

**TRANSCENDENCE, KENOSIS AND ENFLESHMENT:  
CHARLES TAYLOR'S RELIGIOUS THOUGHT**

**TRANSCENDENCE, KENOSIS AND ENFLESHMENT:  
CHARLES TAYLOR'S RELIGIOUS THOUGHT**

By

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### ABSTRACT

The dissertation examines an intersection of ethics, epistemology, politics, and religious consciousness in the work of Canadian political theorist Charles Taylor. The goal of the study is to bring to light the central or even unifying role of theism in Taylor's broader philosophical project. More specifically, the dissertation speaks to the constructive moral and anthropological—as opposed to any merely ideological—role that theism plays in Taylor's thought, focusing especially on the conception of transcendence that underwrites his political and ethical theory. A basic claim of the dissertation is that Taylor's conception of transcendence, while remaining attentive to the demands of religious pluralism, has a kenotic shape that gives rise to an ethics that emphasizes enfleshed enactments of *agape*.



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## **DEDICATION**

For my parents, Jose and Gracia Colorado—*sine qua non*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Title Page.....	ii
Descriptive Note.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Dedication.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Opposing Humanisms: The Agapeic Challenge to the Will to Power.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter Three: The Self and the Good: Expressivism, Transcendence and Weak Ontology.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Transcendence Revisited: A Response to D.P. Baker and Ian Fraser.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Chapter Five: From Cartesian Turn to Christian Excarnation: Taylor's "Augustinian" Recovery of the Body.....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Chapter Six: Towards an Enfleshed, Kenotic Pluralism.....</b>	<b>156</b>
Bibliography.....	163

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation examines an intersection of ethics, epistemology, politics, and religious consciousness in the work of Canadian political theorist Charles Taylor. The goal of the study is to bring to light the central or even unifying role of theism in Taylor's broader philosophical project. More specifically, the dissertation speaks to the constructive moral and anthropological—as opposed to any merely ideological—role that theism plays in Taylor's thought, focusing especially on the conception of transcendence that underwrites his political and ethical theory. A study of this kind is important and needed, not only because it adds a new perspective on a widely read and increasingly influential Canadian thinker (numbered by Richard Rorty “among the dozen most important philosophers writing today, anywhere in the world”).<sup>1</sup> It is important also because it identifies and explores a key component at the very heart of Taylor's project, without a proper understanding of which the full significance and potential impact of his ethical and political programme cannot be fully appreciated.

It is widely agreed that one of Taylor's unique and most highly valued contributions to current discussions has to do with his endeavours to bring back a genuinely *human*—and not merely cultural—normativity to moral and political discourse, in ways that are attentive to the contemporary demands of pluralism. This is integral, for example, to his much discussed ‘politics of recognition.’<sup>2</sup> A central claim of the dissertation is that a certain articulation of transcendence is at the very centre of this programme, such that the project cannot hold together systematically without it.

A predominant theme in *Sources of the Self*, probably Taylor's most influential monograph, is that modern conceptions of selfhood and moral and political responsibility emerge centrally from three sources: naturalism, expressivism, and theism.<sup>3</sup> These are the main components comprising what

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in James L. Heft's introduction to *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture, with responses by William M. Shea, Rosemary Luling Haughton, George Marsden, and Jean Bethke Elshtain*. James L. Heft, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 3.

<sup>2</sup> See Charles Taylor. *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Amy Gutmann, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 495-521. As will be discussed in chapter two, the structure of Taylor's discussion of the modern moral order changes somewhat in later works, beginning with “A Catholic Modernity?” published in 1999. In the more recent iteration, expressivism is replaced by anti-humanistic Nietzscheanism. The significance of this descriptive shift will be explored below.

Taylor calls “the modern moral order.” Naturalism—which holds that the human is best understood in scientific terms—is a “hegemony” that by itself is unable to meet the self’s intrinsic need for strong moral sources. Until recently, Taylor’s main overt opposition to naturalism has been articulated in terms of expressivism. Expressivism is a conception of human subjectivity rooted in the thought of Rousseau, Goethe, Humboldt, and Hegel, but which finds its clearest expression (for Taylor) in Herder. It stresses that the human subject reaches its highest potentialities through acts of expression that cannot be reduced to an “object of an objectifying scientific analysis.”<sup>4</sup> For Taylor, the modern subject is self-defining and can only fully know her nature by articulating or *expressing* that which exists within her—the subject’s “inner voice.”

Increasingly, however, theism has entered as a more explicit component in Taylor’s discussion of the modern moral order. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor claims that theism continues to have a legitimate place in the modern moral order, and that theistic accounts represent a necessary alternative to the “stripped-down secular outlook” central to naturalism. However, *Sources of the Self* does not yet offer a fully explicit account of theism (as Taylor understands it). While expressivism is discussed explicitly in Taylor’s “The Politics of Recognition” and naturalism in his critique of modern epistemology (e.g., *Philosophical Arguments*), Taylor has only recently turned his focus to the place of theism in modernity, as we see in his publications “A Catholic Modernity?”, *Varieties of Religion Today*, and, most recently, *A Secular Age*. It is important to note that, by Taylor’s own admission, theistic issues “have been at the center of [his] concern for decades,” but that they have remained implicit because of the “nature of philosophical discourse...which has to try to persuade honest thinkers of any and all metaphysical or theological commitments.”<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps due to Taylor’s reserved or more modest discussion of theism in earlier works, his interlocutors have tended to deal only preliminarily or cursorily—or somewhat dismissively, in the case of some of his critics—with the theistic component in Taylor’s work.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, much of the secondary

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<sup>4</sup> See Taylor’s *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 13-29; *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 1-14.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor. “A Catholic Modernity?” In *A Catholic Modernity?* 13.

