human happiness” (*SA* 717). This could come from a religious direction, where the lack of a transcendent dimension is protested. Or it could come from a Nietzschean direction, where the lack of heroism is protested. Or it could come from a Romantic direction, where the lack of deep feeling or connection to others and the natural world is protested. With all these attacks, Taylor says, there is a ‘spectre of meaninglessness’ surrounding the modern moral order. Of course, as discussed above, there could also be a spectre of meaninglessness surrounding Nietzschean and Romantic views of self-realization and any other view if one cannot answer the ‘meaning of meaning’ question. Without a sense of the meaning of meaning that provides a narrative unity to our lives the repeated cycles or routines lose their point and we can feel imprisoned in them. In this way time would seem homogenous and empty (*SA* 719).

Moreover, the spectre of meaninglessness related to the loss of higher time can be felt not only in our everyday existence, but also in what should be crucial moments in our lives such as birth, marriage, and death. Taylor writes:

These are important turning points of our lives, and we want to mark them as such; we want to feel that they are of particular moment, something solemn. So we talk of “solemnizing” a marriage. The way we have always done this is by linking these moments up with the transcendent, the highest, the holy, the sacred. [...] But the enclosure in the immanent leaves a hole here. Many people, who have no other connection or felt affinity with religion, go on using the ritual of the church for these rites de passage. (SA 309; cf. De Botton 2012)

I would now like to examine in particular the issue of confronting death as well as the more general issues of human finitude and vulnerability and consider how these can draw one towards vertical transcendence in the form of the ‘desire for eternity’.

### *The Desire for Eternity*

Human finitude and vulnerability are fundamental features of the human condition.<sup>52</sup> Our lives and the lives of those we love as well as our various projects are all vulnerable to numerous kinds of misfortune. Moreover, our lives and the lives of those we love will also ultimately be subject to death. Reflection on all of this can give rise to a sense of futility, despair, or absurdity. Taylor writes:

One of the things which makes it difficult to sustain a sense of the higher meaning of ordinary life, in particular our love relations, is death. It’s not just that they matter to us a lot, and hence there is a grievous hole in our lives when our partner dies. It’s also [...] just because they are so significant, they seem to demand eternity. A deep love already exists against the vicissitudes of life, tying together past and present [...]. By its very nature it participates in gathered time. And so death can seem a defeat, the ultimate dispersal which remains ungathered [...]. The deepest, most powerful kind of happiness, even in the moment, is plunged into a sense of meaning. And the meaning seems denied by certain kinds of ending. That’s why the greatest crisis around death comes from the death of someone we love. (SA 720-1)

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<sup>52</sup> On this theme see: Nussbaum 2001; MacIntyre 1999; Cottingham 2003, Ch. 3; 2009a, Ch. 1.

While this can give rise to a sense of despair or futility, it can also give rise to religious longings and hopes for a higher good beyond our present condition, which Taylor speaks of in terms of a ‘desire for eternity’ (SA 720). Indeed, it is because of considerations such as these that Pascal wrote: “humankind transcends itself”<sup>53</sup>; and in a similar vein Augustine famously wrote: “you [God] have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (Augustine 1998, 3).

There are of course those such as Bernard Williams who believe that eternal life would be tedious or boring and so mortality is not a great misfortune when compared to the intolerable condition of immortality (Williams 1973a, Ch. 6). I think to some extent this reaction is understandable, especially since there is great difficulty in conceptualizing what eternal life would be like. Nevertheless, anyone who has loved deeply can also understand the force of the ‘desire for eternity’. Indeed, Taylor stands in a long tradition that maintains that the desire for eternity arises from the nature of love itself. As Plato puts it in the *Symposium*: “love is wanting to possess the good forever” (206a; see Plato 1997). Likewise, although he was no believer in eternal life, Nietzsche writes: ‘Alle lust will Ewigkeit’, which Taylor takes to mean that “love by its nature calls for eternity”, since the joy of love “loses some of its sense if it doesn’t last” (SA 720-1). I also think the desirability of eternal life makes more sense if we consider the ‘incremental approach’ suggested by Thomas Nagel, who is also no believer in eternal life. He writes: “given the simple choice between living for another week and dying in five minutes I would always choose to live for another week; and by a version of mathematical induction I conclude I would be glad to live forever” (Nagel 1986, 224).

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<sup>53</sup> The translation is by John Cottingham (Cottingham 2008, 35 & 41, n. 38; see Pascal 1995, 34-5).



We also see the desire for eternity expressed in aspirations to immanent forms of ‘immortality’, i.e., when people desire that their memory and influence will ‘live on’ after their death: e.g., by making their ‘mark’ through great achievements (e.g., artworks), procreation and family lineage, or contributing to the well-being or ongoing ‘progress’ of the human race (see *SA 721*). But this is a very limited form of ‘immortality’ since most people’s memory and influence will not live on long (see *SA 722*). Moreover, since our solar system itself will not last forever this seemingly means that even the memory and influence of the most renown figures of history such as Homer, Plato, Shakespeare, Napoleon, etc., will die out just like the rest of us. Finally, it is a limited form of ‘immortality’ because obviously neither our loved ones nor ourselves actually live on and it does not enable us to confront death itself with any sense of deeper meaning.

For those who reject the possibility of a life after death, Taylor says, there can be a sense of void and embarrassment in the inability to see a deeper meaning in death, and this can come out in the difficulty of finding a way of marking death that speaks to one’s strongest feelings (*SA 723*). According to Luc Ferry, among the non-religious there is often a sense of the “banality of mourning” (Ferry 2002, 3). Or as Taylor says:

[We] very often feel awkward at a funeral; don’t know what to say to the bereaved; are often tempted to avoid the issue if we can. And at the same time, even people who otherwise don’t practice have recourse to religious funerals; perhaps because here at least is a language which fits the need for eternity, even if you’re not sure you believe all that. [...] We don’t know how to deal with death, and so we ignore it as much and for as long as possible. We concentrate on life. The dying don’t want to impose their plight on the people they love, even though they may be eager, even aching to talk about what it means to them now that they face it. [...] The aim can be to glide through the whole affair, smoothly and as much as possible painlessly, for both dying and bereaved [...]. The cost is a denial of the issue of meaning itself, something which can never be totally suppressed in any case. (*SA 723*)

As discussed above, Taylor believes that the inability of exclusive humanism to give a deeper meaning to death and suffering other than as ‘dangers and enemies to be avoided or combated’ has helped to give rise to the ‘immanent revolt’ within unbelief, which sees death as a crucial crite of exploration, a gathering point for making sense of life. For Taylor, this ‘anti-humanist’ response is a manifestation of our nature as *homo religiosus*. “Exclusive humanism”, he says, “closes the transcendent window, as though there were nothing beyond—more, as though it weren’t an irrepressible need of the human heart to open that window, and first look, then go beyond”. Taylor thus sees the existence of anti-humanism as telling against this: “If the transcendental view is right, then human beings have an ineradicable bent to respond to something beyond life. Denying this stifles” (*CM* 26-7; *SA* 638). I believe we can understand this draw to something ‘beyond life’ in terms of a desire for a kind of self-transcendence in which we achieve a higher mode of selfhood through identifying with a wider perspective beyond our present life-span.

Now, just as I questioned the limits of the different ideals of immanent immortality, I believe we can also question the limits of the anti-humanist attempts to explore the standpoint of death as the gathering point of life. While this might help to provide an orientation for our life as ‘beings-toward-death’, to use Heidegger’s expression, it is not clear how much it can actually help us to deal with death itself, especially the crisis surrounding the death of loved ones. If love does indeed call for eternity, then there still seems to be something missing in this anti-humanist view that can draw one towards vertical transcendence (i.e., God and eternal life).

*Making Sense of Strong Evaluative Experience*

For Taylor one of the most important ways in which the immanent frame remains open to the transcendent is through our strong evaluative experiences, which are precisely those experiences through which we define the meaning of life and our sense of what fullness consists in. He writes:

[Wherever] the sense of the higher which constitutes such distinctions is somehow ineradicably linked to God, or something ontically higher (transcendent), belief in this higher seems obviously right, founded, even undeniable. For many, their highest sense of the good has been developed in a profoundly religious context: it has been formed, for instance, around images of sainthood; or their strongest sense of it comes in moment of prayer, or liturgy, or perhaps religious music; or their role models were people of strong religious faith. Their sense of the highest good [...] is of something consubstantial with God; by that I mean that this good is inconceivable without God, or some relation to the higher [...]. [They] cannot make sense of the good as they experience it without reference to the transcendent in some form. (*SA* 544)

Taylor says that this kind of ‘consubstantiality’ of strong evaluation with the transcendent can be present not only positively as we see in this passage, but also negatively “as something whose lack we feel” (*SA* 545).

In Chapter III we have already discussed the relationship between Taylor’s theism and his defense of moral (i.e., strong evaluative) realism. Since in that context we mostly explored the more strictly ‘moral’ aspect of strong evaluative experience I would like to focus on Taylor’s attempt to show the draw to vertical transcendence through the ‘aesthetic’ realm of our strong evaluative experience. The key question here is: can our experience of being moved by beauty in nature and in art “be made sense of in an ontology excluding the transcendent?” (*SA* 606).

At first glance, he says, it seems obvious that it can, at least to some extent. He mentions, e.g., experiences of awe and wonder that atheists have when contemplating

nature, especially its depth in time and width in space, which can be bring with it a sense of beauty or the sublime (*SA* 367-8, 606; *DC* 295-7; cf. Costa 2011; Levine 2008). There is particularly a sense of awe and wonder that beings such as our selves have emerged out of the ‘blind’, mechanistic processes of nature and are capable of contemplating it.<sup>54</sup> This awe is modulated and intensified by “a sense of kinship, of belonging integrally to these depths”, i.e., a “sense of connection and solidarity with all existence” (*SA* 368). The sense of wonder, awe, and kinship here can be seen then as not only compatible with a purely immanent perspective, but as “an intrinsic part of such a perspective” (*SA* 606). However, one must avoid reductionist accounts of these responses in terms of blind, mechanistic causation based on how we happen to be ‘wired’, which would undermine such responses since they seem to presuppose the grasping of some intelligible features that are judged as commanding these responses (*DC* 300-2; cf. *SA* 595-7).

One might question here whether such an atheist view could in fact account for the normative sense that we *ought* to have such aesthetic responses such that a person who felt revulsion and despair rather than awe and wonder would be judged poorly.<sup>55</sup> The issue of radical contingency could return here such that which response one had might be thought to be just a matter of personal temperament. Moreover, although Taylor acknowledges the power of such aesthetic experiences within a purely immanent perspective, he thinks that something similar and perhaps even richer can be captured in a religious perspective, such as Pascal’s view of human beings as ‘thinking reeds’, i.e., as

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<sup>54</sup> We find something like this expressed by Darwin in the concluding passages of both *The Origin of Species* (Darwin 2009, 913) and *The Descent of Man* (Darwin 2004, 689).

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Nagel quotes the character Marlow from Joseph Conrad’s *Chance* as having just such an opposite reaction: “It was one of those dewy, clear, starry nights, oppressing our spirit, crushing our pride, by the brilliant evidence of the awful loneliness, of the hopeless obscure insignificance of our globe lost in the splendid revelation of a glittering, soulless universe. I hate such skies” (Nagel 2010, 9, n. 2).

paradoxically both great and small, which brings with it a sense of religious mystery (*SA* 607; cf. 347, 367). Or we can also think of Gerard Manley Hopkins' line about the world being "charged with the grandeur of God" (see *SA* 763).

But setting this issue aside, Taylor says: "there are other modes of aesthetic experience, whose power seems inseparable from their epiphanic nature, that is their revealing something beyond themselves, even beyond nature as we ordinarily know it" (*SA* 607).<sup>56</sup> He mentions as an example Bede Griffith's epiphanic experience in contemplating nature. Griffith says of this experience: "I remember now the feeling of awe which came over me. I felt inclined to kneel on the ground, as though I had been standing in the presence of an angel; and I hardly dared to look on the face of the sky, because it seemed as though it was but a veil before the face of God" (*SA* 5; cf. Griffiths 1954, 9; *SA* 728-30). The idea here seems to be that a constitutive feature of this awe before the natural world is that it points beyond nature itself to its Creator. Beside such epiphanic experiences of nature, Taylor also says: "there are certain works of art – by Dante, Bach, the makers of Chartres Cathedral: the list is endless – whose power seems inseparable from their epiphanic, transcendent reference" (*SA* 607). In both cases "the challenge is to the unbeliever, to find a non-theistic register in which to respond to [such experiences], without impoverishment" (*SA* 607).

According to Taylor, this is not an easily decidable question. For one thing, even though we each have our own interpretation of our experience that inclines us to a particular view, it is difficult to convince someone else unless they can come to share

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<sup>56</sup> It should be noted that Taylor's use of 'epiphany' here is broader and less nuanced than his discussion of epiphany in *Sources*, where he discusses it with reference to certain kinds of works of art (*SS*, Chs. 23-4, esp. pp. 419-20). In the passage from *A Secular Age* that I am quoting from here Taylor speaks of 'epiphanic' experiences not only with reference to works of art, but also with reference to nature.

with us the same sort of ‘personal resonance’. Moreover, the question can be difficult to decide specifically in the case of Romantic and post-Romantic art where there is the use of ‘subtler languages’ that allow us “to manifest an order in things while leaving our ontological commitments relatively indeterminate” (*SA* 607; cf. 352-61, 400-4, 755-65). These languages, he says, “*can* be taken in more than one sense, ranging from the fullest ontological commitment to the transcendent to the most subjective, human-, even language-centered” (*SA* 757). As a key instance, he mentions the significance of the poetry of Wordsworth for many people in the nineteenth century at different places along the ontological spectrum, from orthodox Christians to atheists.<sup>57</sup> But while such subtler languages permit this indeterminacy, it is not required. Indeed, he says, a “new poetic language can serve to find a way back to the God of Abraham” (*SA* 757; cf. 404). In Taylor’s view this is the case, e.g., with Wordsworth himself, along with Hopkins and Eliot, and he also mentions the importance of Romantic and post-Romantic art in the religious transformations of Griffiths and Dostoevsky.<sup>58</sup>

Taylor does not claim to decide the issue here about aesthetic experience, but says that he is only pointing to the considerations that push us in a certain direction (*SA* 607). However, I think it is important to try to advance the issue further than Taylor does here, just as I did in Chapter III with respect to Taylor’s ‘hunches’ about the significance of theism for moral realism. First of all, we might question whether the experience of a meaningful or purposeful ‘order in things’ that is arrived at through epiphanic

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<sup>57</sup> As an example of such ‘subtler languages’ in the work of Wordsworth, Taylor cites a passage from *Tintern Abbey*, where Wordsworth writes of: ‘A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused, / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, / And the round ocean and the living air, / And the blue sky, and the mind of man; / A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things. (II. 94-102)’ (*SA* 357-8; cf. *SS* 571, n. 2; *EA* 88).

<sup>58</sup> On Wordsworth see *SA* 302, 404; on Hopkins see *SA* 404, 757, 764; on Eliot see *SA* 757; on Griffiths see *SA* 5, 14, 252, 407, 728-30, 768-9; on Dostoevsky see *SS* 452, 454-5, *SA* 593, 672.

experiences of nature or epiphanic works of art can in fact be sustained without a theistic teleological framework. In the absence of a cosmic teleology it appears that what we are left with is a purely contingent, purposeless universe and this seems in tension with our epiphanic experiences of a meaningful order in things. But such experiences can also be precisely what leads one to faith (or deeper faith) in God, as Taylor discusses with respect to the work of Hopkins, who used a new poetic language to articulate and make manifest a sense of ‘God’s Grandeur’ in particular things and in the cosmos as a whole (SA 763). In other words, he sought to give expression in the modern context to a theistic teleological framework that is centered on the “telos of communion” (SA 764).<sup>59</sup>

An additional way in which such epiphanic experiences can point us to the transcendent is found in a Platonic form of argument, which has been employed by a number of contemporary theistic philosophers.<sup>60</sup> This argument begins from our experiences of goodness and beauty in finite beings and the strong evaluative judgment of them in terms of higher and lower and argues that they point beyond themselves to a most perfect form of goodness and beauty, which theists understand to be God, the ultimate creative source of all finite things.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, it is precisely because of such

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<sup>59</sup> Taylor writes: “Hopkins returns decisively to the central Christian focus on communion as the goal of God’s action in Creation. [...] What is striking is the way Hopkins brings to the fore once again the deep connection between this telos of communion and a recognition of the particular in all its specificity”. He renews this in the modern context “where the universe, vast in time and space, has already quite broken out of the dimensions, as well as the Platonic-Aristotelian conceptuality of the mediaeval cosmos. So that Hopkins’ vision of God at work in the particular inscape [i.e., a thing’s proper form], as well as in the overwhelming and often destructive action of a measureless universe, is quite unprecedented” (SA 764).

<sup>60</sup> See Cottingham 2003, 99-104; 2005, 131-9; Scruton 2011, 145-6; Adams 1999, Chs. 1-2; and Zagzebski 2004, Pt. II.

<sup>61</sup> The argument usually builds in the thought that all embodiments of goodness and beauty in finite beings will be in some way imperfect and thus they point us to the idea of a Being (viz., God) that is perfect in goodness and beauty. At the most basic level finite beings will always embody goodness and beauty imperfectly because they are limited, perishable, and vulnerable to numerous kinds of misfortune. It should be mentioned that this sort of argument is the basis of Aquinas’s ‘fourth way’ for arguing for the existence of God, which begins from “the gradations to be found in things” (*Summa Theologiae* I, Q. 2, A. 3; see Aquinas 1948). It should also be mentioned that a non-theistic version of this argument can be found in the

perfect goodness and beauty – along with the other attributes associated with God in classical theism (e.g., perfect wisdom, power, etc.) – that God is regarded as a constitutive good most worthy of our love; thus, love for God is the greatest good for human life. Hence Alasdair MacIntyre writes: “finite beings who possess the power of understanding, if they know that God exists, know that he is the most adequate object of their love, and that the deepest desire of every such being, whether they acknowledge it or not, is to be at one with God” (MacIntyre 2009, 5-6).

This point becomes all the more important insofar as there is a human need to orientate one’s life towards some highest object of love, devotion, and perhaps even worship. Such a need seems to be expressed not only in the life of the devout religious person, but also in the lives of non-religious persons who seek a ‘God-substitute’, whether in the form of a ‘religion of humanity’ (e.g., in Mill, Marx, Ferry, etc.), or Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, or in certain deep ecological perspectives where the natural world is regarded as the highest object of love and devotion.<sup>62</sup> The epiphanic argument

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work of Iris Murdoch, to which I will return shortly. Murdoch writes: “The proper and serious use of the term [‘the Good’] refers us to a perfection which is perhaps never exemplified in the world we know (‘There is no good in us’) and which carries with it the ideas of hierarchy and transcendence. How do we know that the very great are not the perfect? We see differences, we sense directions, and we know that the Good is still somewhat beyond” (Murdoch 1997, 376; cf. 1992, Ch. 13).

<sup>62</sup> The human need to be orientated towards an ultimate object of love, concern, devotion, and even worship is powerfully expressed in a number of Dostoevsky’s novels. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, e.g., the eldest brother Dmitri says: “I’m tormented by God. Tormented only by that. What if he doesn’t exist? [...] So then, if he doesn’t exist, man is chief of the earth, of the universe. Splendid! Only how is he going to be virtuous without God? A good question! I keep thinking about it. Because whom will he love then – man, I mean? To whom will he be thankful, to whom will he sing the hymn?” (Dostoevsky 1990, 592). In *The Adolescent* the ‘holy peasant’ Makar remarks: “[To] live without God is nothing but torment. And it turns out that what gives light is the very thing we curse, and we don’t know it ourselves. [...] It’s impossible for a man to exist without bowing down; such a man couldn’t bear himself, and no man could. If he rejects God, he’ll bow down to an idol – a wooden one, or a golden one, or a mental one. They’re all idolaters, not godless, that’s how they ought to be called” (Dostoevsky 2003, 373). Finally, at the end of *Demons* Stepan proclaims: “The whole law of human existence consists in nothing other than a man’s always being able to bow before the immeasurably great. If people are deprived of the immeasurably great, they will not live and will die in despair. The immeasurable and infinite is as necessary for man as the small planet he inhabits [...]. [Long] live the Great Thought! The eternal, immeasurable Thought! For every man, whoever he is, it is necessary to bow before that which is the Great Thought” (Dostoevsky 1994a, 664).



claims that it is God – in virtue of God’s perfection – who is best able to meet this human need for an ultimate object of love and devotion. Moreover, it can also claim that God is best able to meet the human desire for the fullest kind of self-transcending communion since on a theistic perspective one’s love for the beauty and goodness of the world also extends beyond the world to its ultimate creative source in God.<sup>63</sup>

It should be noted that this sort of argument is also employed in Feuerbachian projectivist views of God, which see the idea of God as a projection of our longings or highest ideals. However, Cottingham notes: “talk of God as a projection does not in the end advance the debate between theists and atheists very much, since it cannot settle the question of whether the impulse to project our longings outward to an external source does or does not have an objective counterpart” (Cottingham 2003, 10-1). It does seem to suggest something very important about us as human beings that we project our longings in this way: viz., a draw to vertical transcendence in human life. However, we might still wonder if it would be better to conceive of perfect goodness and beauty as abstract ideals, rather than as embodied in a particular being (viz., God). We see something like this in Iris Murdoch’s work, where she speaks of the concept of ‘the Good’ as an abstract ideal of perfection towards which we can orientate our lives (Murdoch 1992, Ch. 13; 1997, 317-24, 334, 344-61, 368-85). The major drawback of this view is that the abstract idea of ‘the Good’ is impersonal, whereas God is personal and thus someone with whom we can be in communion. In short, if we consider what would constitute the highest object of love, it seems that adding personhood, which includes the capacity to return love, would

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<sup>63</sup> As we see in Griffiths’ epiphanic experience cited above, the epiphanic ‘pointing beyond’ to God as the most perfect form of goodness and beauty is often claimed to imbue or transfigure our experiences of the goodness and beauty of finite beings with a deeper sense of meaning precisely because of their reference to this perfect form of goodness and beauty.

increase an object's worthiness of being loved over that which is impersonal and thus unable to return love.<sup>64</sup> As we have seen, on Taylor view fullness is "something that happens between people rather than within each one" (CM 113).

### *Exemplary Lives*

Connected to the issue of strong evaluation, Taylor identifies another way that we can be drawn to vertical transcendence: viz., by certain exemplary lives that embody a religious outlook. In discussing the draw to a religious notion of fullness, he writes:

[...] the best sense I can make of my conflicting moral and spiritual experience is captured by a theological view of this kind. That is, in my own experience, in prayer, in moments of fullness, in experience of exile overcome, in what I seem to observe around me in other people's lives – lives of exceptional spiritual fullness, or lives of maximum self-enclosedness, lives of demonic evil, etc. – this seems to be the picture which emerges. (SA 10)<sup>65</sup>

On a number of occasions Taylor mentions certain saintly people that he sees as embodying such 'exceptional spiritual fullness', e.g., Mother Teresa, Jean Vanier, and St. Francis of Assisi.<sup>66</sup> He sees these saintly people as attaining an exceptional level of moral/spiritual transformation, especially in the extent to which they have overcome self-enclosure and achieved self-transcending love for others through becoming a 'channel' of God's *agape*. While he does not deny that there are exceptional people who are non-religious and also that there are unexceptional and even bad people who are religious,

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<sup>64</sup> See Murdoch 1997, 358-9, where Murdoch acknowledges this issue. I think the issue of the impersonal nature of the Good does not strike Murdoch as deeply problematic because of her endorsement of the Buddhist-like ideal of 'unselfing', which suggests going beyond the self completely (ibid., 369). However, as I argued in the last chapter, I do not think this is possible, but rather what is involved is some form of transcending a lower mode of selfhood for a higher mode of selfhood. If this is the case then an impersonalistic view of the Good would be more problematic; or at least, I contend, less desirable than a personalistic view of the Good (i.e., where the Good is identified with God). I will return to Taylor's own personalistic viewpoint in the next chapter.

<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere he says: "I believe in God, because I sense something which I want to describe as God's love and affirmation of the world, and human beings. I see this refracted in the lives of exceptional people, whom I'll call for short saints, as well as hearing faint echoes in my own prayer life" (Taylor 1994b, 226).

<sup>66</sup> On Mother Teresa see PHS 234; SS 517; SA 684, 727, 765; Taylor 1994d, 183-4; 2003a, 317-8; 2004b, 9. On Vanier see SS 517; SA 765; Taylor 2004b, 9. On St. Francis see SA 431, 436, 631, 729-30.

Taylor clearly thinks that a theistic perspective has greater resources than a non-theistic perspective for inspiring greater heights of moral/spiritual transformation or self-transcendence. This is a claim I will take up in more detail in the next chapter, but the main point for now is that the recognition of higher, exemplary modes of life achieved by certain religious people can be an important draw towards a religious outlook.<sup>67</sup>

### *Fusion Experiences*

Finally, Taylor believes that vertical transcendence can also impinge on us in certain experiences of communion or ‘fusion’ with others. He focuses particularly on the category of the ‘festive’, which he describes as involving “moments of fusion in a common action/feeling, which both wrench us out of the everyday, and seem to put us in touch with something exceptional, beyond ourselves” (SA 482-3).<sup>68</sup> In other words, the ‘festive’ it seems can be understood as analogous to the sort of individual epiphanic experiences described by Griffiths and Havel (see previous chapter), but in a communal form. Such fusion moments of course have been an important part of collective religious life (e.g., in rituals, celebrations, etc.) going back to the earliest forms of religion. In religious terms, the ‘something exceptional, beyond ourselves’ with which one is thought to be in contact is typically understood in terms of the sacred or the divine. However, Taylor says, the festive has become more marginalized in the modern West because of the increased emphasis on personal piety/spirituality and also because of the individualism inherent in the modern moral order. Nevertheless, such collective moments

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<sup>67</sup> Taylor also says that it can be important for sustaining a religious mode of life: “[The] sense that others have been closer [to the place of fullness] is an essential part of the ordinary person’s confidence in a shared religious language, or a way of articulating fullness. [...] [The] language one adheres to is given force by the conviction that others have lived it in a more complete, direct and powerful manner. This is part of what it means to belong to a church” (SA 729).

<sup>68</sup> Cf. SA 45-53, 469-70, 516-8, 546, 554, 715, 730; VRT 23-5, 28-9.

of fusion still break through and they continue to play a significant role in our lives. He mentions, e.g., the draw to collective religious gatherings involving fusion experiences such as World Youth Days and Taizé. Moreover, he says, collective moments of fusion can be found in sporting events, rock concerts, collective celebrations for public holidays, collective bereavement (e.g., the public mourning of Princess Di, 9/11, etc.), and collective action and feeling in facing an exceptional danger (e.g., Nazi Germany, terrorism, etc.). While these are not straightforwardly religious experiences, nevertheless, they can take on a kind of 'religious' significance insofar as they do involve tapping into something of great significance beyond one's self.

Now, the crucial question Taylor wants to raise is whether a purely immanent, naturalistic perspective can account for the continuing power of these kinds of fusion experiences. While Taylor acknowledges that there have been attempts by people such as Durkheim and Freud to provide naturalistic explanations of them, he writes: "It is not obvious a priori that the sense of something beyond, inherent in these fusions, can be ultimately explained (away) in naturalistic categories. The festive remains a niche in our world, where the (putatively) transcendent can erupt into our lives, however well we have organized them around immanent understandings of order" (*SA* 518). Of course, in some of these fusion moments the sense of something great beyond us may remain in the human domain such that the sense of fullness is understood solely in terms of achieving a higher, more extended sense of self in communion with other human beings. But there also seems to be a tendency for such self-transcendence in communion with other human beings, especially in its most intense forms, to open out to include love not only for a wider sphere of human beings, but also for non-human beings, even perhaps extending

beyond the limits of the natural world to something ‘supernatural’ (e.g., God, cosmic spirit, etc.), which might be understood as the ultimate source of all existence (if such a thing exists).<sup>69</sup> Hence, people sometimes talk of having a ‘spiritual experience’ at a concert. Or to take another example: for many throughout history the experience of ‘falling in love’ has been linked with a sense of the divine, often involving a felt need to express love and gratitude to God (we see evidence for this in a great deal of romantic poetry). We also see something of this ‘opening out’ of love in the passage previously cited from Havel in which he writes: “I was flooded with a sense of ultimate happiness and harmony with the world and with myself, with that moment, with all the moments I could call up, and with everything invisible that lies behind it and has meaning. I would even say that I was somehow “struck by love”, though I don’t know precisely for whom or what” (*SA* 728-9; see Havel 1983, 331-2). As this passage suggests, in such opening or widening out of self-transcending love there is often experienced a greater degree of fullness. Moreover, the draw toward this opening out of love or communion, even extending to that which is beyond the natural world, I believe can be understood as an important part of what it means to speak of human beings as *homo religiosus*.

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In this section we have been exploring Taylor’s case for the claim that there is an ineradicable draw to vertical transcendence in human life, not in the sense that everyone will want to embrace a religious outlook, but rather in that it can impinge on anyone’s life because of the question of the meaning of life and our aspirations to fullness. We have specifically discussed how a draw to vertical transcendence can arise when we ask about

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<sup>69</sup> The reverse can also be true: viz., love for the non-human (e.g., God or the natural world) can open out to love for human beings.

the meaning of all our particular meanings. We have also explored a number of particular issues that fall under the general topic of the meaning of life in which there can arise a draw to vertical transcendence in human life: viz., (1) responding to evil and suffering; (2) the experience of secular time as homogenous and empty; (3) confronting human vulnerability and finitude, especially in death; (4) making sense of strong evaluative experience (moral and aesthetic); (5) being inspired by exemplary lives that embody a religious outlook; and (6) making sense of fusion experiences. I believe all of this makes a strong case for Taylor's claim about the ineradicable draw to vertical transcendence in human life, which entails that the mainstream secularization thesis is implausible. It must be emphasized here that none of this has been an attempt to establish the truth of theism, but only its significance if true or if hoped to be true. Indeed, I take it that someone who is unable to believe or hope in the truth of theism could accept the foregoing argument. However, even if the draw to vertical transcendence in human life is ineradicable there are some who suggest that it should still be resisted. I now want to consider some important objections to giving a central place to vertical transcendence in human life.

### III. RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

#### *The Threat to Wholeness*

The first objection concerns the way in which the aspiration to transcendence as a good beyond and higher than ordinary human flourishing can threaten our wholeness as human beings insofar as it can at times require the sacrifice of our ordinary human flourishing and perhaps lead to its denigration. This returns us to the general issue raised in Chapter II regarding the danger of self-mutilation that is posed by hypergoods. In

confronting this objection to transcendence in *A Secular Age* Taylor takes up specifically the forceful articulation of it that is found in the work of Martha Nussbaum.<sup>70</sup>

Nussbaum's criticisms are focused particularly on aspirations to vertical forms of transcendence that involve 'transcending humanity', viz., in aspirations to a god-like existence that takes us beyond our ordinary human flourishing.<sup>71</sup> We can think here of Plato's ideal of pure contemplation of the Good and the Beautiful, or theistic hope for eternal life, or even certain highly demanding ideals of saintliness that require extensive ethical-spiritual transformation (as exemplified by St. Francis). Nussbaum regards the aspiration to such transcendence as in fact arising from the unease that we experience with respect to the vulnerability, neediness, and finitude inherent in human life.<sup>72</sup>

On Taylor's reading of Nussbaum, there are two main problems she identifies with the aspiration to transcend humanity. First, it is self-defeating insofar as it takes us beyond an integrally human life and the goods inherent to it (*SA* 625-6). She writes:

[What] my argument urges us to reject as incoherent is the aspiration to leave behind altogether the constitutive conditions of our humanity and to seek for a life that is really the life of another sort of being – as if it were a higher and better life for *us*. It asks us to bound our aspirations by recalling that there are some very general conditions of human existence that are also necessary conditions for the values that we know, love, and appropriately pursue. (Nussbaum 1990a, 379)

Some of the specific values or goods that Nussbaum mentions include: various forms of ordinary human love relationships, athletic and artistic accomplishments, and virtues such

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<sup>70</sup> Taylor's engagement in *A Secular Age* with Nussbaum's critique of vertical transcendence is the second round in a debate between them. This debate began with Taylor's review of Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness* (Taylor 1988b). The central concern of Taylor's review is to pose the question of whether Nussbaum's conception of affirming the 'whole human good' includes the 'aspiration to transcendence' (or as he also puts it, 'self-transcendence') or excludes it (the former he calls 'the inclusive interpretation', while the latter he calls 'the narrower view') (*ibid.*, 812). Nussbaum responds to Taylor in her essay "Transcending Humanity", which is found in her collection of essays entitled *Love's Knowledge* (Nussbaum 1990a). This essay constitutes her most extensive direct engagement with the topic and Taylor is especially responding to it in his discussion of Nussbaum in *A Secular Age*.

<sup>71</sup> Nussbaum 2001; 1990a, Chs. 12 & 15; 1990b; 2002; 2003a, Pt. III; 2003b.

<sup>72</sup> Nussbaum 2001, Pt. II; 1990a, 368, 377; see *SA* 625.

as courage, moderation, justice, and compassion. These are values in and for the specific context of human life, which “contains and is structured by limits as well as capabilities”: “Human limits structure the human excellences, and give excellent action its significance. The preservation of the limits in some form – and here [...] we can only fall back on a vague and yet not so unclear notion of the normal human life – is a necessary condition of excellent activity’s excellence” (ibid., 378).

The second problem with the aspiration to transcend our humanity for Nussbaum is that it damages us and makes us unfit to achieve human fulfillment insofar as it causes us to despise our ordinary human desires (viz., bodily desires), needs, and limitations (SA 626). One of the chief targets here is a certain hyper-Augustinian form of Christianity that strongly emphasizes human depravity, God’s judgment, and other-worldly salvation (Nussbaum 1990a, Ch. 12). Nussbaum draws on Lucretius and Nietzsche to articulate this critique, who both “believed that a religious view of the world had deeply poisoned human desires in their time, constructing deformed patterns of fear and longing” (ibid., 306). In order to pave the way for a full affirmation of human life she apparently endorses Nietzsche’s negative task with respect to religion: viz., “the thorough, detailed dismantling of religious beliefs and teleological desires through the techniques of debunking genealogy, mordant satire, horrific projection” (ibid., 307; cf. SA 626).

In her affirmation of our ordinary human desires it may seem that Nussbaum wants to do away with all aspirations to transcend our ordinary human condition, but in fact she says that matters are more complex:

[There] is a great deal of room, within the context of a human life [...], for a certain sort of aspiration to transcend our ordinary humanity. For, [...] it is all too plain that most people are much of the time lazy, inattentive, unreflective, shallow



in feeling; in short, that most human action falls well short of the fully human target of complete virtue [...]. (ibid., 378)

Clearly then there are ordinary human desires that are to be affirmed, while there are others that need to be transformed or transcended. Nussbaum describes this sort of transcendence as “an *internal* and human sort” and she contends that there is “so much to do in this area of *human* transcending [...] that if one really pursued that aim well and fully I suspect that there would be little time left to look about for any other sort” (ibid., 379). Now, it must be said that it is somewhat odd to claim that one would be so concerned with one form of transcendence that they would not have time to look about for others, since the real issue is about how we should understand the draw to any form of transcendence. I will return to this issue, but first we must look at Taylor’s response to Nussbaum’s endorsement of an internal form of transcendence.

According to Taylor, Nussbaum’s point “transfers the argument to a new plane, and raises the question whether her internal-external distinction will be able to make the discriminations we want” (SA 627). He thinks we first need to get clearer on what is meant by ‘external’ transcendence. If we mean that which requires a transformation that would “wrench us out of the human mould, so that certain human goods and excellences would no longer be possible for us”, then we still find that there will be controversies over what counts as permitted forms of transcendence. Taylor mentions, e.g., that Nussbaum herself elsewhere acknowledges “a tension between ethical demands and those of erotic love” (SA 629; see Nussbaum 1990a, 50-3). He writes:

The way in which sexual love demands privacy and exclusivity, and can thus easily generate anger and jealousy, seems in tension with the aspiration to a more universal love and concern, one decentred from the self. Here it seems hard to say, well so much the worse for ordinary, embodied erotic love [...]. But it also seems hard to say, let’s declare the aspirations to a more universal, decentred

concern as a forbidden, “external” form of transcendence. It indeed, seems “external” on the criterion just suggested – carrying through on it as an ultimate, exclusive demand would seem to sideline an important component of our lives, viz., erotic love, or any love where exclusion and hence jealousy and anger are in play. But it is now less clear that the distinction so defined can decide the matter for us. (*SA* 629-30)<sup>73</sup>

He goes on to say: “We might take a line like that of Nel Noddings, and renounce everything which competes with the values of nurturance, and love for those around us; but this too leaves out a great deal that we are now attached to, which attachments we would have to “transcend”” (*SA* 630).<sup>74</sup> But this is not the line that Nussbaum takes. In fact, elsewhere she writes: “What spells transcendence to me is the concerted effort to remain morally awake on behalf of others, and to put one’s own mental and physical comfort at risk for their sake” (Nussbaum 2002, 451). We might add that such universal concern for others can be in tension not only with the priority we give to particular relationships (romantic and otherwise) and with our mental and physical comfort, but also, e.g., with other goods that require significant financial resources, such as going to college, attending a concert, or eating at a fine restaurant. Taylor’s basic point seems to be that working out these tensions is not fundamentally different from working out tensions that arise with respect to the religious person’s love and devotion to God.<sup>75</sup>

Now, given that Nussbaum embraces such an ethic of universal human concern, Taylor also questions her apparent endorsement of the Nietzschean project of ‘dismantling religious beliefs and teleological desires’. He writes:

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<sup>73</sup> This passage reinforces my claim in the last chapter that Taylor’s attempt to distinguish between religious and non-religious ideals of fullness through a within/without or internal/external distinction regarding the ‘source’ of fullness is not wholly adequate.

<sup>74</sup> According to Taylor, insofar as we recognize an ethic of universal human concern we are all post-Axial thinkers (see Taylor 2011c, 124).

<sup>75</sup> I will return to explore in more detail in the next chapter the tension between an ethic of universal human concern and the more particular goods to which we are committed.

In view of the importance of Christian universalism and agape in the constitution of the modern idea of moral order, ought we really to hope for the utter uprooting of all the beliefs and desires which Christianity has inculcated in our civilization? Perhaps Nietzsche saw the full scope of this question, and was ready to give an affirmative answer, because he wanted to jettison not only body-hatred, but pity, the relief of suffering, democracy, human rights. But how many are ready to follow him the whole way? (*SA* 626)

This passage raises the issue I want to discuss in the next chapter: viz., what ‘moral sources’ can best make sense of and motivate us to live up to an ethic of universal human concern. I will consider Taylor’s case for the claim that certain religious outlooks are best able to do this. If this is so then Nussbaum is cutting herself off from important possible resources for an ethic of universal human concern in her attempt to do away with aspirations to vertical transcendence. But it should be noted for now that her presentation of the failure of religious believers to adequately affirm this-worldly life tends to be too one-sided since, as we have discussed, religious perspectives also give rise to ideals such as *agape* (Christianity), *tikkun olam* (Judaism), and *karuna* (Buddhism) in which the recognition of vertical transcendence leads to a deeper affirmation of this-worldly life.<sup>76</sup>

As for the issue of despising ordinary bodily desires in Christianity, Taylor condemns this as a terrible deviation from the proper Christian attitude of affirming the goodness of the body along with the whole of the created world (as expressed in the Genesis account of Creation and the doctrine of the Incarnation).<sup>77</sup> Even in cases where there is a renunciation of sexual life, e.g., in monastic life, this can be compatible with affirming the good of sexual life. The renunciation here is seen as “an attempt to find a

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<sup>76</sup> For exceptions to Nussbaum’s largely negative reading of religion see Nussbaum 1990a, 375-6 and, to a some extent, Nussbaum 2003a, Chs. 11-2.

<sup>77</sup> In fact, Taylor writes: “We have to recover a sense of the link between erotic desire and the love of God, which lies deep in the Biblical tradition, whether Jewish or Christian, and find new ways of giving expression to this. [...] This terribly fraught area in Western Christendom, where the sexual meets the spiritual, urgently awaits the discovery of new paths to God” (*SA* 767; cf. 275-9). It is not clear whether Taylor would have in mind something like Pope John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*. He does seem to favorably reference this work elsewhere (Taylor 2011e, 202).

fuller response to the agape of God as seen in Christ, to take part in a fuller, more all-embracing love. This is close to the perspective in which we should see the dedication of Saint Francis of Assisi” (*SA* 631). Taylor acknowledges that such renunciation can slide into “a negative obsession with body, a disgust-cum-fascination with desire”, but he does not think we should reject the aspiration here to a fuller love for God and others on these grounds since this would be “an even greater mutilation of the human” (*SA* 631).

More generally, Taylor elsewhere claims that doing away with the aspiration to vertical transcendence in human life would be a kind of “spiritual lobotomy” (*CM* 19; cf. *SS* 520). In other words, this aspiration is itself an integral part of our humanity such that to completely cut it off also constitutes a threat to wholeness. The claim here that the aspiration to vertical transcendence is an integral part of our humanity is precisely what has been argued in the previous section in defense of the view of human beings as *homo religiosus*, which we saw is connected to another human constant: viz., the quest for a meaningful life. It is important to note that Nussbaum does not address in any direct way the issue of the meaning of life, i.e., the issue of the meaning of all our particular experiences of meaning/value in human life, or the connection of this to the aspiration to vertical transcendence. If she had then I think she could have better appreciated how religious aspirations might be said to be an integral or ‘natural’ part of human life, rather than being anti-natural and socially constructed as she sometimes suggests (Nussbaum 1990a, Ch. 12). It is also worth noting here that the language Nussbaum uses of ‘transcending humanity’ is crucially ambiguous. On the one hand, it can refer to our concern for non-anthropocentric constitutive goods such as God and the natural world. On the other hand, it can refer to the attempt to be something other than what we are as

human beings, which would be an anti-natural mode of existence. Nussbaum's discussion of transcending humanity suggests that these two modes of transcending humanity are connected (at least where the non-anthropocentric constitutive good is God). Yet, if it is true that the aspiration to vertical transcendence is an integral part of our humanity (in virtue of the search for fullness or meaning in life), then this can only be considered a form of transcending humanity in the first sense (see Taylor 1988b, 813).