<sup>6</sup> One such dismissive reading of Taylor’s theistic contribution comes from Quentin Skinner. Skinner notes that Taylor’s basic position concerning theism is that a belief in God is connected to a full appreciation of human life. Skinner’s response to this view is that “one of the most important elements in the so-called Enlightenment project was to disabuse us of precisely that position.” For Skinner, some of the primary contributions of the Enlightenment were to argue: 1) “that theism is a dangerously irrational creed”; and 2) “that the death of God leaves us

literature that does consider Taylor's theism focuses on his *explicitly* religious work, and does not deal with theism's implicit place in Taylor's more influential moral and political theory. For example, commentator George Marsden has hypothesized that *Sources of the Self* is incomplete because Taylor does not disclose his Judeo-Christian agenda. However, Marsden's short piece on Taylor titled "Matteo Ricci and the Prodigal Culture" focuses primarily on the explicitly theistic "A Catholic Modernity?" rather than on the core of Taylor's political thought. Similarly, Nicholas Smith's important study of Taylor's work considers the Taylorian contribution to the study of secularity, but does not examine adequately how this later research on the sources of secularity is related to the theistic undertones of Taylor's earlier work.<sup>7</sup> Ian Fraser's book *Dialectics of the Self* and his article "Charles Taylor's Catholicism," published in the journal *Contemporary Political Theory*, are largely attempts to explore critically Taylor's theistic thought, and Fraser's work is attentive to Taylor's contribution to political philosophy.<sup>8</sup> However, while Fraser's research rightly considers the place of Taylor's religious commitments in his wider philosophical project, Fraser arguably fails to interpret adequately the role of Taylor's theism in his political and ethical theory. This misinterpretation is the consequence of both an inattentiveness on Fraser's part to important non-theistic elements in Taylor's writings and a misreading by Fraser of Taylor's explicitly theistic work.<sup>9</sup>

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with an opportunity, perhaps even a duty, to affirm the value of our humanity more fully than before." Skinner takes this basic argument to be decisive, and notes that the inscription "Important if true" could be easily inscribed on Taylor's *Sources of the Self*. See Quentin Skinner. "Modernity and Disenchantment: Some Historical Reflections." In *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*. James Tully, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 37-48. Skinner is even more blunt in "Who Are 'We'? Ambiguities of the Modern Self," where he states that theistic belief is "obviously self-deceiving and erroneous" and that theism is not only false, but "that it must be grossly irrational to believe otherwise." He states further that "anyone who continues to affirm it must be suffering from some serious form of psychological blockage or self-deceit." See "Who Are 'We'? Ambiguities of the Modern Self." *Inquiry* 34 (June 1991), 133-153.

<sup>7</sup> See Nicholas H. Smith. *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Ian Fraser, "Charles Taylor's Catholicism." *Contemporary Political Theory* 4 (2005), 231-252. I offer a rejoinder to Fraser's somewhat superficial reading of Taylor's religious thought in chapter four.

<sup>9</sup> Fraser's misinterpretation of Taylor's work is explored by Ruth Abbey in "Turning or Spinning? Charles Taylor's Catholicism: A reply to Ian Fraser." *Contemporary Political Theory* 5 (2006), 163-175. A recent book by Deane-Peter

This dissertation, by contrast, studies critically the role and impact of theism in Taylor's philosophical project as a whole, but with special attention to his ethics. A basic claim of this work is that Taylor's conception of transcendence, while remaining attentive to the demands of religious pluralism, has a kenotic shape that gives rise to an ethical theory that emphasizes enactments of *agape* (or *karuna*, the analogous Buddhist dispensation often discussed by Taylor). The study begins with an analysis of how Taylor's critical reading of Nietzschean philosophy provides an entry point through which to study religious authority in Taylor's own programme. The chapter discusses how Taylor and Nietzsche articulate opposing accounts of humanism and, correspondingly, how their accounts of transcendence are opposed. I argue that Nietzsche's increased importance in Taylor's more recent descriptions of the modern moral order helps to reveal for us the basic structure of Taylor's conception of transcendence. My analysis suggests that there are significant common elements in Nietzschean and Taylorian transcendence (most significantly an emptying or decentering movement that follows an encounter with transcendence, an encounter that calls the self into question, but which establishes a new self). However, these points of correspondence notwithstanding, a comparative exploration of transcendence in Nietzsche and Taylor enables us to distill a fundamental difference, which, interestingly, is articulated for both in terms of love. As Taylor formulates it in "A Catholic Modernity?" the Christian conception of love, of *agapê*, is a response to the radical unconditionality of the fact that the neighbor is created in *imago dei*. Taylor emphasizes how the decentering move that precedes *agapê* is a response in *obedience*—"Thy will be done". This is fundamentally opposed to Zarathustra's love for the human, a love that is manifested for Nietzsche not in obedience, but in resolute, *autonomous* willing.

The next chapter explores the ways in which transcendence functions in Taylor's moral ontology. I follow philosopher Stephen White in arguing that Taylor offers us a "weak ontology," an ontology that recognizes its own contestability and its own limits. I provide a reading of Taylor that challenges the suggestion by Ruth Abbey that Taylor's theism moves him into the realm of strong ontology. This reading builds on the previous chapter, which sheds light on the kenotic nature of transcendence, and thus the moral source at the very center of Taylor's religious ethics. I consider how it is a somewhat paradoxical formulation to discuss kenosis as strong ontology, insofar as kenosis is by definition *dispossessive* and strong ontology is characterized by a kind of power-seeking. The chapter also makes connections between Taylor's dispossessive conception of transcendence and his anthropology,

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Baker provides what is perhaps the best engagement with Taylor's theism published thus far. I engage with this text in some detail in the fourth chapter.

connections which provide the point of departure for the fifth chapter.

In chapter four, I provide a response to accounts of Taylor's religious thought advanced by Ian Fraser and Deane-Peter Baker, both of which seem to challenge the claim that Taylor's conception of transcendence is fundamentally kenotic. Though both of the readings differ in their judgment of Taylor's work on religion—one is highly critical and polemical, while the other is generous and endorsing—I suggest that both fail to discern the kenotic structure of transcendence in Taylor's programme, including how kenosis gives shape to Taylor's ethics, politics and epistemology. Chapter four also includes a preliminary discussion of Taylor's critique of disembodiment in western intellectual, religious and moral traditions, a topic that comprises the focus of the fifth chapter. Taylor's philosophy discusses some of the ways in which the dominant trends in certain modern philosophical and theological quarters have obscured the self's embodiment or "enfleshment". My analysis of disembodiment/disenfleshment in chapter five begins with a consideration of Taylor's critique in *Sources* of the Cartesian turn in philosophical anthropology, and how it contributes to the loss of the body. My exploration of this theme centers on the role of Augustine in the historical movement towards Cartesian disengagement. The presence of Augustine in the genealogy of the disengaged, Cartesian subject has been hotly debated and widely criticized by many Augustinian scholars, since the worst excesses of Cartesianism are anathema to the Bishop of Hippo's theology. Drawing upon Taylor's argument in *A Secular Age*, in which he discusses the disenfleshment that has characterized much recent Christian thought, I suggest that Taylor's own response to Cartesian disembodiment, as well as Christian "exarnation," is fundamentally Augustinian—which would suggest that Augustine does not need saving from Taylor. In order to bring the Augustinian itineraries of Taylor's thought into focus, the chapter considers Taylor appropriation of Ivan Illich's work in *Rivers North of the Future*. Taylor's *modus operandi* models itself on Illich's, emphasizing the primacy of the body as criterial for Christian ethics. Connections are made between Taylor's incarnational rehabilitation of the body and his agapeic ethics, thereby illuminating further the ways in which Taylor's anthropological work is animated by a particular kenotic conception of (Christian) transcendence. The dissertation closes with a short consideration of the theological limits of Taylor's religious thought.