The main point to be emphasized then is that if we affirm that the draw to vertical transcendence is an integral part of human life, then it might be important for achieving wholeness to find a place for it within one's life (otherwise an important dimension of human life might be lacking<sup>78</sup>). However, in doing so one must also adequately address what Taylor calls the 'maximal demand' for meeting the dilemma between the aspiration to (vertical or horizontal) transcendence and our ordinary human flourishing, which he formulates as follows: "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?" (*SA* 639-40; cf. 604-5).

Taylor says that his own Christian perspective offers no 'global solution' for meeting this maximal demand. Instead, it can only "show ways in which we can, as individuals, and as churches, hold open the path to the fullness of the kingdom" (*SA* 643). There are two reasons why he says that Christianity does not offer 'the solution' to the dilemma: first, the direction it points to cannot be demonstrated as the right one since it requires faith; second, "we can't exhibit fully what it means [to meet the maximal demand], lay it out in a code or a fully-specified life form, but only point to the

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<sup>78</sup> There are of course those who may be unable to believe in God, but feel a lack in their life because of this; i.e., they have the 'Peggy Lee response': 'Is that all there is?'

exemplary lives of certain trail-blazing people and communities” (ibid.). This recalls Taylor’s point about ‘leading a life’, which was discussed in Chapter II when I first raised the issue of the threat to wholeness posed by hypergoods. In other words, it is only in the context of our life as a whole that we can try to integrate and order the various goods we recognize and this will require practical wisdom, rather than mere general rules or formulas. So in regard to the aspiration to transcendence we will need to find ways to integrate this in a life that also acknowledges some place for ordinary modes of human flourishing. Only in this way can our wholeness as human beings be realized.

*The Threat to Autonomy*

I would now like to take up a second important objection to acknowledging a central role for vertical transcendence in human life: viz., the objection that making God the ultimate object of our love and concern threatens our autonomy as human beings. Although this objection has been put forward by a number of different thinkers, Ian Fraser has stated it specifically in regard to Taylor’s work. Fraser writes:

[It] should [...] be noted how in comprehending the world Taylor thinks he and his fellow Catholics do so with one aim in mind and that is to serve God [...] [He] is subordinating the lives and actions of individuals to serving God and at one stroke undermining any notion of an autonomous self. If our good actions are evidence of God’s love in the world then those actions are being directed by another and not by the person carrying them out. (Fraser 2007, 56-7)

In response to this critique it must be said first of all that Taylor certainly does not claim that all our good actions are “evidence of God’s love in the world”. As I argued in Chapter II, Taylor recognizes a number of constitutive goods such that good actions can be seen to arise from our strong evaluative responses to the worth of our own potential, or other human beings, or the natural world. But in the case of God as a constitutive good,

especially Taylor's Christian concept of God as *agape*, I believe Fraser greatly misunderstands what is involved here when he says it involves our actions "being directed by another and not by the person carrying them out" and when he later remarks that when Taylor "looks at the world he sees it has the will of God manifesting itself in the benevolent actions of human beings. People are thereby reduced to conduits of God's will and are not autonomous in their actions [...]. They may internalise God as a moral source and use that to reason about the world, but ultimately it is God's reasoning and not theirs" (ibid., 57). Fraser seems to be misinterpreting Taylor here as endorsing a divine command view of ethics in which what is good and bad is simply taken to be whatever is commanded by God as such and which we have reason to follow because God has the power to enforce his commands through threat of punishment or promise of reward. God becomes then an alien power that directs our actions. Indeed, it is such a divine command ethic that is usually what people have in mind when they raise the objection that religious ethical views threaten our autonomy as human beings.<sup>79</sup>

However, as I have already discussed in Chapters II and III, Taylor explicitly rejects divine command ethics. For Taylor, when we respond to God as a constitutive good it is because we regard God as being worthy of our fullest love, respect, and devotion. This is a judgment of our own reasoning, not an alien imposition of God's (mysterious) 'reasoning' or will upon us. Moreover, when we are inspired specifically by God's love (*agape*) it is because of a belief that God's love for human beings is the fullest expression of love and we want to try to imitate or participate in this love because we see it as part of the highest, most fulfilling kind of life and also of what human beings are in fact worthy (see *SS* 515-21; *SA* 701-3). Again, this does not involve any kind of

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<sup>79</sup> See, e.g. Nowell-Smith 1966; Rachels 1971; Hampson 2002, Ch. IV; Schneewind 1998.

imposition by an alien power. If we see ourselves as following God's will it is because we regard it as pointing us to what we ourselves judge to be good.<sup>80</sup>

Fraser's remarks also seem to be referring to the role of divine grace in Taylor's account of participation in God's *agape*. But again I do not think this should be understood as some kind of imposition of an alien power upon us, but rather as way in which God helps us to achieve what we already regard as good and worth pursuing.<sup>81</sup>

So do these responses mean that a religious worldview such as Taylor's is fully compatible with human autonomy? Much of course depends on how 'autonomy' is understood. The word itself suggests the idea of 'self-legislating', which could be seen as synonymous with a subjectivist view (à la Sartrean existentialism) in which we 'legislate' for ourselves what is good and bad on the basis of our *de facto* desires. We would thus be autonomous when we pursue such desires without any external constraint (see *SA* 582-9; Cottingham 2005, 43; Adams 1999, 270-1). Such a view of autonomy would be opposed to any notion of strong goods that placed normative demands on our desires, whether this involves God as a constitutive good, or other constitutive goods related to our own potential, or other human beings, or the natural world. However, another way of understanding autonomy is in terms of our making decisions "independently of the arbitrary will of another, acting in the full light of reason, free from internal or external

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<sup>80</sup> In the context of responding to the 'autonomy objection' and in commenting on the phrase 'Thy will be done' in the 'Lord's Prayer', John Cottingham writes: "'Thy will be done' is a way of focusing on the objective moral order towards which our lives need to be oriented if they are to have value and meaning. And the prayer is not to lose sight of that order in some blind act of servility but rather to remain in touch with that order, and to ask that it may be fulfilled in our lives" (Cottingham 2005, 45). I think such a view is very much in line with Taylor's theistic perspective, as I have tried to argue in Chapter III.

<sup>81</sup> I will return to discuss this issue more in the next chapter. In response to Fraser's 'autonomy objection' to Taylor, Ruth Abbey also notes: "Taylor has gone to some lengths to reflect on the social and political conditions necessary for the realization of autonomy. [...] It would [...] be radically discontinuous with the rest of Taylor's work were he now to exclude all those whose actions are religiously motivated from pursuing the good of autonomy" (Abbey 2006, 171).



interference with [our] rational processes” (Cottingham 2005, 43). I believe this view of autonomy is fully compatible with Taylor’s theistic perspective since love and devotion to God is based on our free judgment that God is worthy of such love and devotion and following the will of God means aligning ourselves with a purposeful moral framework in which good is understood independently of God’s act of willing it.<sup>82</sup>

However, even if we acknowledge the compatibility between this second notion of autonomy and a theistic perspective, there are still some who see theism as threatening another kind of autonomy: viz., a freedom from divine judgment or ‘ultimate’ moral responsibility. Something like this seems to be behind comments that Thomas Nagel makes about the ‘fear of religion’, to which he acknowledges being subject: “I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want the universe to be like that” (Nagel 1997, 130). Nagel refers to this as the ‘cosmic authority problem’.<sup>83</sup> It is not entirely clear what is behind this fear of religion, but it seems to make more sense if one has a picture of God as a kind of vindictive judge who is out to get us. However, if God is understood on analogy with a loving parent then the fear of religion is more difficult to understand. As far as I can understand, an important part of this fear seems to be the thought that there is an all-powerful, all-knowing Being who holds us accountable for everything we think

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<sup>82</sup> I believe Kant’s well-known idea of autonomy falls into this second notion of autonomy since he sees it as acting from duty rather than being determined by our *de facto* desires. Although there is a kind of self-legislation in the categorical imperative (i.e., we must act according to what can be willed as a universal law for all rational beings), it is grounded in the recognition of the unconditional worth or dignity of human beings as rational agents, which places normative demands on our desires.

<sup>83</sup> Along similar lines, in his book *The Face of God* Roger Scruton argues (somewhat provocatively) that one of the underlying motives for contemporary atheist culture (especially in its militant forms) is “the desire to escape from the eye of judgment [whether human or divine]” (Scruton 2012, 2).

and do, even the most shameful things that we might keep hidden from others. While I think such a reaction is quite understandable, it does not necessitate that one should reject religion altogether, especially if a better view is possible. For instance, the thought that God knows what we do and think and holds us accountable can form an important part of our sense of moral ‘conscience’, at least according to one way of understanding the etymological meaning of the term as ‘knowing-with’. But in order for this to not be oppressive I believe it needs to go along with a view of God as loving and merciful, rather than as vindictive and wrathful.

*The Threat to the Modern Moral Order*

A final objection to acknowledging an important place for vertical transcendence in human life is that religion poses a threat to the modern moral order, which is based on relationships of mutual benefit and is especially concerned to promote peace and prosperity. We already referred to this objection above when discussing Taylor’s contrast between the ‘transformation perspective’ of St. Francis who acknowledges a good beyond and higher than human flourishing and the perspective of Hume who rejects any such transcendent good. Indeed, Hume offers an important example of someone who gives voice to the objection I am considering here in his critique of any religious perspective that takes one beyond a primary concern with maintaining a social order based on relationships of mutual benefit (see *SA* 263, 272-5, 280, 287, 430-1).

We might think here of Hume’s rather uncharitable reading of a religious transformation perspective in terms of the ‘monkish virtues’. Hume provides the following rather odd list of ‘virtues’: celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, and solitude. Many of these are practices or vows rather than virtues

(see Hursthouse 1999b, 75), but certainly he should have at least mentioned the primary ‘theological virtues’ of faith, hope, and charity. In any case, he writes of his list: “for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man’s fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company; nor increase his power of self-enjoyment?” (Hume 1975, 270). In other words, Hume is advancing the often-stated critique of post-Axial religion as prioritizing the ‘other-worldly’ to this ‘this-worldly’.<sup>84</sup> One can of course contest Hume’s account of a religious transformation perspective here and the claim that a representative of such a view would be ‘useless’ to society or this-worldly life. Certainly a St. Francis or a Mother Teresa or a Jean Vanier does much to benefit others, though it will likely not be only in the terms of the modern moral order with its relationships of mutual benefit. As we have seen, Taylor says that the ideal of Christian *agape* is “by definition a love which goes way beyond any possible mutuality, a self-giving not bounded by some measure of fairness” (SA 430).

Hume’s critique of religious transformation perspectives in fact goes beyond saying that they are useless to the modern moral order to claiming that they are dangerous to it. In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* Hume has the character Philo respond to the claim that religion is beneficial to society by saying:

How happens it then, [...] if vulgar superstition be so salutary to society, that all history abounds so much with accounts of its pernicious consequences on public

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<sup>84</sup> Feuerbach writes: “The purpose of my writings, as also of my lectures, is to turn men from theologians into anthropologists, from theophilists into philanthropists, from candidates for the hereafter into students of the here and now, from religious and political lackeys of the heavenly and earthly monarchy into free, self-confident citizens of the world” (quoted in *SS* 577, n. 21). For commentators on Taylor who express concern about the neglect of the this-worldly in his account of transcendence see: Luling Haughton 1999; Cassidy 2010; Thomson 2011. This concern is somewhat difficult to understand since Taylor in fact wants to turn the tables on exclusive humanism by claiming that “clinging to the primacy of life in the [...] “metaphysical” [...] sense is making it harder for us to affirm it wholeheartedly in the [...] practical [...] sense” (CM 24-5; cf. 109-10). I will return to this issue in the next chapter.

affairs? Factions, civil wars, persecutions, subversions of government, oppression, slavery; these are the dismal consequences which always attend its prevalency over the minds of men. If the religious spirit be ever mentioned in any historical narration, we are sure to meet afterwards with a detail of the miseries which attend it. (Hume 1993, 122)

While one might certainly think that Hume is being too extreme and polemical in claiming that “these are the dismal consequences which always attend [religion’s] prevalency over the minds of men”, nevertheless, it is important to note that his fears about the dangers of religion are still present today. For instance, we often find reminders about the history of religious violence, especially the so-called ‘wars of religion’ in early modern Europe, by liberal political philosophers in their attempts to justify a liberal political order that would privatize religion and thereby neutralize it (see Rawls 1992, 188; 2005, xxiii-xxiv; Shklar 1984, 5, Ch. 1; Skinner 1994, 47-8). There is also the view among the most militant atheists – e.g., Richard Dawkins, Steven Weinberg, and, I think, Judith Shklar and Quentin Skinner as well – that in fact it would be best to completely eradicate religion if possible, since, for one thing, even if religion is privatized there is always the danger that it can ‘go public’. Such views usually maintain a very strong connection between religion and violence, as we see in the following remark by Weinberg: “With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil—that takes religion” (Weinberg 1999).

In response to Weinberg, Taylor says: “it is astonishing that anyone who lived through a good part of the 20th Century could say something like this. What are we to make of those noble, well-intentioned Bolsheviks, Marxist materialist atheists to a man (and occasional woman), who ended up building one of the most oppressive and murderous brace of regimes in human history?” (Taylor 2007b). He also goes on to cite

the horrors inflicted by Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot, who were all enemies of religion. His point is not to return the compliment and claim that atheism is inherently violent, but rather that any higher ideal, whether religious or non-religious, can have a dangerous potential. We see this in his response to Skinner's comment that we cannot be confident that "we have no reason to fear the Christian faith" given "the horrors perpetrated in its name" (Skinner 1994, 47). Taylor says:

I think that we have reason to fear any belief which holds out hope of major transformation in human life, including several atheistic views, some of which have caused a bit of havoc in our century. I also think that this is not necessarily the only consideration. Perhaps if we determined only to put our faith in something which gave absolutely no cause for fear, we might end up also without hope for human beings. (Taylor 1994b, 225; cf. *SS* 519-21)

For Taylor, the important issue concerns what perspective or perspectives can best enable us to live up to our highest ideals while avoiding falling into the worst debasement of these ideals.<sup>85</sup> This is an issue I want to take up in the next chapter, especially with respect to an ethic of universal human concern.

It is worth noting for now that Taylor believes that there is in fact a great deal of 'overlapping consensus' between religious and non-religious people in the modern world regarding important facets of the modern moral order, such as the concern for protecting and ensuring basic rights and liberties and for alleviating human suffering and fostering human well-being. Beyond the issue of which perspective can best enable us to promote these goals, Taylor thinks it is politically important to try to seek to build such an overlapping consensus as far as possible across many different perspectives (see *SA* 532, 693; *DC*, Ch. 6, 311, 319, 328-9; *SFC* 11-8, 107). However, he thinks that such a

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<sup>85</sup> In confronting the problem of violence Taylor thinks that it is important to understand not only the biological roots of violence, but also the 'metabiological' roots, i.e., how it can be connect to issues of human meaning (see *DC*, Ch. 10). The theme of religion and violence in Taylor's work has been extensively explored in O'Shea 2010a-b.

consensus cannot be established by appeal to some neutral or purely ‘secular’ notion of reason (i.e., ‘reason alone’), but rather we must allow for people to draw on the ‘deeper reasons’ that are embedded in their different religious and philosophical outlooks, even though we cannot establish agreement on these deeper reasons (see *DC*, Ch. 14). For instance, regarding the reasons for valuing the right to life and liberty, a Kantian will appeal to the dignity of rational agency, a Utilitarian will appeal to the concern owed to sentient beings in terms of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain, a Christian will appeal to the dignity of human beings as made in the image of God, and a Buddhist will appeal to the core principle of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) (*DC* 311, 329; *SFC* 12). None of these perspectives can be established by some neutral view of reason since each depends upon one’s deepest moral responses and sense of the overall meaning of life. Thus, in order to convince others of these deeper reasons – as discussed in Chapter II – we must try to have them come to share our moral responses and sense of the overall meaning of life. But the point of the overlapping consensus is precisely that we can concur on basic ethical and political principles and goals (e.g., ensuring the right to life and liberty) while differing on the deeper reasons for them.

While acknowledging the value of the political ideal of working towards an overlapping consensus on basic principles and goals, I now want to turn to explore the more contentious issue of what ‘deeper reasons’ can best support an ethic of universal human concern.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE MORAL SOURCES OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN CONCERN

In this final chapter I want to examine a key issue where Taylor argues for the significance of religion – especially Christian theism – for ethics: viz., the issue of what moral sources can best enable us to make sense of and motivate action on behalf of an ethic of universal human concern. Since in the modern world there is a large overlapping consensus among religious and non-religious people alike in regard to such an ethic, for Taylor it is an important area in which he utilizes his ‘ad hominem’ model of practical reasoning (discussed in Chapter II) to show the difference that religious moral sources can make. In other words, he appeals ‘to the person’ and what they are already moved by and seeks to show how this can be best supported.

In the first section I will explore the relationship between an ethic of universal human concern and an ethic of the good life, which are often regarded as being in tension. This is an important issue since the main concern of this chapter is over how we can motivate action on behalf of an ethic of universal human concern and it is difficult to see how this can be done if such concern is not connected to a view of the good life. I will first consider utilitarian and Kantian views, which endorse an ethic of universal human concern but in a manner that can be at odds with considerations of the good life. Next, I will consider the views of contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists, who endorse an ethic of the good life but in a manner that does not adequately provide resources for an ethic of universal human concern. I will argue that Taylor offers a unique and important perspective in that he shows how to combine an ethic of universal human concern with an ethic of the good life. I will also discuss how my account of self-transcendence is important for making this combination intelligible.

In the second section I will examine Taylor's argument for the claim that "great as the power of naturalist sources might be [for an ethic of universal human concern], the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater" (SS 518). First, I will examine his critique of exclusive humanism, which shows it to have certain tendencies towards self-enclosure. Next, I will consider why he claims that Christian *agape* and the view of human beings as made in the 'image of God' are important for overcoming self-enclosure and achieving self-transcendence in unconditional love and concern for others.<sup>1</sup> I seek to show how Taylor holds a profoundly 'personalist' view of life that is centered on the 'telos of communion', which can be seen to make an important difference for an ethic of universal human concern in contrast to 'impersonalist', disenchanting views of life. I believe this 'personalist' aspect of Taylor's thought has yet to be fully appreciated.

In the third and final section I will address three main lines of criticism in regard to Taylor's argument: the first questions the supposed inferiority of non-religious sources compared to theistic sources for an ethic of universal human concern; the second questions whether an ethic of universal human concern, or at least high aspirations with respect to it, is in fact desirable; and the third questions whether Taylor's argument for the superiority of theistic moral sources is compatible with his political commitment to pluralism. In each case I will seek to defend Taylor's position.

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<sup>1</sup> Recall that seeking this sort of self-transcendence can be seen as seeking a kind of re-enchantment insofar as disenchantment is connected with a narrowing of the self. So one way of stating the issue here is: how can we go farthest in this aspect of re-enchantment?



## I. UNIVERSAL HUMAN CONCERN AND THE GOOD LIFE

### *The Ethic of Universal Human Concern in Utilitarianism and Kantianism*

In exploring the relationship between an ethic of universal human concern and an ethic of the good life I begin with the two most common ways of articulating an ethic of universal human concern among secular moral philosophers, viz., utilitarianism and Kantianism. These also appear to be the most prominent moral theories used to support exclusive humanism, though one need not be an exclusive humanist to accept either theory.<sup>2</sup> In both moral theories there seems to be a tension with an ethic of the good life.

That utilitarianism and Kantianism embody an ethic of universal human concern can be clearly seen in the basic moral principle that each offers and from which they think our particular moral duties can be derived. In the case of utilitarianism, the basic moral principle is the ‘principle of utility’, which enjoins us to promote the ‘greatest happiness for the greatest number’, where happiness is understood in terms of pleasure and the absence of pain (see Mill 2001, 7, 17). With the importance given to attaining

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<sup>2</sup> For some key passages in Taylor’s writings where we can see the connection between exclusive humanism and the moral theories of Kantianism and utilitarianism see *SS* 93-5; *SA* 244-5, 250-1, 580, 694-5; cf. *SS*, Chs. 19 & 20; *SA* 8-9, 244-59, 261-2, 282-3, 311-2, 580-9, 694, 696-7.

It should be said that Kant himself is not exactly an exclusive humanist since he thought we must postulate the existence of God and an afterlife as a support for the moral law (if true these postulates would enable the highest good in which perfect moral rectitude is combined with perfect happiness). However, Kant’s notions of autonomy, the universal law, and the dignity of all rational agents have been key sources for many exclusive humanists who have dropped Kant’s postulates (e.g., Thomas Nagel, John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, J.B. Schneewind, Luc Ferry, Andre Comte-Sponville, etc.). Kantianism has been especially important for non-religious conceptions of human rights.

The major founders of utilitarianism, viz., Bentham and Mill, are clearly exclusive humanists (cf. Bertrand Russell, Peter Singer, James Rachels, Derek Parfit, Richard Rorty, etc.). As aforementioned, Mill in fact endorses the idea of a ‘religion of humanity’. Utilitarianism has been especially important for non-religious ideals of universal sympathy/solidarity/benevolence. I should also mention here the perspective of Hume, who Taylor also regards as a major representative of exclusive humanism (see *SS* 343-7; *SA* 236-7, 240-2, 247, 263, 430-1, 546, 581, 608-9, 693-4). Hume’s perspective is very similar to utilitarianism in emphasizing sympathy/benevolence, but he does not endorse the principle of the ‘greatest happiness for greatest number’. For Hume, sympathy and benevolence are important primarily for sustaining an order of mutual benefit in a polite, commercial society. Hume has also been an important resource for contemporary exclusive humanists (e.g., Simon Blackburn, Annette Baier, J.L. Mackie, etc.).

pleasure and avoiding pain, utilitarianism can be said to offer an ethic of universal concern for all *sentient* beings. In the case of Kantianism, the basic moral principle is the ‘categorical imperative’, which enjoins us to act only in such a way that we can will our action to become a universal law for all *rational* beings. Or, in a different formulation: we should respect the dignity of humanity by acting so as to treat human beings always as an end and never simply as a means (see Kant 1993, 30, 36).