## Chapter 2: Opposing Humanisms: The Agapeic Challenge to the Will to Power

The central focus of this chapter is on how Taylor's critical reading of Nietzsche helps to bring to light the central importance of religious authority in Taylor's moral thought. In the conclusion of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor considers the Nietzschean critique of morality as benevolence, which suggests that pity is destructive to both the giver and the receiver.<sup>10</sup> Taylor claims that Nietzsche's critique of an ethic of benevolence is only wrong "if there is such a thing as *agapê*, or one of the secular claimants to its succession."<sup>11</sup> For Taylor, the clearest conception of *agapê* is found in the Christian gospels, though he notes that something analogous to *agapê* can be found outside of Christianity, with Buddhism and its concepts of *metta* and *karuna* being Taylor's most oft-cited example.<sup>12</sup> Taylor insists that "high standards need strong sources," and the question he poses at the end of *Sources* concerns "whether we are not living beyond our moral means in continuing allegiance to our standards of justice and benevolence."<sup>13</sup> For Taylor, Nietzsche forces moderns to confront this question, and one of the central tasks of Taylor's philosophical programme is to show that transcendence provides a robust and viable moral source for many of modernity's moral commitments. Though Taylor is something of a polymath, and his philosophy explores a wide range of themes—including

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<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche writes in *The Antichrist*: "Some have dared to call pity a virtue (in every noble ethic it is considered a weakness); and as if this were not enough, it has been made the virtue, the basis and source of all virtues. To be sure—and one should always keep this in mind—this was done by a philosophy that was nihilistic and had inscribed the negation of life upon its shield...Pity is the practice of nihilism. To repeat: this depressive and contagious instinct crosses those instincts which aim at the preservation of life and at the enhancement of its value. It multiplies misery and conserves all that is miserable, and is thus a prime instrument of the advancement of decadence: pity persuades men to nothingness!" in *The Portable Nietzsche*. Walter Kaufmann (ed.) (New York: Penguin, 1954) 573.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 516. According to Taylor, as a source for an ethic of benevolence, theism surpasses the "secular claimants to *agapê*'s succession": "[As] great as the power of naturalist sources might be, the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater." *Sources of the Self*, 518.

<sup>12</sup> See "A Catholic Modernity?" 22; "A Place for Transcendence," in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 9; *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2007) 18; 818 fn 23.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 516-517.

hermeneutics and interpretation, secular ethics, linguistic theory, philosophical anthropology, the human sciences, artificial intelligence, political philosophy and multiculturalism—this task forms the core (though sometimes implicitly) of many of Taylor’s more important works, including *Sources of the Self*, *A Catholic Modernity?*, *Varieties of Religion Today*, and *A Secular Age*.

In an interesting and relevant article, philosopher Mark Redhead argues that “Taylor’s Nietzschean challenge is...more self-revealing than foreboding as it brings to light the tension between the open and pluralistic content of Taylor’s faith and the epistemological grounding of it which a more well-rounded appreciation of Nietzsche could help to alleviate.”<sup>14</sup> Though the specific tension that Redhead identifies requires attention (and thus I will speak to it both directly and indirectly in later chapters) I would like presently to focus on Redhead’s more general assertion that Taylor’s Nietzschean challenge reveals something about Taylor’s theism. More specifically, one of the central claims of this chapter is that Taylor’s interpretation of Nietzschean philosophy gives us a glimpse into the centrality of Christian transcendence and religious authority in Taylor’s moral thought. A reading of Nietzsche will be offered here that problematizes certain aspects of Taylor’s discussion of the modern moral order, and this interpretation of Nietzsche (similar to the one fleshed out by Redhead) will attempt to uncover affinities between certain key facets of Nietzschean and Christian thought. However, unlike Redhead, who claims that Nietzsche’s “interpretive modes of moral thought...are not antithetical to the substantive content of [Taylor’s] own moral vision,” I will argue not only that their accounts at bottom are antithetical, but also that it is precisely at the site of their divergence where Taylor formulates his critique of Nietzscheanism, thus revealing quite clearly the nature of religious/transcendent authority in his moral philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

One place where we encounter the importance of Nietzsche for Taylor is in the reconfiguration of the modern moral order we find in “A Catholic Modernity?”. In the earlier formulation found in *Sources of the Self*, as mentioned in chapter one, the modern moral order is comprised of three main sources: theism, secular humanism/scientism, and expressivism. However, in “A Catholic Modernity?”, published nearly a decade after *Sources*, Taylor discusses modernity “as the scene of a three-cornered...battle. There are secular humanists, there are neo-Nietzscheans, and there are those who

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<sup>14</sup> Mark Redhead, “Charles Taylor’s Nietzschean Predicament.” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 27/6 (2001), 102.

<sup>15</sup> Redhead, “Charles Taylor’s Nietzschean Predicament,” 82.

acknowledge some good beyond life.”<sup>16</sup> Notably, it is this framework set out in “A Catholic Modernity?” which Taylor retains in Chapter 17 of *A Secular Age*—his most recent monograph. What is crucial to note is that in the later formulation of the modern moral order, Taylor has replaced expressivism with neo-Nietzscheanism. And though the Nietzschean strands of the modern moral order can be understood as expressivist strands, thus making it seem that little has changed in Taylor’s account, he is adamant that neo-Nietzscheanism represents a “revolt from within exclusive humanism” and is fundamentally *anti*-humanist. The shift from earlier discussions of expressivism in Taylor’s writing, which center on the likes of Herder, Hegel, Humboldt, Rousseau, and Goethe (none of whom can easily be slotted into the category of “anti-humanist”),<sup>17</sup> to Nietzschean modes of expressivism, which often manifest themselves in violent and destructive modes of expression, is therefore noteworthy and merits further study.