What both of these views share in common is that they claim not to derive their accounts of moral obligation from any particular conception of the good life. Indeed, questions about the nature of moral obligation and the nature of the good life or human fulfillment are viewed as separate domains (see *SS* 87-9; Taylor 1995b; *DC* 4, 6-7; *PHS* 233, 236-47; cf. Williams 1985, Ch. 10). This is perhaps clearest in Kantian forms of morality (see Kant 1993, 7-9, 26-8); but it is also true of utilitarianism. As Mill says, “the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is *not the agent’s own happiness* but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator” (Mill 2001, 17; my emphasis). In other words, the obligation to promote the ‘general happiness’ is not based on one’s own happiness since the latter can only count as one among others in the sum total of the general happiness.

This attempted separation of the domain of moral obligation from that of one’s individual happiness in these views can be seen most clearly in the way they regard ‘moral’ considerations as *overriding* ‘non-moral’ ones, where ‘moral’ is defined solely in

terms of obligatory actions and is concerned above all with our treatment of others.<sup>3</sup> This is sometimes expressed as the priority of duty over happiness, or ‘the right’ over ‘the good’. On such views we may be required to sacrifice our happiness or fulfillment for the sake of duty. However, if moral obligations are not derived from a conception of the good life then the question arises: what is the basis for accepting these moral obligations? According to Taylor, it is characteristic of these moralities that they seek to establish acceptance of their account of moral obligation through offering their moral principles as self-evident ‘basic reasons’.<sup>4</sup> In other words, they offer their respective criteria as a moral ‘foundation’ that can command acceptance independent of a person’s conception of the good life and from this foundation all moral obligations can be derived.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most important criticisms of these ‘moralities of obligatory action’ is that their claims about the overriding nature of moral obligations, if strictly followed, are ultimately self-alienating, or ‘self-mutilating’.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, if they really require us to completely sacrifice our pursuit of the good life – rather than being a matter of a particular strong good overriding other possible (weak or strong) goods – then it is not

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<sup>3</sup> Kant does speak of duties to self and duties to others, but in both Kantianism and utilitarianism the emphasis is on our other-regarding duties. Moreover, duties to self (e.g., not to commit suicide) for Kant are not based on considerations of the good life, but follow from the categorical imperative.

<sup>4</sup> See *SS* 75-7, 89; *DC* 12-5; Taylor 1997a, 173-4; *PHS* 230-3, 240-7; *PA*, Ch. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Such views thus accept a form of motivational externalism, as discussed in Chapter II. In some cases, however, the appeal is instead to enlightened self-interest insofar as the principle is claimed to be the basis of mutual cooperation in a pluralistic society for individual benefit. This is true of Bentham’s version of utilitarianism and Rawls’ version of Kantianism.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Williams is perhaps the moral philosopher who has developed this criticism most powerfully. He argues that Kantian and utilitarian accounts of moral obligation are self-alienating in the deepest sense possible: viz., they undermine our fundamental projects, relationships, commitments, convictions, desires, etc., which are constitutive of identity and of our “having a reason for living at all” (Williams 1981, 5; cf. *ibid.*, 11-2, 14, 18 ; Williams 1973b, 95-100, 103-4, 112, 116-7). By requiring us to sacrifice our fundamental projects, relationships, convictions, etc., whenever they come into conflict with moral obligation, Williams contends, these moralities of obligatory action represent an attack on our integrity as persons (Williams 1973b, 95-118). Taylor agrees with Williams here and likewise maintains that giving systematic priority to the demands of benevolence and justice over concern for ‘non-moral’ modes of human fulfillment “leads to pragmatic absurdity” (Taylor 1997a, 176; cf. *ibid.* 175-8; *DC* 6-7, 10; Taylor 1995b, 133, 152-3; *HAL* 233-6).

clear why one would be motivated to act in accordance with them. Thus, some moral philosophers, such as Elizabeth Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre, simply dismiss these moral theories as incoherent (see Anscombe 1981, 26-31; MacIntyre 2007, Chs. 1-6).

In contrast to these dismissive responses, Taylor's response is to show how they do in fact rely on implicit or not fully acknowledged life goods and constitutive goods (see *SS* 88-9).<sup>7</sup> In other words, he seeks to show how the question 'What ought I do?' cannot be separated from the questions 'What is it good to be?' and 'What ought I to love [or respect]?' (*SS* 3, 89, 93-5; *DC* 9). As discussed in Chapter IV, on Taylor's view both utilitarianism and Kantianism do seem to be motivated by conceptions of fullness. In particular, they implicitly endorse views of fullness that involve actualizing our strongly valued capacity as moral agents to take up an impartial, universal standpoint and live according to the duties enjoined by that standpoint, thereby achieving dignity or moral worth. Such conceptions of our potential as moral agents function as constitutive goods, which constitute as life goods those modes of life that realize this potential and thereby achieve fullness (viz., universal justice and benevolence/solidarity). Additionally, connected to such views of fullness, I have argued, is an ideal of self-transcendence that involves transcending a lower mode of selfhood that prioritizes more particular attachments and egoistic desires for a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood that achieves the impartial, universal standpoint. Often this higher mode of selfhood will include not only the actualization of the strongly valued capacity for adopting an

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<sup>7</sup> For a good discussion by Taylor of his differences with MacIntyre on this issue see Taylor 1994e, 22. Taylor's basic view is that those who embrace such moralities of obligatory action "will always be in truth more 'Aristotelian' than they believe, surreptitiously relying on notions like 'virtue' and 'the good life', even while they repudiate them on the level of theory" (ibid.).

impartial, universal standpoint, but also self-transcending communion with others insofar as these others are regarded as being worthy of our concern (i.e., constitutive goods).

Recognizing these deeper, yet not fully acknowledged ‘sources’ of utilitarianism and Kantianism is important for several reasons. First of all, as discussed in Chapter IV, it is important for overcoming the problematic dichotomy between egoism and altruism, or between self-regarding and other-regarding actions, or between individual fulfillment and moral duty, which utilitarianism and Kantianism on the surface seem to endorse and which leads to self-alienation and obscures their actual motivational sources. According to Taylor, when these theories identify ‘moral’ requirements that they regard as overriding all other ‘non-moral’ concerns, they are in fact identifying hypergoods such as universal justice and benevolence, which are among “the central moral aspirations of modern culture” and help define the good life for those who embrace them (*SS* 88).

A second reason why it is important to get clearer about the implicit strong goods behind utilitarianism and Kantianism is because doing so enables us to properly consider how our various life goods should be ordered in our lives and whether hypergoods (if we accept them in some form) should in fact always override ‘non-moral’ life goods that are also seen to be important for the good life.<sup>8</sup> These include various modes of human fulfillment, such as those found in particular relationships and in various activities wherein we actualize strongly valued capacities (e.g., creative and intellectual capacities). In short, even if we regard universal justice and benevolence as genuine hypergoods we

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<sup>8</sup> See *SS* 65-6, 76-7, 86, 106-7, 518-21; Taylor 1994b, 213-4; 1994e, 25, 30-3; 1997; *SA* 639-40, 704-7. This issue is also raised by Harry Frankfurt in his account of the ‘importance of what we care about’ (Frankfurt 1988, Ch. 7; 1999, Ch. 14; 2004), by Susan Wolf in her account of ‘meaning in life’ and why it matters (Wolf 2010), and by Bernard Williams in his account of ‘importance’ (Williams 1985, 182ff). The use of ‘moral’ and ‘non-moral’ here, it should be noted, is the narrow sense typical of moralities of obligatory action. As previously mentioned, Taylor typically uses ‘moral’ in a broader sense that refers to anything involving strong evaluation.

must still practically work out their relationship to other life goods so that our good may be holistically promoted, thereby avoiding the self-mutilation of denying something integral to our humanity. This is an issue I will return to address in the last section of this chapter. In doing so we will also consider another important aspect of our moral thinking that Taylor believes is often neglected by moralities of obligatory action: viz., “all that aspect of our moral thinking which concerns aspirations to perfection, heroism, supererogation, and the like” (SS 89-90; cf. Taylor 1995b, 132).<sup>9</sup> The failure of moralities of obligatory action to account for this aspect of our moral thinking represents another way in which they are ‘cramped’, as Taylor says: “The notion that morality is exclusively concerned with obligations has had a restricting and distorting effect on our moral thinking and sensibility” (SS 89).

Finally, properly recognizing the implicit strong goods operative in utilitarian and Kantian moral theories is important for the debate Taylor wants to take up regarding what perspective can best make sense of and motivate action on behalf of an ethic of universal human concern. I will come back to this in the next section. At this point, however, I want to turn to consider a third important position in contemporary moral philosophy, viz., neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, which gives central importance to considerations of the good life, but which has not typically been seen as providing a strong basis for an ethic of universal human concern.

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<sup>9</sup> On the lack of the category of the ‘supererogatory’ in moralities of obligatory action see also Williams 1985, 178-9 and Urmson 1995. While the lack of place for the supererogatory is obvious in the case of utilitarianism, it should be mentioned that Kant does seem to give a role to this category in his account of ‘imperfect duties’ (Kant 1993, 30-2, 36-7). But one might question whether this is in tension with his view of the categorical imperative; indeed, the strain is seen in the term ‘imperfect duty’, which attempts to capture that which goes beyond the requirement of strict (i.e., ‘perfect’) duty.

*Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics and Other-Regarding Concern*

As discussed in Chapter II, Taylor's ethical framework can be described as neo-Aristotelian in that he is concerned with questions about the good life and often makes favorable references to Aristotle's views on ethics. However, he differs from most contemporary neo-Aristotelians in that he focuses not only on the question of 'What is it good to be?', but also on the question of 'What ought I to love [or respect]?' In other words, he thinks it is important not only to specify the life goods that define for us the good life, but also to give an account of the constitutive goods – e.g., our potential, other human beings, the natural world, God – that constitute these life goods as the goods they are for us. More generally, as I have discussed in Chapters II & IV, Taylor is more explicit about the role of strong evaluation in an account of the good life; i.e., it is seen as a form of life that is higher, nobler, more fulfilling. This contrasts with contemporary neo-Aristotelians such as Rosalind Hursthouse, Philippa Foot, and Alasdair MacIntyre who adopt a version of 'ethical naturalism' in which the good life is defined in terms of flourishing *qua* human being, which is understood as analogous to what it is for plants and non-human animals to flourish *qua* member of their particular species. What is often missing in such accounts is an articulation of the strong evaluative sense – as we find in Aristotle's view of 'the noble' (*to kalon*) – that fulfilling our natural ends would constitute a higher, nobler, more fulfilling form of life that is normative for our desires.<sup>10</sup>

The difference between Taylor's version of neo-Aristotelianism and the version found in the works of Hursthouse, Foot, and MacIntyre can also be seen with regard to the issue of other-regarding concern. For neo-Aristotelians like Hursthouse, Foot, and

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<sup>10</sup> The three paragraphs that follow are drawn from my article "To What Extent Must We Go Beyond Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism?" (McPherson 2012).

MacIntyre, the other-regarding virtues – e.g., justice, honesty, loyalty, generosity, and compassion – are regarded as virtues primarily because of their role in promoting the good functioning of our social group, which is important for achieving our own good as rational, social animals. In other words, as rational, social animals we can only achieve our flourishing through the shared practice of other-regarding virtues that promote the good of others and the common good of our community.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, these other-regarding virtues also make possible “one of our greatest sources of characteristic enjoyment” as social animals, viz., “loving relationships” (Hursthouse 1999a, 209; cf. 202). Thus, possessing these other-regarding virtues both benefits us and makes us good *qua* human being by promoting our naturalistic ends as rational, social animals (see *ibid.*, 196; see also Foot 2001, 16).

As important as these considerations are, nevertheless, they seem to miss something fundamental in our moral experience that is captured by Taylor’s account of constitutive goods: viz., our first-personal sense that human beings are *worthy* of our love and respect. For neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists the ultimate justification for other-regarding virtues is the achievement of our flourishing as rational, social animals. What they do not articulate is the strong evaluative sense that human beings are worthy of love and respect for their own sake and that a higher mode of life can be realized in such love and respect for other human beings. This goes beyond the third-personal account of human flourishing on analogy with the flourishing of plants and non-human animals. To articulate our sense of human beings as worthy of love and respect for their own sake is precisely to articulate the way in which human beings are constitutive goods. Of course,

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<sup>11</sup> One of the best accounts of this is found in MacIntyre’s *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999) where he argues for the importance of ‘social networks of giving and receiving’ for achieving our own good.



neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists do say that part of what it is to acquire other-regarding virtues such as compassion, generosity, justice, and the like is that we wish and pursue good for others for their own sake, especially those with whom we share in community (see MacIntyre 1999, Chs. 9-10 & pp. 160-1). But there is still no articulation here of a view that others are worthy of such concern for their own sake in virtue of their human dignity; rather, this concern is seen as a requirement of the other-regarding virtues.<sup>12</sup>

Insofar as neo-Aristotelians do not articulate an account of human beings as commanding our love and respect they therefore do not provide a strong basis for an ethic of universal human concern. Indeed, for neo-Aristotelian ethical naturalists the other-regarding virtues find their point and function primarily in the particular communities of which we are a part. If these virtues have application outside of our communities – e.g., in helping a stranger we happen upon – this still seems to ultimately refer to the flourishing of our particular communities for its justification (see MacIntyre 1999, 122-3). One response of course might be to say: ‘So much the worse for an ethic of universal human concern.’ Indeed, we would have reason to be critical of such an ethic if it amounted to little more than an abstract humanitarianism that neglects concern for our particular relationships. But concern for all human beings and concern for our particular relationships need not be opposed.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it seems that such an ethic of universal human concern cannot be so easily dismissed given that it is integral to much of our modern moral sensibility and it expresses what for many seems to be a genuine

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that in a more recent essay entitled “Human Dignity and Charity” (Hursthouse 2007) Hursthouse endorses a view of human dignity that human beings are said to possess simply in virtue of being human (in fact, she sees this view as having its roots in the Christian tradition rather than the Greek tradition). However, in this essay she does not attempt to explain how this view fits with the ethical naturalism that she defends in *On Virtue Ethics* (1999a).

<sup>13</sup> I will return to this issue in the last section of this chapter.

constitutive good: viz., a sense of all human beings as being worthy of our love and respect. For neo-Aristotelians who do accept an ethic of universal human concern, e.g., Martha Nussbaum, this is often done by incorporating non-Aristotelian ideas, such as Stoic, Kantian, Jewish or Christian ideas of human dignity, which do involve appeals to constitutive goods (see Nussbaum 1996; 2001, xviii-xxiv; 2007, 159-60).

*Universal Human Concern as a Constitutive Feature of the Good Life*

From the foregoing I hope it has become apparent that one of the important advantages of Taylor's evaluative framework is that it enables one to affirm an ethic of universal human concern within an account of the good life. In particular, his two-tiered account of strong goods in terms of constitutive goods and life goods is important for making sense of this. What is needed is to articulate a view of human beings as worthy of love and respect, i.e., as constitutive goods. In turn this view of human beings will constitute certain life goods that are involved in realizing such love and respect (e.g., virtues such as compassion, generosity, and justice). Attaining these life goods would mean attaining a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life, i.e., the good life.

Moreover, as I have argued, Taylor's account of fullness has implicit within it an ideal of self-transcendence that can make sense of concern for others in a way that allows us to avoid the strict dichotomies between egoism and altruism, or between self-regarding and other-regarding actions, or between individual fulfillment and moral duty. Such an ideal of self-transcendence should be understood in terms of transcending a lower mode of selfhood for a higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood, which means that it is at the same time an ideal of self-realization. As aforementioned, there are two general types of self-transcendence: (1) self-transcendence through actualizing one's own strongly valued

capacities; and (2) self-transcendence through love or concern for constitutive goods external to one's own person, such as other human beings, the natural world, or God. It is especially this latter type of self-transcendence that is important for conceiving of how other-regarding concern can be a constitutive feature of a view of the good life for our selves. Self-transcendence through love or concern for other human beings involves transcending a lower, narrower mode of selfhood that is to some degree closed off from love or concern for others for the sake of a higher, wider, more fulfilling mode of selfhood that achieves a greater degree of love or concern for others in which their good is affectively identified with one's own good. Thus, the important contrast is not between egoism and altruism, but between narrower and wider conceptions of the self.<sup>14</sup>

A key question arises here: How far can such self-transcendence in love or concern for others actually extend? In other words, can it extend to include affective identification with all humanity, as seems to be required by an ethic of universal human concern? Obviously if this is possible it will have to be an imaginative form of affective identification since we cannot know every individual human being that exists in the world. However, it would have to be such that it would dispose us to love or show concern for every individual human being that we do encounter. We find a model of this sort of stance of love for all human beings in the story of the 'Good Samaritan', which Taylor is fond of citing (see *SA* 158, 246, 277, 576, 737-9, 742, 844, n. 39).<sup>15</sup>

In the next section we will be examining the question of whether religious or non-religious sources can best enable us to achieve the fullest degree of self-transcendence in

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<sup>14</sup> As was discussed in Chapter IV, self-transcendence through actualizing strongly valued capacities can also factor in here insofar as the higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood that is involved in love or concern for others is also constituted by actualizing our strongly valued capacities for such love or concern and our capacities for recognizing others as worthy of such love or concern.

<sup>15</sup> I will return to further discuss this issue in the last section of this chapter.

love or concern for others and to overcome various tendencies towards self-enclosure. However, for now it is important to note that whatever account one gives to support an ethic of universal human concern, one thing is needed for any perspective that would connect it with an ethic of the good life: viz., an ethic of universal human concern must in some sense be seen as fulfilling a crucial aspect of our human nature.

We can actually see such a view expressed in Taylor's work. On a number of occasions he remarks upon the human draw towards wider, less-restricted forms of solidarity with other human beings, which I think can also be interpreted as a draw towards an ever wider form of self-transcendence through love or concern for others as a constitutive feature of the highest, most fulfilling form of life. For instance, he writes:

If we focus on this powerful moral attraction of a new, less cluttered, more universal and fraternal space, we find something which has wide resonances in human history. Something like this has happened again and again: Buddha's followers stepping out of the caste dharma into the new space of the Sangha; those of Christ following the lead of the parable of the Good Samaritan, until Paul can say: "in Christ is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, man nor woman"; those of Muhammad, who see the new space of Islam, as beyond all tribes and nations; likewise, the appeal of Stoicism. The power which this kind of move seems to have for us as a species could tell us something important about ourselves, if only we could define it more exactly. I don't pretend to do that here, but it does seem to me that the power can't be explained just by the negative move, the breaking out from the skein of distinctions and restrictions. [...] The power has to be accounted for partly, even largely, by the positive attraction of the space we are released into: the space of the search for Enlightenment, of salvation, or of submission to God, or the cosmopolis of Gods and humans, to take the four examples above. (*SA* 576-7; cf. 254-5, 608-9, 692-703; *PA* 56-7)

Taylor also sees the same sort of draw towards a wider, less restricted solidarity with other human beings as being operative among non-religious people who embrace the 'modern moral order' with its endorsement of universal human rights and universal solidarity (see *CM* 16-9; *SA* 254-5, 608-9, 692-5).

What is especially important to note in the above passage is Taylor's statement that "[the] power which this kind of move [towards a wider space of solidarity] seems to have for us as a species could tell us something important about ourselves, if only we could define it more exactly." While he says that he does not pretend to define it here, nevertheless, in a number of places throughout *A Secular Age* it seems that Taylor does in fact seek to clarify what the power of this draw towards a wider space of solidarity says about ourselves. Indeed, for Taylor it is important for articulating an adequate moral ontology that can make sense of and motivate action on behalf of an ethic of universal human concern that we specify not only what makes other human beings worthy of our love and respect, but also what it says about ourselves that we see love and respect for other human beings as part of a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life.

Although we will be considering this issue in more detail in the next section, it should be said for now that one position that Taylor certainly wants to reject is the kind of 'naturalism' that has no place for the strong evaluative judgment that there is a higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life that can be achieved through moving into a wider space of solidarity. He mentions as an example of this the Humean view that seeks to explain the move towards a wider space of solidarity in terms of our natural sympathy gradually expanding through wider forms of human contact as civilization develops. "There is no sense", Taylor says, "of the qualitative break in this account, of the sense of acceding to the higher that we experience when we break from or relativize a narrower and lower belonging for a higher solidarity" or that there is an "intrinsically higher demand" to do so (*SA* 608-9). He also sees something similar in more recent sociobiological accounts that suppose "a tendency in us, induced by evolution, to act in

solidarity with our in-group, often through savage hostility to outsiders” and then seek to explain the development of a universalist ethic “by the gradual extension of what we define as the “in-group”” because of changing evolutionary and cultural pressures (*SA* 609). The issue that Taylor raises is “whether such a “naturalist” account can make sense of the phenomenology of universalism, the sense of breaking out of an earlier space and acceding to a higher one, the sense of liberation, even exaltation which accompanies this move” (*SA* 609). He clearly thinks that it does not, as he later writes: “The alleged extension of sympathy with civilization development and wider contact is just a fact about us; what it doesn’t account for is our sense that there is something higher, nobler, *more fully human* about universal sympathy” (*SA* 694; my emphasis).

If this is so, then in order to resolve this lack of fit between our moral phenomenology and our moral ontology we must either enrich our ontology or revise our phenomenology (*SA* 609). Thus, for those who believe that there is indeed something “higher, nobler, more fully human about universal sympathy” what is required is something more than a naturalist ontology of the Humean or sociobiological sort. However, Taylor writes: “The issue of what causes, or lies behind, or (if this is possible) justifies these qualitative shifts in the space of solidarity, together with the sense of moral ascent, remains unresolved to general satisfaction (though I have my own – theistic – hunches)” (*SA* 609). I want to now turn to explore this issue in more detail by examining Taylor’s account of the difference between religious and non-religious sources for an ethic of universal human concern.

## II. THE MORAL SOURCES OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN CONCERN: RELIGIOUS VS. NON-RELIGIOUS

Taylor writes: “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” (*SA* 371; cf. *CM* 25). On his view this is a moral culture that has its historical roots in Christian theism, especially the Gospel ethic of *agape*.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, as mentioned in the previous chapter, in its *scope* the humanist ethic – whether it is expressed in Kantian, utilitarian or some other terms – is equivalent to the Christian ideal of *agape* and it is often considered to be a functional replacement for it.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Taylor maintains that the modern secular breach with the culture of Christendom was probably needed in order “for the impulse of solidarity to transcend the frontier of Christendom itself” (*CM* 26; *SA* 371). So for Christians today this can be a humbling realization (see *CM* 16-9, 26). It is humbling because although this moral culture has its roots in Christian theism, it has in important ways gone farther in overcoming restrictions to other-regarding concern than when Christians were ‘running the show’. For Christians, it should chasten their commitment to an *agape* ethic knowing how much Christians have failed to live up to

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<sup>16</sup> Taylor writes: “[The] Christian roots of all this run deep. First, there is the extraordinary missionary effort of the Counter-Reformation Church, taken up later by the Protestant denominations. Then there were the mass-mobilization campaigns of the early nineteenth century – the anti-slavery movement in England, largely inspired and led by Evangelicals; the parallel abolitionist movement in the United States, also largely Christian-inspired. Then this habit of mobilizing for the redress of injustice and the relief of suffering world-wide becomes part of our political culture. Somewhere along the road, this culture ceases to be simply Christian-inspired – although people of deep Christian faith continue to be important in today’s movements” (*SA* 371; cf. *CM* 26).

<sup>17</sup> See *SS* 319, 515-8; *CM* 16-9, 25-6; *SA* 245-7, 253-7.

their own ideals. However, Taylor thinks Christian moral sources are still important for fully carrying through on an ethic of universal human concern.<sup>18</sup>

Since humanist moral culture has its historical roots in Christian theism the important question arises of whether anything is lost when it no longer appeals to Christian theism as a moral source, i.e., as a way of making sense of and motivating an ethic of universal human concern. This is the question that Taylor has been especially concerned to explore in his attempt to come to terms with modern moral culture (see esp. *SS* 515-21; *CM* 13-37; *SA* 692-703). Moreover, his affirmative answer to this question has been one of the most controversial aspects of his work.<sup>19</sup> I want to examine here in more detail Taylor's position on this issue.

One way to summarize the basic issue at stake is with Taylor's remark near the end of *Sources*: "High standards need strong sources" (*SS* 516). An ethic of universal human concern clearly sets for us a tremendously high moral standard. As Taylor puts it: "Our age makes higher demands of solidarity and benevolence on people today than ever before. Never before have people been asked to stretch out so far, and so consistently, so systematically, so as a matter of course, to the stranger outside the gates" (*SA* 695). The same also goes for universal justice, which is often expressed in terms of a commitment to universal human rights. "How do we manage to do it?", asks Taylor, "Or perhaps we don't manage all that well; and the more interesting question might run: how could we manage to do it?" (*SA* 696; cf. *CM* 31). In exploring this question Taylor begins by

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<sup>18</sup> Notice the 'Hegelian' structure of Taylor's view: there is a 'thesis' (Christendom Christianity), an 'antithesis' (the break from Christendom, including the rise of exclusive humanism), and a 'synthesis' (a chastened Christianity that can help us to fully carrying through on an ethic of universal human concern).

<sup>19</sup> Taylor is not alone in holding such a view. For instance, Nietzsche holds a similar view (see, e.g., Nietzsche 1954, 515-6); this seems to be part of the reason why he is such an important figure in Taylor's work. Another important example is Dostoevsky, who is also a key figure in Taylor's work.



looking at three sources of motivation for an ethic universal human concern from a non-religious perspective, each of which he finds to be problematic.

*Non-Religious Moral Sources*

(1) First of all, Taylor says: “performance in these standards [of universal solidarity and justice] has become part of what we understand as a decent, civilized human life. We live up to them to the extent that we do, because we would be somewhat ashamed of ourselves if we didn’t. They have become part of our self-image, our sense of our own worth” (*SA* 696). Moreover, he says: “alongside this, we feel a sense of satisfaction and superiority when we contemplate others – our ancestors, or contemporary illiberal societies – who didn’t or don’t recognize [these standards]” (*SA* 696). However, this sense of self-worth is very fragile as a source of motivation because it is based on one’s self-image vis-à-vis others. This makes one’s philanthropy “vulnerable to the shifting fashion of media attention, and the various modes of feel-good hype” (*SA* 696); e.g., one might throw oneself into the ‘cause of the month’, but then forget about it when it no longer is the subject of media attention, thereby failing to live up to strong evaluative standards one apparently recognizes. Taylor thus contends: “A solidarity ultimately driven by the giver’s own sense of moral superiority is a whimsical and fickle thing. We are far in fact from the universality and unconditionality which our moral outlook prescribes” (*SA* 696).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This whimsical and fickle behavior does raise the question of whether one really does in fact recognize the strong evaluative standards involved in an ethic of universal human concern. Perhaps one does but it is just a case of what Aristotle calls ‘*akrasia*’ (i.e., weakness of the will). Or it could be that one has some doubts about the validity of these strong evaluative standards (e.g., about the worth of other human beings and one’s own sense of dignity in acting for the good of others). I want to thank Ruth Abbey for raising this issue for me via personal communication.

Now, it must be said that this represents only a shallow version of a humanist perspective, which can also be found in different forms among some religious people. There are also humanists for whom their sense of self-worth is not ultimately based on their sense of moral superiority vis-à-vis others, but rather on some sense of their human potential as moral agents that functions as a constitutive good, i.e., it is regarded as being worthy of admiration and respect and thus to be realized. For instance, they might invoke “our sense of dignity as agents capable of grasping the universal perspective – or as rational agents” (*SA* 694). We have seen this in different ways in utilitarian and Kantian perspectives. The utilitarian will take up the standpoint of the impartial, benevolent spectator and seek to promote the general happiness, while the Kantian will take up the standpoint of the ‘kingdom of ends’ (i.e., of all rational agents) and act only upon universalizable maxims. In both cases, Taylor says, “we can say that we owe it to our own dignity to act this way, and this is what the moral source consists in” (*SA* 694). But even here we can still ask questions about the adequacy of such moral sources for an ethic of universal human concern (*SA* 695; cf. *SA* 589; *SS* 9-10, 317). For one thing, we can question – as we did in Chapter III – whether a convincing moral realism can be defended here and if not, whether this can potentially undermine the strong evaluative judgment of self-worth. Furthermore, Taylor says, “the most exigent, lofty sense of self-worth has limitations. I feel worthy in helping people, in giving without stint. But what is worthy about helping people?”

(2) This brings us to a second non-religious moral source for an ethic of universal human concern: viz., the view that human beings have dignity or worth in light of which they are owed basic concern for their well-being. In other words, human beings are

regarded as constitutive goods. Taylor writes: “My feelings of self-worth connect intellectually and morally with my sense of the worth of human beings” (*SA* 696). This worth or dignity of human beings is articulated in terms of some notion of “the potential of human beings for goodness and greatness” (*SA* 696). “The higher the human potential,” Taylor says, “the greater the enterprise of realizing it, and the more the carriers of this potential are worthy of our help in achieving it” (*SA* 697).

However, according to Taylor, philanthropy and solidarity motivated by such lofty notions of human potential have a Janus face. On the one hand, abstractly it certainly can inspire philanthropic action; on the other, he says, “faced with the immense disappointment of actual human performance, with the myriad ways in which real, concrete human beings fall short of, ignore, parody and betray this magnificent potential, one cannot but experience a growing sense of anger and futility” (*SA* 697). One may then begin to question whether such human beings are really worthy of one’s concern. What is even worse, love for humanity can undergo a reversal in which it changes into contempt, hatred, and aggression, which in turn can lead to coercive and inhumane behavior towards others. Taylor sees this sort of tragic turn in the history of despotic socialism, in various one-party regimes, and in certain “helping” institutions. “The tragic irony”, he says, “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” (*SA* 697). Taylor in fact thinks that both religious and non-religious people are vulnerable to this kind of tragic reversal. The crucial point then is that “[wherever] action for high ideals is not tempered, controlled, ultimately engulfed in an unconditional love of the beneficiaries, this ugly dialectic risks repeating itself” (*SA* 697).

I will return shortly to discuss Taylor's argument for the claim that a theistic view – especially a Christian one – can provide a more adequate moral source for unconditional love than a non-theistic view. For now we can note again that similar questions can arise here about whether a convincing moral realism can be defended from a non-religious perspective about the claim of the intrinsic dignity of human beings.<sup>21</sup> Defending such a moral realist view, as we will see, is important for supporting an unconditional love for others.

(3) Finally, Taylor identifies a third problematic source of motivation for an ethic of universal human concern, which pertains to the claims of universal justice rather than universal solidarity. In particular, he notes how people – whether religious or non-religious – are often moved in their fight for justice by a 'righteous anger' or 'flaming indignation' at injustice (e.g., at racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression, or at leftist attacks on the family or the Christian faith). We can say that such righteous anger is a motivational source added to either or both of the two sources just discussed insofar as it is anger *about* threats to our sense of self-worth or to the dignity of others.

Taylor sees such indignation as being deeply problematic insofar as it "comes to be fuelled by hatred for those who support and connive with these injustices; and this in turn is fed by our sense of superiority that we are not like these instruments and accomplices of evil. Soon we are blinded to the havoc we wreak around us. Our picture of the world has safely located all evil outside of us" (*SA* 698; cf. *CM* 124-5). Thus, another tragic irony arises here: "We become centres of hatred, generators of new modes

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<sup>21</sup> In the last section I will discuss some attempts to provide a non-realist basis for human solidarity and human rights/justice, i.e., where they are not seen as being grounded in strong evaluative claims about human dignity (I will specifically discuss the works of Berlin, Rorty, Rawls, and Ignatieff). The key issue is whether they can match the motivational power of ideals of human solidarity and human rights/justice that are grounded in strong evaluative claims about human dignity. I do not think that they can.

of injustice on a greater scale, but we started with the most exquisite sense of wrong, the great passion for justice and equality and peace” (*SA* 698). In order to avoid this it seems that we need an unconditional love that extends even to those whom we consider to be perpetrators of injustice. Moreover, as Taylor notes on other occasions, we need to adopt the Dostoevskian insight that ‘we are all to blame’, i.e., we all share some responsibility for the injustice in the world (*SS* 452; *SA* 709-10).

Now, in each of these three cases of problematic patterns of motivations Taylor accuses exclusive humanism of often suffering from a form of blindness. He writes:

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 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. (*SA* 698)

I think we can question the extent to which this critique can be said to apply to different exclusive humanists. Certainly, some exclusive humanists whom Taylor especially admires, such as Luc Ferry and Martha Nussbaum, do not seem to suffer from this blindness.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Taylor does raise important challenges here.<sup>23</sup>

One important thing that I think he has shown is that in addition to the previously discussed human draw to self-transcendence in solidarity with others there are also strong tendencies in human life towards self-enclosure, i.e., towards being closed off from love

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<sup>22</sup> Recall the discussion of Ferry and Nussbaum’s exclusive humanism in the last chapter.

<sup>23</sup> As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, in the last section I will consider in more detail some responses to Taylor’s claims about the inferiority of non-religious sources compared to theistic sources for an ethic of universal human concern. I put off consideration of these responses until then because we must first examine Taylor’s own theistic sources.

or concern for others. We have seen this in his comments about the tendencies towards (1) feelings of moral superiority and the attempts at self-aggrandizement; (2) feelings of despair and contempt at human failings and the attempts to achieve power over others; and (3) feelings of anger and hatred towards others. There are of course many other forms of self-enclosure possible, such as any self-centered pursuit of wealth, fame, power, pleasure, personal projects, etc. Moreover, one may also be self-enclosed because of some narrower forms of attachments to others, such as in various forms of chauvinism (e.g., nationalism) where we are closed off from concern for others beyond our preferred group. Thus, human life often involves tendencies to both self-transcendence and self-enclosure. Moreover, as Taylor points out, even our aspirations to self-transcendence in concern for the good of others can lead to some of the worst forms of self-enclosure (i.e., ways of being closed off from such concern): philanthropy can lead to misanthropy and the fight for justice can lead to greater injustice. So the important issue becomes: How can we best overcome such self-enclosure and achieve a fuller self-transcendence in love and concern for others? Let us turn now to examine Taylor's solution to this issue.

*Taylor's Theistic Moral Sources for an Ethic of Universal Human Concern*

Taylor's own way of stating the issue is in terms of the question: "How can we become agents on whom misanthropy has no hold, in whom it awakens no connivance?" He thinks there is a theistic and specifically Christian solution to this issue. However, he acknowledges that this solution is not a matter of guarantee, but of faith, which elsewhere he understands in terms of 'anticipatory confidence' (SA 701; cf. SA 550-1, 703, 833n17, 844n38). It is important to note that Taylor is not just offering a statement of 'blind faith', i.e., faith without any reasons supporting it. As discussed in the Introduction, to speak in

terms of ‘anticipatory confidence’ suggests that there are well-founded reasons for our view, even though we cannot offer a full proof and so “our over-all sense of things anticipates or leaps ahead of the reasons we can muster for it” (*SA* 550). Where faith or anticipatory confidence especially comes in here is with respect to the existence of the Christian God. However, as we will see, if one does have such faith then one can make a strong argument for the claim that it can make an important difference for overcoming self-enclosure and achieving self-transcendence in love or concern for others.

Regarding the Christian solution, Taylor writes:

It can be described in two ways. Either as love/compassion which 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 made 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 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 made 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. (*SA* 701)

In order to better understand this crucial passage I think it is important to try to fill out more of what Taylor is saying about our being made in the ‘image of God’. This will enable us to better understand how this makes possible a love that is unconditional.

In the above passage Taylor says that our being made in the image of God cannot be characterized simply by reference to our individual being, but rather must be understood as “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.” What Taylor is articulating here, I believe, can be described as a profoundly ‘personalist’ view.<sup>24</sup> There

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Personalism’ as a philosophical school of thought arose in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and exists in a number of different variants. Generally, it can be understood as a reaction against various depersonalizing strands of modern thought (e.g., scientific understandings of human beings of the sort

are a number of places where Taylor discusses this personalist view in more detail. One important place is in Chapter 7 of *A Secular Age* where he discusses the conception of the world as an ‘impersonal order’ operating according to mechanistic causal laws, a view which arose with ‘providential deism’ in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and eventually morphed into completely disenchanted materialist views.<sup>25</sup> Taylor contrasts this conception of the world with a theistic view, especially a Christian view, which sees the world instead as a ‘personal order’.<sup>26</sup> On a Christian view, Taylor says,

[...] the highest being is a personal being, not just in the sense of possessing agency, but also in that of being capable of communion. Indeed, the definitions of the Trinity in Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers made central use of this notion (Koinonia). The new sense of “hypostasis” which was developed by the Cappadocians, which we translate no longer as “substance”, but as “persons”, was part of this new theology. The notion of person was correlative to that of communion; the person is the kind of being which can partake in communion. (*SA* 278)

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Taylor has been concerned to combat). According to Thomas D. Williams and Jan Olaf Bengtsson, “Personalism posits ultimate reality and value in personhood—human as well as (at least for most personalists) divine. It emphasizes the significance, uniqueness and inviolability of the person, as well as the person’s essentially relational or communitarian dimension” (Williams and Olaf Bengtsson 2009). In the most expansive sense, personalism holds that the ultimate nature of reality is personal rather than impersonal due to having been created by a person (viz., God) for the ultimate purpose of interpersonal communion. It will be clear that Taylor is a personalist in this expansive sense.

Personalism is often associated with Catholic thinkers such as Jacques Maritain, Gabriel Marcel, Étienne Gilson, Emmanuel Mounier, Robert Spaemann, and Karol Wojtyła. However, there are also Protestant personalists such as John Macmurray and Jewish personalists such as Martin Buber. Taylor in fact acknowledges Mounier as a key intellectual influence. When asked by Hartmut Rosa and Arto Laitinen about his intellectual influences, Taylor mentions three people: Merleau-Ponty, Mounier, and Dostoevsky (Taylor 2002b, 182; for a brief discussion on the influence of Mounier on Taylor see Redhead 2002, 14-5). I think this broader personalist commitment allows us to see in a new light Taylor’s work on human agency, selfhood, and personhood (see, e.g., *HAL*, Chs. 1-2, 4; Taylor 1985c; *SS*, Ch. 2).

<sup>25</sup> Taylor provides a nice summary of this development: “The crucial feature here [of Deism] is a change in the understanding of God, and his relation to the world. That is, there is 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. In a wider perspective, this can be seen as a move along a continuum from a view of the supreme being with powers analogous to what we know as agency and personality, and exercising them continually in relation to us, to a view of this being as related to us only through the law-governed structure he has created, and ending with a view of our condition as at grips with an indifferent universe, with God either indifferent or non-existent. From this perspective, Deism can be seen as a half-way house on the road to contemporary atheism” (*SA* 270).

<sup>26</sup> Note that if the process of disenchantment is associated with the rise of an ‘impersonal order’, then one way of seeking re-enchantment might be through recovering a sense of the world as a ‘personal order’.



From this passage we can say then that our being made in the image of God means that like God we are ‘persons’, which is defined here as “the kind of being which can partake in communion.” Moreover, our being made in the image of God means being made for the ultimate purpose of the fullest communion with other persons, viz., with God and other human beings.<sup>27</sup> In this way we realize our humanity most completely and achieve the greatest experience of fullness. The “fullness of human life”, Taylor says, is “something that happens between people rather than within each one” (*CM* 113). He goes on to remark: “When you get to the point of seeing that what is important in human life is what passes between us, then you are coming close to the Trinity. It is not so surprising that the fullness of human life is what passes between humans, if the fullness of divine life passes between persons, and we are made in God’s image” (*CM* 114).

In Chapter III I discussed Taylor’s theistic teleological view in terms of its importance for moral (i.e., strong evaluative) realism, but here I think we are beginning to understand more about its specific content: viz., on this view human life is understood in terms of the “telos of communion” (*SA* 764).<sup>28</sup> In particular, Taylor speaks of “the central Christian focus on communion as the goal of God’s action in Creation”: “God didn’t just make us so that we could live according to the laws of his creation, but to participate in his love” (*SA* 764). Moreover, Taylor speaks of communion as the goal not only of God’s action in Creation, but also of his intervention in history. He writes:

God’s intervention in history, and in particular the Incarnation, was intended to transform us, through making us partakers of the communion which God already is and lives. It was meant to effect our “deification” (theiosis). In this crucial sense, salvation is thwarted to the extent that we treat God as an impersonal being, or as merely the creator of an impersonal order to which we have to adjust.

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<sup>27</sup> See *HAL* 58 for an early statement of this view.

<sup>28</sup> In discussions of *A Secular Age* I have seen very little discussion of Taylor’s theistic personalism that is centered on the ‘telos of communion’. However, I think this is key to his whole perspective.

Salvation is only effected by, one might say is, our being in communion with God through the community of humans in communion, viz., the church. (SA 278-9)

Several pages later Taylor further elaborates:

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 life blood 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. (SA 282; cf. 158, 246, 739, 754-5)

In order to get clearer on Taylor's discussion here of communion as the goal of God's action in Creation as well as of God's intervention in history I think it is important to examine the role of *nature* and *grace* in the realization of this purpose. By 'nature' I am referring to our *human nature*, which on a theistic teleological view we are said to possess as the intended result of God's action in Creation.<sup>29</sup> By 'grace' I mean the way in which God's intervenes in history and "establishes the new relationship with us by loving us, in a way we cannot unaided love each other." Let us first examine the role of nature.

In Chapter III I already discussed how Taylor affirms a teleological conception of human nature in which "there is a distinction between distorted and authentic self-understanding", where "the latter can in a sense be said to follow *a direction in being*" (Taylor 1985d, 384-5; my emphasis). This 'direction in being' is precisely what Taylor's philosophical anthropology seeks to identify; i.e., it "tries to define certain fundamental features about human beings, their place in nature, their defining capacities [...], and their

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<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that this human nature, which was intended by God, only came to fruition of course through the long evolutionary process.

most powerful or basic motivations, goals, needs, and aspirations” (Taylor 2005, 35; cf. *EB* 3-4). Finally, the “study of human nature and its fundamental goals” is said to be important for an Aristotelian form of ethical reflection in which the central premise is that “there is a form of life which is higher or more properly human than others, and that the dim intuition of the ordinary man to this effect can be vindicated in its substance or else corrected in its contents by a deeper understanding of human nature” (*EB* 4; cf. *SA* 589).