## 2.1 Taylor on Transcendence, Kenosis and *Agapè*

As alluded to above, the description of the modern moral order we find in “A Catholic Modernity?” pits Nietzschean (and neo-Nietzschean) anti-humanism in a struggle against both exclusive humanism and views that acknowledge some good beyond life—and both of the latter, according to Taylor’s account, aim at some level of humanism. In this section, I shall give a preliminary account of Taylor’s own conception of transcendence, especially Christian transcendence—one of the “corners” of the modern moral order. I will describe how his theistic ethics are *kenotic*, because as will be shown below, he argues that confrontations with divine power and revelation dispossess the self, or *empty it*. Interestingly, as I will argue later in the chapter, many of the movements within Taylor’s *Christian* view—particularly the transcendent and the kenotic—correspond with the Nietzschean *anti-humanist* account. This raises an important question: what are we to make of the antagonistic relationship that Taylor identifies between Nietzscheanism

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<sup>16</sup> “A Catholic Modernity?” 29. Taylor mentions that we can also identify a fourth party to this battle “because the acknowledgers of transcendence are divided,” with some holding that the move to secularization was an error which needs to be overcome while others (such as Taylor) believe that real moral gains have accompanied secularization.

<sup>17</sup> Here we need only think of the significance that Rousseau accords to sympathy—arguably an intrinsically humanistic, though perhaps instinctual, motivation—as a primal existential category for savage man, and how this category ramifies into later Romantic thought. See Rousseau’s *A Discourse on Inequality*.

and transcendence, if Nietzsche's work contains elements of transcendence, especially kenotic ones? In order to examine critically these points of commonality, we need first to focus on how these two particular themes—transcendence and kenosis—function in Taylor's own thought.

Before proceeding, some brief explanation is required for why I have opted to focus on the category of transcendence rather than theism, since Taylor employs both in his work. There are two reasons for this. The first is that language to do with *theos* obscures important points of convergence between Taylor and Nietzsche. Though I will describe Zarathustra below as a *homo religiosus*, I will by no means suggest that Nietzsche's protagonist is *theistic*—that would fundamentally distort the thrust of Nietzsche own programme. The second and main reason that I have gone in this direction is that there is a discernable shift in Taylor's own terminological framework, according to which he uses the category of theism less and less when discussing the modern moral order, speaking instead of perspectives and traditions that acknowledge the transcendent. A compelling case can be made that Taylor's increased preference for the category of transcendence stems from his aspiration to use more inclusive and pluralistic terminology that does not exclude non-theistic religious traditions such as Buddhism. In Taylor's response to Rosemary Luling Haughton's critique of his choice to use "transcendence," he acknowledges that he hesitantly chose the term, but that his concern was to strive to be morally inclusive and to aim for some level of objectivity:

How could I ever have used such an abstract and evasive term, one so redolent of the flat and content-free modes of spirituality we can get maneuvered into in the attempt to accommodate both modern reason and the promptings of the heart? I remember erasing it with particular gusto. Why did I ever reinstate it? What pressures led in the end to its grudging rehabilitation? Well, one was that I wanted to say something general, something not just about Christians...[A second reason] is that I felt (feel) the need to take a distance, to open out the range of possibilities.<sup>18</sup>

Though he very well should be applauded for this attempt at inclusivity, it is this move to the language of transcendence rather than theism that creates a tension in Taylor's critique of Nietzsche and his description of the modern moral order. For as we will see below, the Nietzschean perspective can be accommodated within Taylor's categories of transcendence and the

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<sup>18</sup> See Rosemary Luling Haughton, "Transcendence and the Bewilderment of Being Modern" and Taylor's "Concluding Reflections and Comments" in *A Catholic Modernity?* 65-81; 105-106.

religious—an impossibility within Taylor’s earlier category of theism, which, particularly in its Christian dispensations, is anathema to Nietzscheanism.

Regardless of the fact that (by his own admission) the language of transcendence is perhaps too abstract and evasive, Taylor nevertheless retains the terminology in his most recent writing on religion and secularity.<sup>19</sup> His attempt to articulate an inclusive moral philosophy which is able to accommodate all religious perspectives—both Christian and non-Christian—prompts this terminological move. However, this is not purely a move by a systematician trying to reconcile his pluralistic political philosophy with his religious thought. Instead, I would want to argue that Taylor is authentically moved by some of the moral sources that are found in Buddhism, for example, and the fundamental place of the decentering (or kenotic) move manifested in the shift from “self” (*atman*) to “no-self” (*anatman*) in Buddhism. This decentering move, which can proceed from the transformative engagement with transcendent sources, is one which figures centrally in Taylor’s religious ethics and which must be explored on his view if one is to understand why the overly simplistic critique waged against religion—which claims that traditions that are oriented towards the transcendent must as a matter of course negate life—is wrongheaded.

More needs to be said about this radically kenotic decentering of the self, especially as it functions in Taylor’s Christian philosophical account, but also how it appears (though in a different guise) within Nietzsche’s philosophy. However, a bit fuller account than has been given thus far of the concept of transcendence as it plays out in Taylor’s philosophy is first needed, since the radical decentering of the self that Taylor underscores at important junctures in his religious work occurs most prominently through an encounter with a transcendent moral source. To grasp fully how Taylor understands this process of decentering, it is vital that we first have a sense of what the concept of transcendence signifies for Taylor. It should come as no surprise, in light of his tentative use of the term transcendence for the reasons laid out above, that he is neither dogmatic nor fully consistent in his usage of the word. And where there are variations in Taylor’s usage of transcendence, they are not the consequence of carelessness, but instead reflect the importance that Taylor places on the process of articulation in moral thinking, which is highly dialogical. As he puts it in *Sources of the Self*,

articulating a vision of the good is not offering a basic reason. It is one thing to say that I ought to refrain from manipulating your emotions

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<sup>19</sup> For example, see Taylor’s “A Place for Transcendence,” in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature and Theology Approach the Beyond*. Regina Schwartz (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2004) 1-11. “Transcendence” is also used extensively throughout *A Secular Age*.

or threatening you, because that is what respecting your rights as a human being requires. It is quite another to set out just what makes human beings worthy of commanding our respect, and to describe the higher mode of life and feeling which is involved in recognizing this.<sup>20</sup>