Now, a theistic teleological view is going to interpret such ‘direction in being’ or ‘fundamental goals’ of human nature in a particular way. As John Cottingham puts it: “The theist believes, sustained by faith, that the careful use of reason, and the sensitive and reflective response to our deepest inclinations, points us towards a life which is the life that a being of the greatest benevolence, goodness, mercy, and love has desired for us, and has destined us to achieve” (Cottingham 2005, 52). One of these ‘deepest inclinations’ or ‘directions in being’ that is identified by Taylor, as previously mentioned, is the natural human draw to a wider space of solidarity. At this point I think we can now better understand Taylor’s ‘theistic hunches’ about what this draw to a wider space of solidarity says about us as human beings: viz., this can be interpreted as an aspect of our having been made in the image of God, which means – as we have been discussing – that we have been made with a capacity for and natural tendency towards communion with others persons. Indeed, on this view our ultimate purpose and highest good is to be found in the fullest realization of such communion (see *SA* 702).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting that this theistic teleology centered on the goal of communion is actually briefly mentioned at the end of Taylor’s well-known essay “The Politics of Recognition”, though it is attributed to Herder (one of Taylor’s intellectual heroes). In the context of discussing the grounding for the presumption of the equal worth of other cultures, Taylor writes: “One ground that has been proposed is religious. Herder, for instance, had a view of divine providence, according to which all this variety of culture was no mere accident but meant to bring about a greater harmony. I can’t rule out such a view” (*PA* 256). In the context of discussing the importance of understanding different religious and non-religious ideals of

To illustrate this view Taylor discusses the parent-child relationship where the parent leads the child along a path of growth. This succeeds, he says, only where a bond of love arises in which “each is a gift to the other, where each gives and receives, and where the line between giving and receiving is blurred” (*SA* 702). He then remarks:

Could it be that, in a very different way, something analogous lies behind the sense of solidarity between equals that pushes us to help people, even on the other side of the globe? The sense here would be that we are somehow given to each other, and that ideally, at the limit, this points us towards a relationship where giving and receiving merge. (*SA* 702)

For the theist, the sense that “we are somehow given to each other” can be interpreted to mean that this is part of the purpose for which we were created and towards which we are naturally drawn. When Taylor says that this “points us towards a relationship where giving and receiving merge” I think this should be understood as a central aspect of the fullest kind of communion. As discussed in my account of self-transcendence through communion, such communion involves a widening of our sense of self through affectively identifying with another person such that we wish and pursue good for him or her as though for our own self. It is with respect to this sort of relationship, I believe, that we can see the truth of Taylor’s remark that the “fullness of human life” is “something that happens between people rather than within each one.”

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fullness in his “Afterward” to *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, Taylor says: “it’s possible to build friendship across these boundaries based on a real mutual sense, a powerful sense, of what moves the other person. [...] Now, what has that got to do with Christianity? Everything, to me: that is what it’s all about. It’s all about reconciliation. It’s all about reconciliation between human beings, and it doesn’t simply mean within the Church, and it doesn’t mean that it’s conditioned on being within the Church. [...] I resonate with Herder’s idea of humanity as the orchestra, in which all the differences between human beings could ultimately sound together in harmony” (Taylor 2010a, 319-20). This also connects up with Taylor’s view of ‘catholicism’ as expressed in *A Catholic Modernity?* He defines it in terms of “unity through wholeness”, which involves “reconciliation, a kind of oneness” that is “the oneness of diverse beings who come to see that they cannot attain wholeness alone, that their complementarity is essential, rather than of beings who come to accept that they are ultimately identical. Or perhaps we might put it: complementarity and identity will both be part of our ultimate oneness” (*CM* 14). In other words, this involves “unity-across-difference, as against unity-through-identity” (*CM* 14; cf. *SA* 754-5; Elshtain 1999).

Taylor is certainly putting forward a lofty ideal here, one involving great heights of self-transcendence in love or concern for other persons. But even if it is true that we have a natural draw towards such wider solidarity or communion, as aforementioned we also have natural tendencies towards self-enclosure. Appeals to human nature in a merely descriptive sense are thus problematic. As discussed in Chapter III, it is part of our evolutionary inheritance that we have been endowed with natural tendencies not only towards love, compassion, solidarity, etc., but also – in varying degrees – towards narrow self-concern, sexual license, dominance, violence, hatred, etc. This might seem to call into question a theistic teleological view of human nature. Indeed, when discussing the human propensity to violence, Taylor asks: “how can human nature as we know it be in the image of God?” In response he offers a hypothesis (previously discussed in Chapter III): viz., “humans are born out of the animal kingdom, to be guided by God”, which requires a transformation of our *de facto* desires so that they are directed towards our telos of communion with God and other human beings (SA 668). Seen from this perspective, Taylor writes: “There is now something higher in one’s life, a dimension of something incomparably higher, which one can’t turn one’s back on totally, a dimension of longing and striving which one can’t ignore” (SA 668). In other words, on this theistic interpretation of the evolutionary process we see our life within a larger purposeful framework in which a certain mode of life is judged to be ‘incomparably higher’, viz., a life involving communion with God and other human beings. This allows then for an appeal to a normative – rather than merely descriptive – view of human nature where there is a judgment about what is “noblest and best within us” (Cottingham 2003, 71): e.g., we judge that love/compassion is part of what is noblest and best within us and thus

what ought to be acted upon, as opposed to the desire for dominance. Such a normative view of human nature, I believe, is behind Taylor's statement that there is "a form of life which is higher or more properly human than others" (*EB* 4).

We can see then how Taylor's theistic teleological view provides a moral ontology (or ontological background picture) that can make sense of the strong evaluative judgment that there is something of 'incomparably higher worth' involved in loving other persons with an unconditional love – i.e., with a love that is not conditional upon what others have made of themselves – and also that this strong good of unconditional love is normative for our desires. In particular, Taylor's theistic view of human beings enables us to specify constitutive goods with respect to ourselves and others. With respect to ourselves, the constitutive good concerns our potential for communion with God and other human beings, and this potential is regarded as something we ought to actualize if we are to attain the fullness of human life. With respect to others, the constitutive good concerns their potential for sharing in this highest, most fulfilling mode of life in communion with God and one another, which makes them worthy of our unconditional love and concern (i.e., they do not have to have realized this potential).

As important as this theistic teleological view of human beings is for making possible an unconditional love for others, Taylor thinks that more is in fact needed in light of the difficulty of concretely loving particular human beings. This difficulty is due not only to the conflict we often experience between our natural tendency towards self-transcendence in love or concern for others and our natural tendency towards self-enclosure, but also because particular human beings are not always easy to love, e.g., because of certain vices or other undesirable characteristics. Taylor writes:

[One] might conclude that this kind of response to the image of God in others is not really a possibility for us humans, and one might not be able to make sense of this notion of our being given to each other. I think this can be real for us, but only to the extent that we open ourselves to God, which means, in fact, overstepping the limits set in theory by exclusive humanisms. If one does believe that, then one has something very important to say to modern times, something that addresses the fragility of what all of us, believers and unbelievers alike, most value in these times. (*SA* 703)

When Taylor speaks here of opening ourselves to God he specifically has in mind the importance of opening ourselves to God's *agape* for us and this takes us into the domain of *grace* (see *SS* 410, 451-2, 516).

According to Taylor, there is a fullness to God's affirmation and love of humanity that is beyond what human beings can achieve unaided. However, through opening ourselves to God's love for us we are enabled to participate in this love and become a 'channel' of it towards others.<sup>31</sup> What this means, as I understand it, is that we can come to understand the fullness of God's affirmation and love by receiving it for ourselves and from this we are inspired to make God's way of seeing and loving humanity our own. We can describe this as a kind of 'loving together' with God of other human beings; i.e., we become part of the 'stream of love'. In this way we fulfill our ultimate purpose of communion with God and other human beings. I should add that opening ourselves to God's love in this way also seems important for actually coming to affirm that our lives do indeed have such an ultimate purpose of communion, which can be challenged by our own tendencies towards self-enclosure and the ways in which human beings in the concrete may be difficult to love (see Taylor 1994b, 226-7; *SA* 8, 10-1).

Obviously an appeal to God's *agape* as a crucial moral source for an ethic of universal human concern will involve a significant measure of faith. However, Taylor

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<sup>31</sup> See *PHS* 234; *SS* 270, 451-2, 516, 521; Taylor 1994b, 225-6.

thinks there is also important evidence to support his view: viz., the lives of certain ‘saintly’ figures such as St. Francis, Mother Teresa, and Jean Vanier, who seem to most fully connect their lives to God’s *agape* and who also seem thereby to go farthest in their love for others.<sup>32</sup> Each of these saintly figures is especially concerned with those who are most marginalized, abject, and irremediably broken. By contrast, Taylor sees naturalist perspectives – in the broad sense of excluding the supernatural – as having a tendency to neglect the failures, the blackguards, the useless, the dying, the mentally disabled, fetuses with genetic defects, and others that negate the promise of our human potential (*SS* 517; *SA* 684). He acknowledges that some might regard this as a point in favor of naturalism; e.g., we can think of Peter Singer’s views on infanticide, euthanasia, etc. (*SS* 517; Taylor 2003a, 318). However, Taylor says, “the careers of Mother Teresa or Jean Vanier seem to point to a different pattern, emerging from a Christian spirituality”, i.e., one that involves greater self-transcendence in love or concern for others (*SS* 517). Through connecting their lives to God’s *agape* for human beings they have a way of ‘seeing-good’ where otherwise the goodness of a particular human being is not readily apparent (*SS* 448-9, 454, 516-7). In other words, faith and grace enable one to see even the most abject as loved by God and as having intrinsic worth in virtue of being made for the ultimate purpose of communion. In sum, Taylor says: “great as the power of naturalist sources might be, the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater” (*SS* 518).

### III. RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

Now that we have laid out in some detail Taylor’s case for this claim that theistic moral sources have an ‘incomparably greater’ potential than naturalistic sources for an

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<sup>32</sup> On St. Francis of Assisi see: *SS* 43; *SA* 230, 431, 436, 631, 729-30. On Mother Teresa see: *PHS* 234; *SS* 517; Taylor 1994d, 183-4; 2003a, 317-8; *SA* 684, 727, 765. On Jean Vanier see: *SS* 517; *SA* 765.



ethic of universal human concern, I would like to take up three main lines of criticism in regard to this case. First, I will respond – at the greatest length – to objections to Taylor’s view about the inferiority of non-religious sources compared to theistic sources for an ethic of universal human concern. Second, I will respond to criticisms of the ethic of universal human concern itself and the ‘moral saintliness’ that it seems to require. Finally, I will respond to the charge against Taylor that in arguing for the importance of theistic moral sources he fails in his political commitment to pluralism.

*Are Non-Religious Sources Inferior to Theistic Sources?*

The claim of Taylor’s that has seemed especially objectionable to a number of commentators is his claim that an unconditional love based on being made in the image of God is fully possible “only to the extent that we open ourselves to God, which means, in fact, overstepping the limits set in theory by exclusive humanisms.”<sup>33</sup> However, it is worth noting that since Taylor is speaking here of an unconditional love *based* on a view of human beings as made in the image of God, the limits set in theory by exclusive humanisms have already been overstepped. So the point really has to do with how those who already accept Taylor’s theistic view of human beings can find the resources to fully carrying through on what it requires. This is all part of Taylor’s ‘Christian solution’ to the problem of misanthropy, or more broadly, to the problem of the human tendency towards self-enclosure. Thus, it remains possible that there are other solutions, such as a Buddhist solution or a Jewish solution (which of course would share much in common with the Christian view). However, what Taylor’s overall argument certainly entails is that exclusive humanism will have greater difficulties in maintaining an unconditional love,

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<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Smith and Laitinen 2009, 68; Fraser 2007, 43-50; 2005, 239-44; Connolly 2004, 179; Smith 2002, 232; Grimm 2001, 248-9.

i.e., a love that is “not based on what you the recipient have made of yourself”, and this is what a number of commentators want to contest.

Ian Fraser, e.g., cites studies on giving that suggest that “altruism is the main motivating factor” and others that suggest that “motives are always mixed”. Such studies, he thinks, do not support “Taylor’s contention that a truly benevolent act is only possible if you open yourself up to God” (Fraser 2007, 46). Fraser also objects to what he sees as an air of superiority in Taylor’s position where “those of us who do not open ourselves up to God are incapable of unconditional love whereas those who do are” (ibid.). Finally, he objects to Taylor’s view because he sees it as holding that when unconditional love is given to beneficiaries “they are a means to an end – loving God – rather than an end in themselves. [...] [We] find that conditionality is also present because it is not caring for people for their own sake, but only as vehicles for showing your love of God. The offer of unconditional love is therefore actually conditional on loving God” (ibid., 49).

In response to these objections it first needs to be said that they involve some significant misunderstandings of Taylor’s views. For one thing, nowhere does Taylor maintain the extreme position that “a truly benevolent act is only possible if you open yourself up to God.” A truly benevolent act is simply one that involves wishing and pursuing good for others for their own sake and Taylor clearly thinks our modern, secular age is full of such actions by both religious and non-religious people. The real question for Taylor is: what viewpoint can best sustain these benevolent actions and also best overcome misanthropy and other forms of self-enclosure? Or, as he puts it: “The truly important question is how one manages to see human beings as worthy, as eliciting of love. No one but God can manage this way of seeing and loving all the time, but we can

all do it some of the time” (Taylor 1994d, 183-4). What this suggests is that for human beings attaining an unconditional love for others is a matter of degree and Taylor’s view is that those who connect themselves to God can do so most fully.<sup>34</sup> But this in no way denies that non-theists can act in a truly benevolent way.

In an extended response to Fraser (Fraser 2005), Ruth Abbey also maintains that Taylor does not hold the extreme position that Fraser attributes to him about truly benevolent actions only being possible for theists. She gives three reasons: first, Taylor acknowledges non-religious moral sources for practical benevolence; second, he acknowledges that religious moral sources of practical benevolence confront the same dangers as non-religious ones and this suggests the difference between them is not as great for Taylor as Fraser seems to think; third, Taylor acknowledges that his belief in the greater power of theistic and particularly Christian moral sources for inspiring unconditional love is a matter of faith, rather than certainty (Abbey 2006, 169-70). Each of these three reasons finds support in what I have written above. I would only add the qualifier that when Taylor acknowledges that his position involves faith, this should not be understood as ‘blind faith’, i.e., faith without any reasons supporting. Rather, as discussed, it is a matter of ‘anticipatory confidence’, i.e., he believes he has well-founded

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<sup>34</sup> This is partly an empirical issue. Hence Taylor points to evidence of certain saintly lives. To really establish this point would require a listing and comparison of the most admirable lives among all religious and non-religious persons, which is of course far beyond the scope of this work. My own sense is that while there are certainly very admirable people on both sides of the aisle (as well as not-so-admirable people), most often the ‘highest flights’ of self-transcending love “have been flown for religious ideals”, as William James puts it (James 2004, 230; I will return to discuss James later). But besides this difficult to establish empirical issue, there is also the issue of which perspective provides greater resources in terms of their respective moral ontologies for inspiring the ‘highest flights’ of self-transcending love. This is the issue I am especially focusing on here and I think a compelling argument can be made for the claim that a certain theistic perspective provides greater resources than a naturalist perspective. It should be mentioned that there is another ‘resources’ issue – which I am not discussing here – that has to do with the ‘spiritual practices’ within particular religious traditions (e.g., prayer, meditations, etc.) that help to cultivate self-transcending love (see Cottingham 2003, Ch. 3; De Botton 2012).

reasons for his view, even though he cannot offer a full proof (especially in regard to God's existence). Indeed, my task in this chapter is to fill out these reasons.

The second point of misunderstanding by Fraser is in his view that when Taylor says we need to open ourselves to God in order to most fully achieve unconditional love for others this means we love others as a means to loving God, rather than for their own sake. Once again, nowhere does Taylor put forward such a view. Instead, the point is that by opening ourselves to God's love for us we are enabled to participate in God's love for others *for their own sake*. In other words, receiving such love from God enables us to see human beings as God sees them – i.e., as made in the image of God and worthy of unconditional love, even where this is not readily apparent – and thus to love human beings as God loves them. Furthermore, to say, as Fraser does, that such love is not really unconditional because it is conditional upon loving God confuses different points of conditionality. As defined by Taylor, unconditional love is a love that is “not based on what you the recipient have made of yourself”, but there will of course be certain conditions that must be met in order to achieve such unconditional love – e.g., consciousness, the acquisition of virtuous character, acquaintance with the person, etc. – which do not undermine its particular sense of unconditionality.<sup>35</sup>

Besides these points of misunderstanding, a few other remarks should be made. First of all, to merely cite studies that suggest that “altruism is the main motivating factor” in philanthropic acts does not actually address the issue that is at stake, which is: what is the best moral source for this altruism? Is it just a matter of natural sympathy, or does it involve the claim that there is something higher, nobler, and more fully human

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<sup>35</sup> Abbey makes a very similar point about the meaning of ‘unconditional love’ in her response to Fraser (Abbey 2006, 170-1). What my response in this paragraph adds especially is an explanation of the relationship between loving God and loving people for their own sake.

about such altruism? If the latter is the case, what is the background ontology that can make sense of this? In order to argue against Taylor's view that theism provides the best moral sources for such altruism – where the moral sources are God's *agape* and the view of human beings as made in the image of God – a clear counter position needs to be taken about what the non-religious moral source is for such altruism and how it is equal or superior to theistic moral sources. Second, to argue for a position in this debate does not mean that one adopts an 'air of superiority', as Fraser charges against Taylor, unless one thinks that arguing for a position in any debate means adopting an air of superiority.<sup>36</sup>

Now, in regard to the argument that Taylor does give about the inadequacy of non-religious moral sources for an ethic of universal concern, Nicholas Smith and Arto Laitinen have charged Taylor with confusing "unconditional respect for persons", which is based on "the mere fact that they are humans", and "conditional appraisal respect", which is based on one's actual achievements (Smith and Laitinen 2009, 65-6). This charge is directed specifically at Taylor's claim that the disappointment of actual human performance when compared to high ideals of human potential for greatness and goodness can lead one to question whether such human beings are really worthy of concern. But we must ask: what does it mean to speak, as Smith and Laitinen do, about an unconditional respect for persons that is based on the "mere fact that they are humans"? Surely built into 'human' here is some notion of human potential that is operative as a constitutive good and commands unconditional respect (otherwise it is not clear why a human is deserving of this unconditional respect rather than, say, an ant, or a rock, or a deer). This means that unconditional respect (or love) is based on a notion of

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<sup>36</sup> Abbey suggests that Fraser may in fact be adopting his own air of superiority when he claims that those who act from religious motivations lack autonomy, since he does not offer much argument in support of this claim (Abbey 2006, 171). I discussed this autonomy objection in the last chapter.

human potential, but it is unconditional because it does not require *actual achievements* in the realization of this potential. However, as I understand Taylor's argument, problems can arise when there is significant failure in realizing this human potential since it can call into question whether such 'failures' really had the potential that would make them worthy of unconditional respect and love in the first place. Hence we need ways of seeing-good or seeing-worth where it is not readily apparent.<sup>37</sup> But none of this involves confusing unconditional and conditional respect.<sup>38</sup>

Smith and Laitinen ultimately contend that there are "unconditional universal moral demands based on the mere fact that the others are humans and possess human rights and human dignity", and when combined with self-interest, sympathy, and a sense of one's own dignity as well as institutional supports there is sufficient motivation for an ethic of universal human concern (ibid., 66-8). However, the problem is that they never seek to defend a particular conception of human dignity; rather, they just assume that there is some adequate conception, which begs the question that is at issue. Taylor's own response is to agree that there are these other motivational possibilities, but he says:

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<sup>37</sup> There are of course difficult cases that arise with respect to severe mental disabilities (see n. 4 in Chapter II). It is here that a theological seeing-good may be especially important (see *SS* 517-8; cf. *SA* 684; Taylor 2003a, 317-8). It is beyond the scope of this work to try to address this difficult topic in any sufficient way. However, for more on this topic from a Christian perspective see Jean Vanier's *Becoming Human* (Vanier 1998; cf. *SS* 517). One of Vanier's central themes is how people with mental disabilities can teach us about our need to give and receive love (because of their own clear expression of this need) and so teach us about 'becoming human'. Seen in light of a Christian teleological view centered on the 'telos of communion', people with mental disabilities can be said to have an important place in this telos and thus to have a fundamental dignity (there are of course other perspectives that might make this case too). Taylor himself says of the basis of human rights: "The capacity to love [...] is more important to me than the capacity to reason" (Taylor 2010d). There are also even more difficult cases, such as when someone is born without a brain and has only a brain stem. Such people may still teach us about love/communion in virtue of being radically dependent on the care of others and so a theological seeing-good may still be possible here. But much more needs to be filled out in these cases.

<sup>38</sup> In his own response to this charge, Taylor writes: "Of course, I'm not *confusing* unconditional with conditional respect. It's not a matter of how you *show* that we ought to respect all human beings, it's a question of whether you're capable of carrying through on this; and if you aren't, of what you fall back on" (Taylor 2009a, 101). I think my response helps to fill out what Taylor is saying here.