Articulation is a fundamental moral activity for Taylor, for it is the process through which we put into words “what underlies our ethical choices, leanings, intuitions.”<sup>21</sup> Through the articulation of the moral sources or frameworks which move us subtly and implicitly, we thus come closer to the goods that power our moral thinking, goods that are often understood or grasped in only very hazy and inchoate ways. And through this articulation and clarification, the force of a moral source can be unleashed in profound ways. Speaking of the best articulations, Taylor claims,

the most powerful case is where the speaker, the formulation, and the act of delivering the message all line up together to reveal the good, as the immense and continuing force of the gospel illustrates. A formulation has power when it brings the source close, when it makes it plain and evident, in all its inherent force, its capacity to inspire our love, respect, or allegiance. An effective articulation releases this force, and this is how the words have power.<sup>22</sup>

Taylor’s notion of articulation must be taken into account when we examine his use of the language of transcendence. His moral philosophy, especially in its more explicitly religious modalities, is largely an attempt to verbalize the inchoate and underlying moral sources of western modernity and, as such, Taylor’s project does not involve constructing some overly systematic, rigid, inflexible account of transcendence. Instead, this project of articulation looks to the moral goods that (often implicitly) “inspire our love, respect, or allegiance,” and endeavors to explore how these find their roots and structures in the myriad of religious, philosophical and political accounts that are the inheritance of modernity. This process of retrieval requires examining the accounts themselves, especially as they have functioned historically to underwrite our moral commitments and our conceptions of what comprises the good life, rather than simply starting with some dogmatic concept of transcendence which might then be used to discern which accounts are authentic or inauthentic, true or untrue, valid or invalid, etc. That these diverse understandings of transcendence already move us is reason enough for Taylor to consider them in his articulation of the sources

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<sup>20</sup> *Sources of the Self*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> *Sources of the Self*, 77.

<sup>22</sup> *Sources of the Self*, 97.

of modern selfhood, regardless of whether the variations between these conceptions of transcendence are not always easily reconciled. Additionally, contra claims by critics such as Ian Fraser, who want to claim that Taylor's religious commitments render his philosophical work intolerant and inflexible and therefore difficult to reconcile with his pluralism—a criticism which will be explored more fully in chapter four—it is worth underscoring that Taylor himself understands his religious work, especially as it intersects with his political and moral thought, to be no more than a “best account.”<sup>23</sup> In “A Catholic Modernity?”—probably Taylor's most explicitly religious work—he explains, “I am going to offer a perspectival reading, and in the end we have to ask ourselves which perspective makes the most sense of human life.”<sup>24</sup> Taylor is very clear that his best account of what is constitutive of transcendence is to be understood at the outset as a provisional articulation that will likely require modifications, and the corrective for difficulties or obscurities in Taylor's best account will be the best accounts, or counter-articulations, of his interlocutors.

To return to Taylor's conception of transcendence, what will be offered at this juncture is merely a preliminary, and (admittedly) a not yet fully nuanced, picture of Taylor on transcendence. A fuller account of how Taylor employs the language of transcendence will be fleshed out in the following chapter, where it will be contextualized within his larger moral ontology, as well as in the fifth chapter, where the relationship between embodiment and transcendence will be explored. What is more pressing for the present discussion is a quick sketch of Taylor on transcendence that shows the general shape of what the transcendent signifies for him. Such a sketch will allow us to get a better sense of what Taylor believes to be involved in the radical decentering move and to bring to light the tension involved in Taylor's formulation of the modern moral order as it pertains to Nietzsche.

One of Taylor's longer, early descriptions of transcendence is found in “A Catholic Modernity?”, where transcendence is identified as being “beyond life.” Taylor fleshes this out as follows:

What I mean by this is something more like: the point of things isn't exhausted by life, the fullness of life, even the goodness of life. This is not meant to be a repudiation of egoism, the idea that the fullness of

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<sup>23</sup> Ruth Abbey makes this point in her response to Ian Fraser's somewhat polemical article “Charles Taylor Catholicism,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 4 (2005), 231-252. See Abbey's “Turning or Spinning? Charles Taylor's Catholicism: A Reply to Ian Fraser,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 5 (2006), 172.

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 26.

my life (and perhaps those of people I love) should be my only concern. Let us agree with John Stuart Mill that a full life must involve striving for the benefit of all humankind. Then acknowledging the transcendent means seeing a point beyond that. One form of this is 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...What matters beyond life doesn't matter just because it sustains life; otherwise it wouldn't be 'beyond life' in the meaning of the act."<sup>25</sup>

In light of Taylor's Catholicism, we can expect that he is largely, or even principally, attuned to the transcendent as it is revealed through Incarnation. Still, I would argue that his formulation in this passage is open to accounts of the transcendent beyond orthodox Christian ones. Some branches of Buddhism might have certain reservations about the notion that the transcendent is something "on which life itself originally draws," which on first glance is suggestive of some form of creative force, prime mover, or even deity—formulations that do not obviously resonate with many Buddhist notions of transcendence, especially as they are articulated within the Theravada tradition. But we need only think of how Levinas, for example, talks about the transcendent in a way which is not obviously theistic, but which has some very clear correspondence with Taylor's formulation as it is presented above. For Levinas, it is through the encounter with transcendence through the face of the Other, that the ego or self is put into question, "[calling the freedom of the ego] to responsibility and [founding] it."<sup>26</sup> Though the ego itself does not find its origins in the encounter with the face, it is the irreducibility of the face of the Other that "[opens] a new dimension," that of the ethical, thereby establishing the self in freedom and responsibility.<sup>27</sup> As such, the "moral summons"<sup>28</sup> of the face-to-face encounter brings about the establishment of a "life," of the ethical life.

A further point regarding Taylor's formulation and how Buddhism might receive it concerns the relation with the Millian exaltation of the "fullness of life." The calculative nature of the utilitarian perspective, especially as it understands itself to be concerned with pure immanence, must find only disutility in both the cruciform sacrifice of Jesus and the self-immolation of Buddhist monks, nuns and laypeople seeking out Buddhahood

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<sup>25</sup> Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?" 20.

<sup>26</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 203.

<sup>27</sup> Levinas, 197.

<sup>28</sup> Levinas, 196.



through an overcoming of enfleshment. This has to be the case because the Millian move that brackets off everything that does not contribute to the fullness of life understood purely immanently cannot recognize any good or utility in selfless sacrifice or the “somatic path” to enlightenment that becomes possible through self-immolation.<sup>29</sup> Within the Christian perspective, the recognition of the transcendent as it is present in Jesus opens up the possibility for an understanding of both how Incarnation and crucifixion call the fullness of life into question, but also how through that calling into question they actually affirm the fullness of life through cruciform love. Viewed through the calculative utilitarian lens, the gospel ethic according to which our access to the highest form of love is found in self-sacrifice is nonsensical. Similarly, the historical practice of self-immolation within Buddhism turns the economy of utility on its head, but the encounter with ultimate reality, with the transcendent, as one reaches enlightenment makes possible a life of *metta* and *karuna*, as we see most saliently enacted by the figure of the Bodhisattva.<sup>30</sup>

This is not to say that there are not significant, and perhaps even insurmountable, differences between Christian and Buddhist notions of transcendence. One that comes to mind concerns the ineluctable relation

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<sup>29</sup> In an interesting recent book, James Benn examines the historical practice of self-immolation. Benn claims “that self-immolation, rather than being an aberrant practice that must be explained away, actually offers a bodily (or somatic) path—a way to attain awakening and, ultimately, buddhahood. This path looks rather different from those soteriologies that stress practices of the mind (such as meditation and learning), which have probably received the most attention from Western scholars in Buddhist studies. Nonetheless, as we shall see, it was a path to deliverance that was considered valid by many Chinese Buddhists.” It is worth noting that self-immolation in Benn’s book does not refer to “auto-cremation” alone. He notes that “in its strictest sense, it means ‘self sacrifice’” and he therefore uses it to refer to “the broader range of practices [which include] drowning, death by starvation, feeding the body to animals or insects, and so forth.” See his *Burning for the Buddha: Self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007) 8.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche is also quite critical of the narrow-sighted moral and aesthetic vision of utilitarianism. We find this articulated, for example, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, sections 174, 291 and 253. Interestingly, Nietzsche’s critique of the ethics of utility stem from his view that it is little more than a secularized variant of Christianity. As Jonny Anomaly puts it, “Nietzsche contends that utilitarianism inherited Christianity’s commitment to the equal worth of each person, and perpetuated its erroneous assumption that a timeless, universal criterion for morality is tenable.” Jonny Anomaly, “Nietzsche’s Critique of Utilitarianism,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 29 (2005), 1.

between transcendence and the world of immanence within Christianity. Theologian Paul Janz describes the connection between transcendence and immanence in Christian thought as follows: “revelation *per se* is to be seen as a divine self-disclosure which is essentially communicated to *whole* sensibly embodied and rationally self-aware human beings in the real world of space and time, which is to say dynamically and causally at the centre of life.”<sup>31</sup> For Buddhists, on the other hand, the phenomenal world is illusory—a view that is difficult to reconcile with the central place of causal authority in Christian thought, particularly as it relates to Incarnation, “the weaving of God’s life into human lives.”<sup>32</sup> But in spite of this divergence between Buddhism and Christianity, we are nevertheless presented with complementary notions of how an encounter with transcendence in both Buddhism and Christianity initiates the decentering movement away from the self/*atman* that leads to an inevitable return to immanence that upholds some variant of human flourishing. In other words, though the precise structure of the moral source in each of these traditions may differ, these transcendent sources can still motivate us, move us, to the kenosis that Taylor holds is vitally important for practical *agapê*. He describes this kenotic movement as follows:

acknowledging the transcendent means being called to a change of identity. Buddhism gives us an obvious reason to talk this way. The change here is quite radical, from self to ‘no self’ (*anatta*). But Christian faith can be seen in the same terms: as calling for a radical decentering of the self, in relation with God. (“Thy will be done.”)<sup>33</sup>

Taylor’s basic point is that the radical decentering of the self through an encounter with transcendence initiates both an “aiming beyond life” and the opening of the self to a “change in identity.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, this proper relationality with God for Christianity is manifested in obedience. How then does this movement position the decentered self vis-à-vis immanence and human flourishing? Taylor acknowledges that there are many examples of “reformers” in most religious traditions who have denied the potentially “symbiotic, complementary relationship between renunciation and flourishing” and thus have pursued renunciation “disintrinsicated from the pursuit of flourishing.”<sup>35</sup> However, Taylor is clear that this disintrinsication cuts

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Janz, “Divine Causality, World, and Reason,” Plenary Paper, Society for the Study of Theology. See also his “Divine Causality and the Nature of Theological Questioning.” *Modern Theology* 23:3 (July 2007), 317-338.

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 14.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 21.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 21.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 21.

against the grain of the “central thrust” of religions such as Christianity and Buddhism. In these two religious traditions,

Renouncing—aiming beyond life—not only takes you away but also brings you back to flourishing. In Christian terms, if renunciation decenters you in relation with God, God’s will is that humans flourish, and so you are taken back to an affirmation of this flourishing, which is biblically called *agapê*. In Buddhist terms, Enlightenment doesn’t just turn you from the world; it also opens the floodgates of *metta* (loving kindness) and *karuna* (compassion).<sup>36</sup>

Contra those critiques of religious life that hold that the acknowledgement of transcendence results in a negation of life—and Nietzsche’s account is but one example—the kenotic decentering of the self does not simply aim beyond life, but actually lays the grounds for a reinvigoration of human flourishing through practical *agapê*, enacted in charity and ethics as benevolence. This is a central theme of the fifth chapter, in which I examine Taylor’s account of how what he calls the work of Reform sidelines the body and the related physical enactments of *agapê*.

## 2.2 The Nietzschean Self as *homo religiosus*

Thus far I provided a very brief sketch of how transcendence functions as a moral source in Taylor’s religious thought, and how the encounter with transcendence decenters the self. Taylor outlines this movement within both Christianity and Buddhism, but the very short discussion of Levinas also revealed how the self is called into question when confronted with the transcendent in the irreducibility of the face of the Other. The focus now turns to Nietzsche’s anthropological account to show how both transcendence and dispossession are pivotal in his account of human subjectivity.

One overly reductive way of interpreting Nietzsche’s conception of selfhood is to identify the self in Nietzsche as nothing more than a primordial battle of drives, founded and kept in check by human instinct. If one reads Nietzsche selectively, this view of the self could be ascribed to him. Nietzsche does suggest that “our drives are reducible to the will to power.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 21-22.

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gesammelte Werke* (Muscari Edition) Volume XIV, 287. The English translation of the passage comes from Walter Kauffman’s *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968) 216.