[...] it's worth asking the question whether they are in the last analysis adequate, or whether other sources, usually associated with religions, like the *agape* I mention, and the *karuna* which is central to Buddhism, can carry us farther. These questions can only be answered by a close study of the actual human record, together with a sensitive and perceptive understanding of the different motivations at play. (Taylor 2009a, 101)

There are those such as Quentin Skinner who do want to claim that a non-religious view comes out better on this score than a theistic view. Given the history of religious violence, Skinner says: “the idea of recommending the re-adoption of the same theistic perspective is, I think, likely to strike anyone familiar with the historical record as a case of offering a cure for our ills potentially worse than the disease” (Skinner 1994, 47). Moreover, he objects to the idea that we need God in order to appreciate the full significance of human life because he thinks the Enlightenment project has successfully refuted this view: “For Hume and his modern descendants there is no reason whatever to suppose that human life in its significance cannot be appreciated in the absence of God. Not only have they argued that theism is a dangerously irrational creed; they have added that the death of God leaves us with an opportunity, perhaps even a duty, to affirm the value of our humanity more fully than ever before” (ibid.).

Taylor's response to this is two-fold: first, as discussed in the last chapter, he thinks any perspective – whether theistic or non-theistic – that has high aspirations also has great dangers (recall the atrocities of the last century). But, he says, “if we determined only to put our faith in something which gave absolutely no cause for fear, we might end up also without hope for human beings” (Taylor 1994b, 225; cf. *SS* 519-21).<sup>39</sup> Second, the key issue for Taylor concerns what perspective can best enable us to live up to our

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<sup>39</sup> We should add here that Skinner seems to neglect the great good that has also been done by high-aspiring theists throughout history. Think, e.g., of the abolitionist movement and the civil rights movement.

highest ideals while avoiding the worst debasement of these ideals.<sup>40</sup> In response to Skinner's claim that "the death of God leaves us with an opportunity, perhaps even a duty, to affirm the value of our humanity more fully than ever before", Taylor writes:

The issue is: what kind of affirmation can one make? I don't want to prejudge this. I have a hunch that there is a scale of affirmation of humanity by God which cannot be matched by humans rejecting God. But I am far from having proof. Let's try to see. In my view, this is the question: how much *can* you affirm? Just talking of 'opportunity' or 'duty' is beside the point. As though you could just turn it on. And as though once you had, the resulting commitment would be no cause for fear. This is perhaps the ultimate 'liberal complacency'. (Taylor 1994b, 226)

In the preceding section I have tried to show that Taylor's view is more than just a mere 'hunch' and indeed it can be filled out in a substantive 'personalist' perspective centered on the telos of communion between persons (both human and divine). I would like to try to explore the significance of this perspective even further now in this context.

In the above passage what Taylor seems to especially question about Skinner's view is the notion that the affirmation of the value of our humanity is something that we can, as it were, 'turn on' at will. This sort of 'self-authorization' view – which is typically connected to certain extreme versions of disenchantment in which the world is seen as impersonal and without purpose – is something Taylor explores in more depth in *A Secular Age*. What I would like to try to do here is to highlight the difference between such views and Taylor's personalist perspective in terms of their motivational implications for an ethic of universal human concern.

In regard to such self-authorization views, one important version that Taylor considers is that of Isaiah Berlin, who claims that in the end human beings choose among

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<sup>40</sup> This issue was raised near the end of the last chapter when discussing the objection that post-Axial religions (i.e., affirmers of vertical transcendence) pose a threat to the modern moral order. In that discussion I said I would come back to examine the issue in this chapter, which I am now doing.



ultimate values that emerge contingently from their past and identity (SA 582). However, Berlin thinks that no skepticism about these values follows from their radical contingency or lack of eternal validity:

Principles are no less sacred because their duration cannot be guaranteed. Indeed, the very desire for guarantees that our values are eternal and secure in some objective heaven is perhaps only a craving for the certainties of childhood or the absolute values of our primitive past. ‘To realise the relative validity of one’s convictions’, said an admirable writer of our time, ‘and yet stand for them unflinchingly is what distinguishes a civilised man from a barbarian.’ To demand more than this is perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow such a need to determine one’s practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity. (Berlin 2000, 242)

Taylor sees a common narrative expressed in this passage in which one moves from childhood to adulthood, or from barbarity to civilization, by progressing towards the point of being capable of self-authorization (SA 582).

A very similar position is found in Richard Rorty’s *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, which is influenced by Berlin (Rorty 1989, 46ff). Here Rorty advocates the stance of ‘the liberal ironist’ against ‘the metaphysician’ and ‘the theologian’. The basic difference between the liberal ironist and the metaphysician or theologian is that the former is able to recognize the ultimate contingency of his or her most deeply held beliefs – or ‘final vocabularies’ – whereas the latter seeks to ground such beliefs in some view about the nature of reality (ibid., 73-8). According to Rorty, one of the liberal ironist’s most deeply held beliefs is that “cruelty is the worst thing we do.” However, he says: “For liberal ironists, there is no answer to the question “Why not be cruel?” – no noncircular theoretical backup for the belief that cruelty is horrible” (ibid., xv). Whereas the metaphysician or theologian might want to answer this question by giving an account of the dignity inherent in human nature, the liberal ironist sees the stance against cruelty

simply as part of his or her final vocabulary arrived at through a contingent historical process that has heightened our feelings of human solidarity. Such solidarity, on Rorty's view, requires "the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers" (ibid., xvi). Moreover: "Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people" (ibid.). For the liberal ironist, our imaginative ability for solidarity will depend upon our powers of 'redescription', i.e., our ability to imaginatively redescribe those whom we once saw as 'one of them' as now 'one of us' given our common ability to feel pain and suffer humiliation (ibid.).<sup>41</sup>

A similar line of reasoning can also be used with respect to justice/human rights. Indeed, there are a number of well-known thinkers who advocate a political or pragmatic justification for justice/human rights, rather than a 'metaphysical' justification (see Ignatieff 2001; Rawls 1999; 1992; 2005; 2001). In other words, the principles of justice/human rights are understood simply as a matter of a political agreement forged in a particular historical and social context on the basis of enlightened self-interest, as opposed to being grounded in an account of the dignity inherent in human nature. Once again we can see a self-authorization view operative here.

Another important version of the self-authorization stance that Taylor discusses is expressed in the work of Albert Camus. In this case the values that we endorse arise not so much out of our past and what we have become, but from a new revolutionary situation. "In Camus," Taylor writes, "the sense is strong that this self-authorization takes place over against a universe which is silent and indifferent, and which defeats all

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<sup>41</sup> Rorty believes that this task of creating human solidarity through imaginative redescription is better aided by novels and ethnographies that make us sensitive to the point of view of others than by philosophical and theological treatises (ibid., 94).

attempts to find some meaning in it” (SA 583). A crucial category for Camus is thus the “absurd”, which arises when our human longings for meaning meet with “the unreasonable silence of the world” (SA 583). According to Camus, the best response to the absurd is to ‘revolt’, i.e., to affirm life in the face of its absurdity. Moreover, he believes that “we find in the movement of revolt the common ground on which men can unite” (SA 585). As Taylor puts it, “the effective rebellion means fighting the battles we can fight, for the limited, provisional happiness we can achieve, wherever this is to be found, and whoever will be the beneficiaries, without exclusion” (SA 585). But one does so knowing that although there may be provisional victories, ultimately the fight is a ‘lost cause’ (SA 586). We find a very similar perspective expressed in Bertrand Russell’s essay “A Free Man’s Worship”, where he writes: “United with his fellow men by the strongest of all ties, the tie of a common doom, the free man finds that a new vision is with him always, shedding over every daily task the light of love” (Russell 1957, 115). According to Taylor, one of the key sources of motivation for such views is the sense of one’s own dignity as a rational agent in being able to lucidly and courageously confront a meaningless universe and certain ultimate defeat for our projects but still affirm life and struggle for human happiness (SA 585-6, 695).

But we must ask: how convincing are these self-authorization views? In an important passage I previously cited from in Chapter III, Taylor writes:

[How] coherent is this view of the creation of meaning and value in the face of the void? [...] Can the values we take as binding really be invented? Or in the less radical version of Berlin, where we admit that they emerge from our past and our identity, what does it mean to endorse them in their temporality and relativity? [...] Moreover, what are we to make of the aura surrounding these standards, the fact that they command my admiration and allegiance? That is, after all, what the references to God and the cosmos were attempting to make sense of. It is not at all clear that Humeans, Kantians, let alone Nietzscheans, can offer a more convincing

account of this than the traditional ones. And finally, who has decreed that the transformations we can hope and strive for in human life are restricted to those which can be carried out in a meaningless universe without a transcendent source? The narratives of self-authorization, when examined more closely, are far from self-evident; and yet their assuming axiomatic status in the thinking of many people, is one facet of a powerful and widespread ['Closed World Structure'], imposing a closed spin on the immanent frame we all share. (SA 589)

Although Taylor states things somewhat tentatively here by putting a number of challenges in the form of questions, the challenges are nevertheless clear. It may be true that some people can be inspired to some extent by the heroic ideal of acting lucidly and courageously for human happiness in the face of a completely disenchanting, meaningless universe; nevertheless, such a stance does not clearly follow from facing up to such a view of the world. Indeed, it seems that depending on how one happens to be constituted it can lead just as easily to despair and to the opposite of humanitarian love, viz., to selfish pursuits ('eat, drink, and be merry...'). Moreover, while there is certainly something admirable about those who take up the heroic stance, nevertheless, it remains questionable whether it can really be an adequate source, i.e., "whether it can really motivate us to carry through on our aspiration to universal human dignity and well-being" (SA 695). It is also not clear that those who take up this stance have adequate resources for overcoming despair and self-enclosure.

Similar difficulties also seem to plague the historicist views of Berlin, Rorty, and the like. Insofar as we happen to have feelings of solidarity with others and are moved by the prospect of extending these feelings more widely, then something like the liberal ironist position might be a viable option. However, the problem is that we also have tendencies towards self-enclosure, and apart from affirming certain strong evaluative judgments there would be no categorical or conclusive reason for why we *ought* to

overcome such tendencies. But it is precisely such strong evaluative judgments and their implied moral ontology that the liberal ironist position is committed to rejecting. This position is thus very similar to the Humean view discussed earlier, which Taylor rejects as an account of the draw to a wider space of solidarity. As we recall, Taylor says of such a view that it does not account for “our sense that there is something higher, nobler, more fully human about universal sympathy” (*SA* 694). It seems that the same thing could be said about the liberal ironist position. Moreover, insofar as it shuns such strong evaluative judgments it seems to lack the motivational power of positions that do have a sense that “there is something higher, nobler, more fully human about universal sympathy”. Something similar could also be said regarding the historicist accounts of justice/human rights based on enlightened self-interest: viz., they lack the motivational power of positions that affirm a view of human dignity that is inherent within our human nature.

By contrast, we have seen how an ethic of universal human concern is at home in Taylor’s personalist view, which is centered on the telos of communion. This allows us to interpret our natural directedness towards a wider space of solidarity in terms of the sense that “we are somehow given to each other, and that ideally, at the limit, this points us towards a relationship where giving and receiving merge” such that the “fullness of human life” is seen as “something that happens between people rather than within each one” (*SA* 702; *CM* 113).<sup>42</sup> This also informs a particular conception of human dignity in terms of our being made in the ‘image of God’. Such a theistic teleological interpretation

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<sup>42</sup> Although the ethic of universal human concern has come into greater prominence in the modern period, it is important to recall that Taylor sees this as an outworking of something inherent within human nature: viz., the draw to an ever wider, more universal space of solidarity with others (see *SA* 254-5, 576-7, 608-9, 692-703; *PA* 56-7). Indeed, as we saw above, he views this wider, more universal space of solidarity to be something that people have been drawn to throughout human history and cites the examples of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Stoicism.

provides a deeper intelligibility to our natural directedness towards a wider solidarity than is possible on the impersonalist, disenchanting view and therefore it seems to provide greater resources for inspiring one to more fully realize it.

Now, it should be recalled from Chapter III that there are some thinkers, such as Paul Davies and Thomas Nagel, who have sought to defend the viability of a non-theistic view of cosmic purpose, e.g., where “[each] of our lives is a part of the lengthy process of the universe gradually waking up and becoming aware of itself” (Nagel 2012, 85). I think that if such views are viable options then they would certainly enable a kind of re-enchantment. However, it is not clear how much help they would be for inspiring an ethic of universal human concern. For one thing, because they are non-theistic they still conceive of the universe in impersonal terms. Thus, rather than seeing the universe in terms of the ‘telos of communion’, they see it more in terms of the ‘telos of knowledge’, i.e., the telos of “the universe gradually waking up and becoming aware of itself.” While this can certainly inspire scientific and philosophical endeavors, it seems to be of more limited use for an ethic of universal human concern, though it might inform a conception of human dignity that can be helpful for such an ethic.

Setting aside the possibility of such non-theistic views of cosmic purpose, I think it is worthwhile to briefly consider here the support that is offered by William James to Taylor’s view that theism provides greater resources for inspiring an ethic of universal human concern than non-theistic views such as Camus’ and others’ that see the universe as purposeless and meaningless.

Like Taylor, James thinks that religion, and theism in particular, is best able to inspire the greatest degree of self-transcendence in love or concern for others, or what he

calls ‘saintliness’ and the ‘strenuous mood’ (James 2004, 230; 1956, 211-3).<sup>43</sup> He writes: “in a merely human world without a God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power” (ibid., 212). Speaking specifically about “those claims of remote posterity which constitute the last appeal of the religion of humanity”, he says: “We do not love these men of the future keenly enough” (ibid.). By contrast, he contends:

When [...] we believe that a God is there, and that he is one of the claimants, the infinite perspective opens out. [...] The more imperative ideals now begin to speak with an altogether new objectivity and significance [...]. Every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life’s evils, is set free in those who have religious faith. For this reason the strenuous type of character will on the battlefield of human history always outwear the easy-going type, and religion will drive irreligion to the wall. (ibid., 212-3)

James goes on to further contend:

[...] the stable and systematic moral universe for which the ethical philosopher asks is fully possible only in a world where there is a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands. [...] In the interests of our own ideal of systematically unified moral truth, therefore, we, as would-be philosophers, must postulate a divine thinker, and pray for the victory of the religious cause. (ibid., 213-4)

Indeed, this idea of a moral universe that embodies a cosmic moral purpose seems to be a key aspect of theism that makes a significant motivational difference for the moral life.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> In his discussion of ‘Saintliness’ in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James writes: “the best fruits of religious experience are the best things that history has to show. They have always been esteemed so; here if anywhere is the genuinely strenuous life; and to call to mind a succession of such examples [...] is to feel encouraged and uplifted and washed in better moral air. The highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves have been flown for religious ideals” (James 2004, 230). James goes on to identify ‘saintliness’ as the “collective name for the ripe fruits of religion in a character”, which has the following characteristics: (1) a “feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world’s selfish little interests; and a conviction, not merely intellectual, but as it were sensible, of the existence of an Ideal Power”; (2) a “sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life, and a willing self-surrender to its control”; (3) an “immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of the confining selfhood melt down”; and (4) a “shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections, towards ‘yes, yes,’ and away from ‘no,’ where the claims of the non-ego are concerned” (ibid., 239-40; cf. *VRT* 37). In other words, saintliness represents the heights of human achievement in self-transcending love or concern for others.

<sup>44</sup> The life and writings of Martin Luther King Jr. provide an excellent illustration of this point. For instance, consider the following passage: “When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of

This is a point that James develops further in his discussion of the pragmatic difference between materialism and theism in the third lecture of *Pragmatism*. On the materialist view, he says, life on earth is ultimately seen as heading towards “death tragedy”, not only individually but also collectively due to the eventual death of our solar system. This means that all our great achievements and loves “will be as if they had not been” (James 1981, 49-50). By contrast, he claims that theism has a practical superiority over materialism insofar as it “guarantees an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved.” He continues:

A world with a God in it to say the last word, may indeed burn up or freeze, but we then think of him as still mindful of the old ideals and sure to bring them elsewhere to fruition; so that, where he is, tragedy is only provisional and partial, and shipwreck and dissolution not absolutely final things. This need of an eternal moral order is one of the deepest needs of our breast. [...] Here then, in these different emotional and practical appeals, in these adjustments of our concrete attitudes of hope and expectation, and all the delicate consequences which their differences entail, lie the real meanings of materialism and spiritualism [...]. Materialism means simply the denial that the moral order is eternal, and the cutting off of ultimate hopes; spiritualism means the affirmation of an eternal moral order and the letting loose of hope. (ibid., 51)

In other words, James says that spiritualistic faith “deals with a world of *promise*”, whereas “materialism’s sun sets in a sea of disappointment”.<sup>45</sup> This basic difference then has great significance for our mode of being in the world.<sup>46</sup> Spiritualism or theism, James

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the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice. Let us realize that William Cullen Bryant is right: “Truth crushed to earth will rise again.” Let us go out realizing that the Bible is right: “Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” This is hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing to some not too distant tomorrow with a cosmic past tense, “We have overcome, we have overcome, deep in my heart, I did believe we would overcome.”” (King 1986, 252). This passage recalls the theistic idea of the ‘buoyancy of the good’ discussed in the last chapter.

<sup>45</sup> When James speaks here of a “world of *promise*” and in the above passage about God being “mindful of the old ideals and sure to bring them elsewhere to fruition” it is not entirely clear what he means, but presumably he has in mind some idea of God making possible for us a life after death. If not, then it would seem to mean that human beings would have to identify with an eternal moral order that is sustained by God, even if they are not themselves eternal. I think even this more limited view would be significant for a sense of the meaning of life.

<sup>46</sup> In “The Will to Believe” James puts the contrast in personalist versus impersonalist terms: “The more perfection and more eternal aspect of the universe is represented in our religions as having personal



says, “not only incites our more strenuous moments, but it also takes our joyous, careless, trustful moments, and it justifies them” (ibid.).<sup>47</sup>

It is worth noting here that something like James’ account of the practical difference between materialism and theism is given literary expression in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. This can be seen in the contrast between Ivan Karamazov, the morally sensitive atheist who despairs over the evil and suffering in the world, and the elder Zosima, the saintly figure who represents Dostoevsky’s own religious perspective and who proclaims that ‘life is paradise’ in spite of the evil and suffering. The novel seeks to portray the difference belief or lack of belief in a theistic teleological perspective makes in the lives of the characters, especially with respect to cultivating our natural feelings of love for others and the world and for overcoming our conflicting tendencies towards self-enclosure.<sup>48</sup> Zosima sums up the heart of Dostoevsky’s ‘argument’ when he says that we would be altogether lost without the “precious image of Christ before us” (as an ideal of self-transcending love<sup>49</sup>) and our “mysterious sense of our living bond with

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form. The universe is no longer a mere *It* to us, but a *Thou*, if we are religious; and any relation that may be possible from person to person might be possible here” (James 1956, 27-8).

<sup>47</sup> I think James raises an important point here, though I cannot pursue it. The basic idea is that theism is significant not only because it encourages high moral aspirations, but also because it grants us ‘moral holidays’, as he memorably puts it (ibid., 36, 38, 51-2). To take a ‘moral holiday’ is “to let the world wag in its own way, feeling that its issues are in better hands than ours”; i.e., we relax our anxieties or cares occasionally by trusting in a power beyond ourselves (ibid., 36). This notion of a moral holiday seems to find expression, e.g., in the well-known statement by Julian of Norwich that ‘all will be well’. An important issue is then how we should balance these different modes of activity and passivity. It is indicative that James describes the passive stance as a moral *holiday*, suggesting that the active stance has primacy.

<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that when Taylor contends that “great as the power of naturalist sources might be [for an ethic of universal human concern], the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater”, he afterwards remarks: “Dostoevsky has framed this perspective better than I ever could here” (SS 518; cf. SS 10, 447-55; SA 731).

<sup>49</sup> In a notebook Dostoevsky says that he considers the ideal of self-transcending love for all to be the ideal of Christ, who is the “eternal ideal toward which man aspires and is bound to aspire according to nature’s law” (Dostoevsky 1997, 305). Indeed, it is in aspiring after and achieving this ideal that happiness is to be found, as he says: “the greatest use a man can make of his personality, of the fullest development of his *I*, is in one way or another to destroy this *I*, to give himself up wholly to all and everyone, selflessly and wholeheartedly. And that is the greatest happiness” (ibid., 306).

the other world”. If this sense of a transcendent purpose is weakened or destroyed we can then become “indifferent to life, and even come to hate it” (ibid., 320).<sup>50</sup>

We find something very similar in a key claim that Taylor makes in *A Catholic Modernity?*: viz., his claim that “clinging to the primacy of life in the [metaphysical] sense [(i.e., the view that nothing more than this life matters)] is making it harder for us to affirm it wholeheartedly in the [practical] sense” (CM 24-5). This can be seen in the difficulty for exclusive humanism in being able to give a deeper meaning to death and suffering other than as “dangers and enemies to be avoided or combated” (CM 24; cf. SA 320). We have seen in the case of both Camus and Russell an acknowledgement that this ‘combat’ is one that we will ultimately lose. While perhaps some can be motivated by a sense of their own dignity to heroically fight such a losing battle it seems that it can also easily lead to a sense of despair or futility that undermines the motivation for the fight. As James argues, there seems to be a significant practical or motivational difference here between a materialist perspective that sees our life as headed towards a ‘death tragedy’ and a theist perspective that affirms an eternal moral order in which “tragedy is only provisional and partial, and shipwreck and dissolution not absolutely final things.”