Furthermore, it is certainly the case for Nietzsche that natural physical human drives are not only inescapable but ontologically fundamental, since he identifies any “[animal, species, or individual] corrupt when it loses its instincts.”<sup>38</sup> However, the ontological identification of the self as a primordial battle of drives, and nothing more, ignores central themes in Nietzsche’s complex study of the self as will.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, such a primordial depiction of the self is unable to accommodate key Nietzschean themes such as suffering, the eternal, and the parabolic, themes which will be shown to have religious resonances in the Nietzschean account of the human. It is with special attention to these Nietzschean themes that the case will be made that the Nietzschean self is not purely instinctual, but also *religious*, involving certain modes of transcendence. It is certainly possible that Nietzsche might reject such a depiction, and certain that many if not most of his epigones would dismiss it. Nevertheless, through a reading of Nietzsche, I will suggest that the Nietzschean self must be understood as *homo religiosus*, which moves him towards not only Taylor, but also the larger theistic/transcendent corner of the modern moral order. I will consider how Nietzschean religiosity proceeds through the doctrine of the eternal recurrence—the primal affirmation in his philosophy without which one cannot understand his conception of suffering. The “doctrine” of the eternal recurrence provides us with an account of how the self must orient itself to the eternal, a relation that enables one to understand human suffering constructively, as necessary for upbuilding.

Thus, my argument that Nietzsche’s conception of the self is religious will run roughly as follows: Nietzsche provides an understanding of human subjectivity oriented around a conception of being that finds its grounding in the affirmation of a particular notion of the eternal. The subject’s relation to the eternal plays a central role in her becoming, a becoming which is largely constituted by suffering or tragedy. I will argue that for Nietzsche the self in proper relation to the eternal both creates itself and imposes content on—or “names”—the eternal, which is otherwise empty. This is achieved for Nietzsche through the *affirmation* of the eternal recurrence, which demands that the self affirm both joy and suffering. Finally, whereas the proper

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<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, In *The Portable Nietzsche*. Walter Kaufmann (trans. and ed.) (New York: Penguin, 1954) 572.

<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting that in a section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* entitled “On the Despisers of the Body,” Nietzsche rejects any simple mind/body dualism and describes the self as coextensive with the body. For Nietzsche, the self (as well as spirit or soul) is necessarily embodied, and moreover, is the body. See *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 146-147. Consequently, my usage of “self” in my discussion of Nietzsche will comprise all aspects of the human subject (i.e. pneumatological, physiological, rational/mental, emotive, etc.)

relation to the eternal on the Christian account is manifested in *obedience*, Nietzsche understand the highest form of relationality, not in obedience to some external, but in *affirmation, creation or will*.

Undoubtedly, the conclusion that the Nietzschean subject is a religious one can be arrived at and substantiated in more than one way.<sup>40</sup> For example, Karl Löwith in *Meaning in History* claims that Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence and his account of history are deeply Judeo-Christian though they may strive to be Greek.<sup>41</sup> According to Löwith, Nietzsche wants to allow for the self to be creative through willing like the God of Genesis. However, for the Greeks (Löwith claims) human creativity was purely mimetic, an imitation of nature; the pagan subject does not create *ex nihilo*.<sup>42</sup> While it may be interesting to entertain Löwith's account that the Nietzschean view of history rests on explicit Judeo-Christian foundations and is therefore religious in a more traditional Christian sense—Nietzsche does after all talk about the eternal recurrence as something "revealed," "inspired," bringing about a "rapture whose tremendous tension occasionally discharges itself in a flood of tears"—I will instead discuss the eternal recurrence as a parable that Nietzsche wills and affirms.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, I will show that the eternal recurrence as parable allows the self to will and to give content to the eternal, or alternatively put, to name the eternal.

In "Upon the Blessed Isles," Nietzsche describes the function of the parabolic: "It is of time and becoming that the best parables should speak: let them be a praise and a justification of all impermanence."<sup>44</sup> This claim has

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<sup>40</sup> A recent example of a book that arrives at such a conclusion is Julian Young's *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) in which Nietzsche is described as a religious communitarian thinker.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949) 214-222.

<sup>42</sup> There is certainly room for critique of Löwith's interpretation of Nietzsche as it pertains to the basic thesis of *Meaning in History*. Löwith argues that the western world has two fundamentally opposed interpretations of history, the Greek, which is cyclical, and the Christian, which is linear and eschatological. As Löwith fails to point out in the second appendix to *Meaning in History*, Nietzsche's account of history is fundamentally un-Christian (at least in terms of the way Löwith defines Christian history in his text) because the eternal recurrence has no end, no eschaton, and therefore is not eschatological. For a more developed discussion of Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence from Löwith, see his *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. J. Harvey Lomax (trans.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*. Walter Kaufmann (trans.) (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 300.

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 198-199.

deep resonances with Nietzsche's assertion about the eternal recurrence in *Ecce Homo*. Nietzsche there claims, "The fundamental conception of [Zarathustra], the idea of the eternal recurrence, [is the] highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable."<sup>45</sup> The point that Nietzsche is making, insofar as the two declarations are connected, is that the eternal recurrence is the best parable. The parable of the eternal recurrence allows the individual self to affirm becoming, to affirm the impermanence of being, to affirm and justify the character of time and the eternal. It is the affirmation of the eternal recurrence that is necessary to make the upward dialectical movement to the child, the creator. This capacity to create can only exist when the self can redeem and move beyond suffering, and this is achieved through the parabolic affirmation of the eternal return of the selfsame.

Perhaps Nietzsche's most famous discussion of the upbuilding of the self is found in "On the Three Metamorphoses" in *Zarathustra*.<sup>46</sup> The upbuilding movement is discussed in terms of the transformation of spirit from camel to lion, and finally from lion to child. The camel is the manifestation of the human spirit that is heavily burdened. Nietzsche states that the camel's greatest encumbrance is "man...himself. That is because he carries on his shoulders too much that is alien to him."<sup>47</sup> When the camel metamorphosizes, it is transformed into the lion who utters a "sacred No" to the "Thou shalt." The camel, unburdened of all external values, evolves into the lion. However, it is the movement from the lion to the child that is most interesting for the present discussion. Unlike the child, the lion is unable to create new values, and the upbuilding movement from lion to child is consequently difficult to undergo. The lion can utter the sacred "No" but not the sacred "Yes" of the child, of the creator. Only

[the] child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of

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<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 295.

<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche also discusses extensively the dialectic of upbuilding in a section titled "On Self-Overcoming" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 225-228. Similar to "The Three Metamorphoses," for the self to undergo upbuilding according to this section of *Zarathustra*, it must constantly overcome itself. However, "On Self-Overcoming" does reveal more clearly that negation and destruction are necessary for upbuilding and for creation. The downward movement of this dialectic is also discussed metaphorically throughout *Zarathustra*, but is particularly clear on 122 and 266, as well as in a short passage on 176 ("You must wish to consume yourself in your own flame: how could you wish to become new unless you had first become ashes").