As we discussed in the last chapter, to affirm that life is not metaphysically primary means affirming a higher purpose or good beyond life itself, such as devotion to God. This often also includes the hope of eternal life with God and other persons such that life can actually be redefined in terms of that which is beyond our present life. In

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<sup>50</sup> In his *A Writer's Diary* Dostoevsky similarly says: “immortality, promising eternal life, binds people all the more firmly to earth [...] for only with faith in his immortality does a person comprehend his whole wise purpose. Without the conviction of his immortality, the links between the person and the earth are broken; they grow more fragile, they decay, and the loss of a higher meaning in life [...] brings suicide in its wake. [...] In short, the idea of immortality is life itself, life in the full sense; it is its final formula and humanity's principle source of truth and understanding” (Dostoevsky 1994b, 736).

contrast to exclusive humanism, such a perspective allows us to “find in suffering and death – not merely negation, the undoing of fullness and life, but also a place to affirm something that matters beyond life, on which life itself originally draws” (*CM* 20; cf. 109-10; *DC* 4-5, 16-7). We also have seen in the last chapter that Taylor thinks that love by its nature demands eternity because it “loses some of its sense if it doesn’t last” (*SA* 721). He writes: “A deep love already exists against the vicissitudes of life, tying together past and present [...]. By its very nature it participates in gathered time. And so death can seem a defeat, the ultimate dispersal which remains ungathered” (*SA* 720).<sup>51</sup>

It must be said that it is certainly no easy task to defend the belief in a life after death; indeed, it seems in many ways more difficult than defending the belief in God. Taylor does not seek to defend this belief in life after death, though clearly he takes life after death to be a live option (it seems he does so largely, if not entirely, on faith).<sup>52</sup> But whatever one thinks about the possibility of eternal life, the important point here is that if

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<sup>51</sup> Consider here the forceful challenge to exclusive humanism presented in Dostoevsky’s *The Adolescent*. The novel’s protagonist says to a group of secular reformers: “why should I necessarily love my neighbor or your future mankind, which I’ll never see, which will not know about me and which in its turn will rot without leaving any trace or remembrance (time means nothing here), when the earth in its turn will become an icy stone and fly through airless space together with an infinite multitude of identical icy stones, that is, more meaningless than anything one can possibly imagine! There’s your teaching! Tell me, why should I necessarily be noble, especially if it all lasts no more than a minute?” (Dostoevsky 2003, 56). Commenting on a similar view, Henri de Lubac writes: “It is absolutely necessary, then, that humanity should have a meeting-place in which, in every generation, it can be gathered together, a center to which it can converge, an Eternal to make it complete, an Absolute which, in the strongest and most real sense of the word, will make it *exist*. It needs a magnet to attract it. It needs [...] Another to whom it can give itself” (De Lubac 1988, 354). As a contingent matter of fact we might of course have a natural solidarity with others. But the question here is what can motivate this further or cultivate it when it is lacking.

<sup>52</sup> In my view one of the best approaches to this issue is put forward by Rowan Williams. Basically, his view is that this issue should be considered via one’s doctrine of God rather than any doctrine about human beings (e.g., a dualist view of human beings as a soul-body composite). We saw something like this expressed by James when he wrote: “A world with a God in it to say the last word, may indeed burn up or freeze, but we then think of him as still mindful of the old ideals and sure to bring them elsewhere to fruition.” According to Williams, the Christian doctrine of God maintains that it is contrary to God’s loving nature to abandon us to death. On this view, he writes, “[whatever] our relationship is with God on the far side of our material death, it involves God’s giving another shape, another carrier, another vehicle, to the (in scientific terms) information complex that is the life we have lived, the memory we have acquired in the physical body. And something has got to be continuous between now and then. Unfortunately we haven’t a clue how that works” (Williams 2005, 6; cf. Cottingham 2009a, 139-44).

one does believe in it or at least hope for it, then it can make an important motivational difference for our lives. As it specifically pertains to an ethic of universal human concern, it can be seen as an important part of a theistic teleological perspective centered on the telos of communion that makes sense of our natural draw to a wider space of solidarity and thereby helps to motivate us to best realize it. This is not only because love demands eternity, but also because eternal life functions as an eschatological perspective in which communion/*agape* will be most fully realized.<sup>53</sup> Of course, belief in eternal life can also make one neglect this-worldly existence, as exclusive humanists have often pointed out. For Taylor this is certainly a danger to be avoided, which is best done by seeing how affirming a certain good beyond life, viz., *agape*, leads us to affirm this life more fully.

#### *Moral Saintliness*

From the foregoing I hope I have made more intelligible and compelling Taylor's claim that "great as the power of naturalist sources might be [for an ethic of universal human concern], the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater." However, even if this is the case, we must at this point consider an important objection regarding the desirability of going the furthest in an ethic of universal human concern. I have in mind here Susan Wolf's critique of moral saintliness.

According to Wolf, a moral saint is "a person whose every action is as morally good as possible, a person, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be" (Wolf 1993, 505). Moreover, she defines being 'morally worthy as can be' in terms of striving to improve the welfare of others (*ibid.*). On the basis of 'common sense intuitions' she distinguishes between two saintly types: on the one hand, there is the 'loving saint' whose happiness

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<sup>53</sup> See *SA* 66-7, 246, 702, 706-7; see also the quote from De Lubac (a key influence on Taylor, as aforementioned) in n. 51.

“would truly lie in the happiness of others, and so he would devote himself to others gladly, and with a whole and open heart”; on the other hand, there is the ‘rational saint’ who “sacrifices his own interests to the interests of others, and feels the sacrifice as such” (ibid., 506). In other words, the former is a moral saint out of love, while the latter is a moral saint out of duty. Wolf says that the loving saint corresponds more to utilitarianism, while the rational saint corresponds more to Kantianism; however, because these saintly types are drawn from common sense they both “appeal to an impure mixture of utilitarian and Kantian intuitions” (ibid., 512).

Wolf’s main contention is that “moral perfection, in the sense of moral saintliness, does not constitute a model of personal well-being toward which it would be particularly rational or good or desirable for a human being to strive” (ibid., 505). She argues that such an exceptional degree of moral virtue is “apt to crowd out the nonmoral virtues as well as many of the interests and personal characteristics that we generally think contribute to a healthy, well-rounded, richly developed character”, such as reading novels, playing an instrument or a sport, cultivating wit, and so on (ibid., 507). We should add here that an ethic of universal human concern also seems to be in tension with our more particular attachments to friends and family, as has been emphasized, e.g., by Nel Noddings (Noddings 2003). According to Wolf, there is in fact only so much morality that we can stand and so she concludes that “a person may be *perfectly wonderful* without being *perfectly moral*” (ibid., 521).

While Wolf mostly focuses on the way that the moral saint seems dull or boring, there is a deeper concern here that is essentially the same point made earlier by Bernard Williams: viz., that an ethic of universal human concern of the utilitarian and Kantian

types is ultimately self-alienating. Wolf writes: “The way in which morality, unlike other possible goals, is apt to dominate is particularly disturbing, for it seems to require either the lack or the denial of the existence of an identifiable, personal self” (ibid., 510). This brings us back to the problem of the threat to wholeness, which we discussed in the last chapter with respect to the tension between the aspiration to transcendence and our ordinary human flourishing. So what kind of response can Taylor provide to this?

Taylor is certainly not going to accept Wolf’s narrow view of morality as solely being concerned with the welfare of others – whether this is expressed in Kantian or utilitarian terms – and thus he will not accept her narrow conception of moral saintliness.<sup>54</sup> For Taylor, universal justice and solidarity are hypergoods that help to define for us the good life, but they are not the only strong goods. He also accepts such strong goods as love of God (an even more important hypergood), authenticity, creativity, aesthetic appreciation, self-regarding virtues such as temperance, courage, theoretical and practical wisdom, and so on. As we have previously seen, Taylor’s method of dealing with such a plurality of strong goods – all of which are important for the good life – is to say that through practical reasoning we must seek to integrate and order these goods as far as possible within in the context of our lives as a whole. This does not mean that we will not at times have to sacrifice some strong goods for the sake of others. But even if such sacrifice does occur it does not mean that these goods are not part of a good life; it just speaks to the limits of human life.

It is also important to note that for Taylor moral saintliness should not be regarded as a matter of strict obligation, as Wolf’s account seems to suggest. The ideal of moral saintliness clearly fails within the domain of the supererogatory, which, as mentioned

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<sup>54</sup> For a critique of the narrowness of Wolf’s conception of saintliness see Adams 1993.

earlier, Taylor thinks moralities of obligatory action – especially utilitarian views – often neglect. Thus, while we may greatly admire those who go especially far in their love and concern for others, such as a Mother Teresa or a Jean Vanier, this does not mean that everyone is strictly required to pursue such a saintly life. While these saintly types might be seen as living out a ‘counsel of perfection’, not everyone can or should follow such a counsel, at least to the same extent.<sup>55</sup> Although we can affirm that everyone should show some basic concern for humanity, the way this is lived out can be very different depending on one’s particular circumstances and abilities (see Adams 1999, Ch. 13).

Now, in regard to the specific tension between universal concern and our more particular attachments, Taylor does not think we should reject either one since both are an integral part of the good for human life (see *SA* 629-30).<sup>56</sup> While this is perhaps more obvious in the case of our particular attachments, it should also be clear from the earlier discussion why Taylor thinks an ethic of universal human concern is an integral part of the good for human life: viz., because there is a natural draw in human life to a wider space of solidarity that can be seen as constitutive of a higher, more fulfilling form of life. Indeed, I have argued that this natural draw to a wider space of solidarity plays a crucial role in Taylor’s personalist view of life as centered on the telos of communion. Thus, to deny this natural draw to a wider space of solidarity, on Taylor’s view, would be a kind of self-mutilation (or self-alienation). Once again, what we need is to find a way to integrate both universal concern and our particular attachments.

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<sup>55</sup> This recalls the discussion in the last chapter of the ‘post-Axial compromise’ between transcendent aspirations and the concern for ordinary human flourishing.

<sup>56</sup> Recall that this was an issue that I discussed briefly in the previous chapter, particularly in the context of the debate between Taylor and Nussbaum over the place of transcendence in human life.

It is important to recall here that Taylor's own way of conceiving *agape* is in terms of an ever-expanding network of communion. This puts the emphasis on our particular relationships while at the same time seeing the ultimate telos of all such relationships as residing in the network of communion among all human beings (SA 246). This emphasis on particularity is important, I believe, because love understood in terms of communion is always most fully realized with respect to particular persons; indeed, communion in the fullest sense just is the shared love between particular persons. As previously mentioned, there is a sense in which we can love humanity as a whole, but this will necessarily have to involve an imaginative form of affective identification since we cannot know every individual human being that exists in the world. However, there would be something problematic about such love for humanity if it only remained at this abstract or imaginative level. The point of this imaginative love for all human beings should be to dispose us to love or show concern for every individual human being that we do encounter and to reach out to those whom we do not yet know. Thus, on Taylor's personalist view, I believe, we must maintain that the higher, more fulfilling mode of selfhood that is achieved through self-transcendence in love or concern for others is determined not only by how *widely* our love or concern extends, but also by the *depth* of our love or communion with particular persons. In other words, self-transcendence through love means not only transcending a narrower, more self-enclosed mode of selfhood for a wider, affectively extended mode of selfhood in communion with others, but also the transcending of a shallower love for a deeper love.



### *Pluralism*

I want to now turn to consider a final criticism, which has been put forward by a number of commentators on Taylor's work. The criticism is that Taylor's argument for the superiority of theistic moral sources, especially for an ethic of universal human concern, undermines his political commitment to pluralism (or diversity).<sup>57</sup> This criticism is in fact the central point of Mark Redhead's book on Taylor's political thought. He states this main criticism as follows:

[...] Taylor's moral ontology is both unnecessarily restrictive in its account of the moral sources of modernity and lacking in justification of why it necessarily testifies to a moral ontology of modernity. Thus, while Taylor's ideal of deep diversity evinces a simultaneous commitment to openness and solidarity, the theoretical structures of his thought are beset by a series of problematic positions that limit Taylor's ability to provide the openness he ostensibly promotes. (Redhead 2002, 18)

Later in the book Redhead quotes from David Miller, who asks of Taylor: "If you really believe that the highest forms of human life are those acted out against religious horizons, can you also wholeheartedly embrace liberal institutions with their implicit assumptions that each person must work out their own conceptions of the good life?" Redhead replies: "The answer, of course, is no" (ibid.,195).

This sort of criticism of Taylor is often accompanied by several other charges, such as: (1) Taylor fails to fully appreciate non-theistic sources (Connolly 2004, 175; cf. Skinner 1991, 148); and (2) he presupposes – on the basis of an "unprovable" hunch – "a core set of uncriticizable values" that are "unduly restrictive" and are not convincing to anyone but "like-minded Catholics" (Redhead 2002, 15, 196, 201-2; cf. Fraser 2007, 47-

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<sup>57</sup> See Anderson 1996; Redhead 2002, 3-4, 15-6, 18, 176, 195-202; Connolly 2004, 173-5, 182; Fraser 2007, 47-8; cf. White 2000, 57ff.

8). Before responding to the main objection here regarding Taylor's political commitment to pluralism, I would first like to respond to these charges.

Regarding the first charge about Taylor's failure to fully appreciate non-theistic sources, it must be said that if this is true it is certainly not because he does not try, as both *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age* involve expansive attempts to understand non-theistic sources. Indeed, in response to Quentin Skinner's charge that he fails "to come to grips with the intellectual depth and reach of modern belief" in *Sources*, Taylor writes: "If things were really that bad, I should be crushed, because coming to grips with that was central to my intention. I am a believer, and I also find spiritual greatness in the views of unbelievers; rather as I am a Christian, and find greatness in some facets of Islam, Judaism, Buddhism" (Taylor 1991a, 241; cf. Skinner 1991, 148).<sup>58</sup> Taylor goes on to note that Skinner apparently does not see himself in a symmetrical situation because Skinner says that much of what theists claim about their faith strikes him as unintelligible and he sees theists as suffering from psychological blockage. Taylor writes: "Is there nothing here that Skinner regrets not understanding? Or are all the riches of, e.g., Judaic, Christian, Islamic theism explicable in terms of 'psychological blockage'? If this is his stance, then it betokens an astonishing selective narrowness of spirit in an otherwise educated and open person" (ibid.).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> This is of course compatible with believing that one of these positions is best, as Taylor does.

<sup>59</sup> In what is perhaps the most strident passage in his writings, Taylor goes on to say: "I think that it [Skinner's inability to see any good in theism, but only evils] probably shows up a striking blind-spot of the contemporary academy, that unbelievers can propound such crudities about the sources of belief, of a level which any educated believer would be excoriated for applying, say, to members of another confession. The paradox is that the last members of the educated community in the West who have to learn some lesson of ecumenical humility are (some) unbelievers. When these come to talk about religion, they have all the breadth of comprehension and sympathy of a Jerry Falwell, and significantly less even than Cardinal Ratzinger. The really astonishing thing is that they even seem proud of it" (Taylor 1991a, 242).

It must be said that many of those who are especially critical of Taylor's theism do not themselves appear to have made any great effort to sympathetically understand his position and they often put forward 'straw-man' characterizations. For instance, as I have already noted on a number of occasions, there is a common tendency to interpret Taylor as holding a very unattractive theological voluntarism (i.e., a divine command ethic), which he explicitly rejects. Redhead, e.g., interprets the idea of acknowledging the transcendent to mean that we must "acknowledge the capricious will of God" (Redhead 2002, 192). However, such a theological crudity has no basis in Taylor's text.<sup>60</sup> For Taylor, God is a constitutive good because God is *worthy* of love and respect. Moreover, as I understand his position, one should seek to follow God's will because what God wills is objectively good independent of God's willing it and because one wants to follow God in being on the side of the good (see Cottingham 2005, 45).

I think this lack of sympathetic understanding of Taylor's position can be seen in the second charge mentioned above: viz., that Taylor presupposes – on the basis of an "unprovable" hunch – "a core set of uncriticizable values" that are "unduly restrictive" and are not convincing to anyone but "like-minded Catholics". A large part of my effort in this dissertation has been to provide a reading of Taylor that fills out his 'hunches' about the importance of theism so as to make them more compelling, even if this does not amount to a strict proof. Something of course can be 'unprovable' while still being rationally convincing. I have specifically sought to fill out Taylor's position in terms of a certain theistic view of cosmic purpose and show the difference this makes for our ethical life compared to seeing life against the backdrop of cosmic purposelessness. I do not

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<sup>60</sup> In regard to commentators such as Redhead, Fraser, and Skinner, it is not clear how much of their lack of sympathetic understanding is due to a kind of religious illiteracy. I think this likely plays a role.

think one needs to be a Catholic or even a theist in order to feel the force of this argument. Atheists such as Nietzsche and Bernard Williams certainly seem to have felt its force, as did James, who is clearly cross-pressured between religious and non-religious views. Furthermore, there is no reason to think that Taylor regards his theistic values – viz., the strong goods of *agape* and humans as made in the ‘image of God’ – as ‘uncriticizable’. Moreover, he is very much alive to the possibility that theistic belief may in fact turn out to be false, even though he acknowledges an ‘anticipatory confidence’ regarding such belief. But we can still ask: is his theism ‘unduly restrictive’? In other words, do his arguments for the importance of theism for our ethical life undermine his political commitment to pluralism?

I do not see why this should be the case unless one supposes that any attempt to argue for the superiority of one substantive view of the good life over another undermines a political commitment to a plurality of views of the good life. This seems to be precisely what Redhead maintains in the passages quoted above. In other words, a political commitment to pluralism, on Redhead’s view, seems to require that we adopt a subjectivist or relativist view of the good life and a stance of neutrality with respect to competing conceptions of the good life. But I do not think that this must be the case and Taylor’s own position in fact points in a better direction.

On Taylor’s view, affirming ‘moral pluralism’ does not mean that a *person* must be neutral between competing conceptions of the good life, but rather, the *state* must be. As a justification for state neutrality, in *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience* Taylor and his co-author Jocelyn Maclure appeal to the Rawlsian notion of “reasonable pluralism”, which is based on “the recognition of the limits of rationality, its inability to

decide the questions of the ultimate meaning of existence and the nature of human fulfillment in a decisive way” (*SFC* 10).<sup>61</sup> But Taylor and MacLure also qualify this notion of state neutrality. They write: “A liberal and democratic state cannot remain indifferent to certain core principles, such as human dignity, basic human rights, and popular sovereignty. These are the *constitutive* values of liberal and democratic political systems; they provide these systems with their foundations and aims” (*SFC* 11). These core principles or values are the basis of an “overlapping consensus” among people who hold different conceptions of the good life.<sup>62</sup> However, as mentioned at the end of the last chapter, Taylor thinks that such a consensus cannot be established by appeal to some neutral or purely ‘secular’ notion of reason (i.e., ‘reason alone’), but rather, we must allow people to draw on the ‘deeper reasons’ or justifications that are embedded in their different religious and philosophical outlooks, even though we cannot establish agreement on these deeper reasons (see *DC*, Ch. 14).

If we take the example of human rights, we can think of a number of different possible justifications for this: e.g., the Christian view of humans as made in the image of God; the Kantian view of our dignity as rational agents; the utilitarian view that concern is owed to sentient beings in terms of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain; and the Buddhist core principle of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) (*DC* 311, 329; *SFC* 12). Of course, these different justifications might actually lead to some divergences in how human rights are

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<sup>61</sup> In other words, each competing view of the good life involves anticipatory confidence.

<sup>62</sup> *SFC* 11-2; cf. *SA* 532, 693; *DC*, Ch. 6, pp. 311, 319, 328-9. Taylor cites Jacques Maritain to illustrate such overlapping consensus. Maritain writes: “I am quite certain that my way of justifying belief in the rights of man and the ideal of liberty, equality, fraternity is the only way with a firm foundation in truth. This does not prevent me from being in agreement on these practical convictions with people who are certain that their way of justifying them, entirely different from mine or opposed to me, ...is equally the only way founded upon truth” (quoted in *DC* 105).

conceived, as we can see, e.g., in the debates surrounding abortion. But there still should be a great deal of overlap among these different views of human rights.

The question does arise, however, over which justification or deeper reason is the most adequate for making sense of human rights and for enabling us to most fully live up to their demands. One response to this might be to say that we should avoid raising such questions – at least in a specifically political context, if not an academic one – and remain content with the fact that we do have an overlapping consensus on a core value such as human rights. Moreover, we might have reason to avoid raising such questions if we thought that arguing for a particular answer might alienate others or undermine collaboration on shared goals (see Redhead 2002, 202; Connolly 2004, 182). However, I think this sort of response is overly cautious and in fact can be damaging to our pursuit of shared goals. What is needed in order to avoid alienation is not to stop debating fundamental areas of disagreement, but to do so in a spirit of friendship, civility, respect, and openness. Indeed, I believe we must regard such a spirit of conversation as another core constitutive value of liberal and democratic political systems. In a genuinely pluralistic society it is of great importance that people find ways to discuss their deepest reasons or justifications for their values, even where there are disagreements. This is important, as Taylor puts it, because getting clear on “what we need to carry through on what the morality [of universal human concern] demands of us” can “inspire us and strengthen our resolve” in the face of obstacles (*SA* 693). It is one of the great virtues of Taylor’s work that he raises this issue, and it has been one of my central goals here to take up the debate and carry it forward.

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