<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 305.

creation...a sacred “Yes” is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.<sup>48</sup>

Nietzsche is an advocate of struggle and war and this agon the lion can achieve. However, it is only the child who through agonistic struggle and willing is able to beget creation. The upbuilding of the self is limited insofar as it is incapable of the sacred “Yes”—and it is this inability to utter the “Yes” that characterizes the existential predicament of the lion. But to what precisely is it that the child is able to say “Yes”? Arguably, it is the child’s capacity to say “Yes” to *both* woe and joy that enables it to create, a “Yes” that is achieved through the affirmation of the eternal recurrence. This Yes-saying to woe and joy is the exclusive power of the child, and the pre-requisite for creation.

However, even for Zarathustra, this sacred “Yes” is not easily uttered. We see how difficult the affirmation of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence can be in Zarathustra’s own constant reluctance to embrace the return of the selfsame. The soothsayer first mentions the eternal, proclaiming, “All is empty, all is the same, all has been.”<sup>49</sup> Zarathustra’s response to this first articulation of the empty return of the selfsame is revealing:

[The] prophecy touched his heart and changed him. He walked about sad and weary...[He] said to his disciples...“Alas, how shall I save my light through it. It must not suffocate in this sadness...” Thus grieved in his heart, Zarathustra walked about; and for three days he took neither food nor drink, had no rest, and lost his speech.<sup>50</sup>

Zarathustra is greatly wearied and depressed by the soothsayer’s contention. The soothsayer’s formulation of the eternal recurrence borders on nihilism for Zarathustra and he cannot help but shrink back from the eternal return of the selfsame—indeed, his profound suffering leaves Zarathustra speechless. Eternity as formulated by the soothsayer appears to be empty. The eternal recurrence is oriented backwards—“all has been”—and is therefore stifling to creative freedom; consequently, Zarathustra cannot bring himself to affirm it.

In “On the Vision and the Riddle,” which occurs later in *Zarathustra*, we find that the text’s protagonist is this time the herald of the eternal recurrence. In his rebuke of the dwarf (the spirit of gravity), Zarathustra articulates the eternal recurrence more extensively than did the soothsayer,

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<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 139.

<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 245.

<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 246.

though his formulation is similar in spirit—empty and seemingly inhibitive of creation, and still primarily oriented temporally backwards:

From this gateway, Moment, a long, eternal lane leads *backward*: behind us lies an eternity. Must not whatever *can* walk have walked on this lane before? Must not whatever *can* happen have happened, have been done, have passed before...[Must] not all of us have been there before? And return and walk in that other lane, out there, before us, in this long dreadful lane – must we not eternally return?<sup>51</sup>

In Zarathustra's formulation, there is a promise of a future, but a future comprised of and therefore limited by all that has been done, all that has happened. It is worth noting that before Zarathustra pronounces the eternal recurrence, his reluctance to articulate it is made manifest in "The stillest Hour," which closes the second part of *Zarathustra*. There, a voice admonishes Zarathustra, "You know it, Zarathustra, but you do not say it."<sup>52</sup> The voice's message causes Zarathustra to "cry with fright" and makes the blood leave his face. Eventually, Zarathustra responds to the voice's admonition, "Yes, I know it, but I do not want to say it...It is beyond my strength!"<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, in "The Vision and the Riddle" Zarathustra overcomes his reluctance to *articulate* the eternal recurrence, though he still is unable to *affirm* the eternal return of the selfsame, and his ideas about eternal return make Zarathustra "afraid of [his] own thoughts and the thoughts behind [his] thoughts."<sup>54</sup>

The final formulation of the eternal recurrence is found in "The Convalescent," where this time it is Zarathustra's animals that assert eternal return. This formulation of eternal recurrence focuses less on the past and on repetition, and more on growth and a dynamic future. This final formulation is worth quoting at length:

[To] those who think as we do, all things themselves are *dancing*: they come back and offer their hands and *laugh* and flee – and come back. Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being. Everything dies, everything *blossoms again*; eternally runs the year of being. Everything breaks, everything is *joined anew*; eternally the same house of being is *built*. Everything parts, everything greets every other thing again; eternally the ring of being remains faithful to

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<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 270.

<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 257.

<sup>53</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 257.

<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 270.



itself. In every Now, *being begins*; round every Here rolls the sphere  
There. The center is everywhere. Bent is the path of eternity.<sup>55</sup>

The eternal recurrence on this formulation does not present Zarathustra with an empty eternity or the inhibition of life and creation. Here, eternal recurrence is dynamic and brings dancing, laughter, blossoming/growth, building/creation, and the beginning of being. And for the first time in the text, Zarathustra does not recoil in fear upon hearing the articulation of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence. Yet, Zarathustra still does not immediately affirm it, instead describing his nausea at the thought of the never-ending return of the small man. He exclaims, “Alas, man recurs eternally. The small man recurs eternally...[That] was my disgust with all eternity. Alas! Nausea! Nausea! Nausea!”<sup>56</sup> While Zarathustra might have embraced the creative possibilities in the final formulation of the eternal recurrence, he is as yet unable to affirm the eternal return of the small man who makes him nauseous. It is now disgust rather than fear that stands in the way of Zarathustra’s utterance of the sacred “Yes.”

However, before the end of Part Three of *Zarathustra*, the teacher of the eternal recurrence is finally able to affirm the unending return of the selfsame. This affirmation reaches its apogee in the section “The Seven Seals (Or: The Yes and Amen Song).” There Zarathustra cries out, “Oh, how should I not lust after eternity and after the nuptial ring of rings, the ring of recurrence? Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children, unless it be this woman whom I love: for I love you, O eternity.”<sup>57</sup> It is worth underscoring the reference to children here. It would seem that Zarathustra has at last discovered that true creative power, embodied in the child, requires the affirmation of eternal recurrence. This affirmation allows Zarathustra to be properly related to the eternal, which through the begetting of the child, Zarathustra can begin to create and to name.

Notably, it is not clear what exactly in the third section prompts this shift in Zarathustra. Why is he now able to affirm the eternal return of the small man, which makes him suffer such nausea? We are given some insight into why he might have made this shift in “The Drunken Song” in Part Four of *Zarathustra*. Here Zarathustra explicitly makes the connection between woe and joy, and their interplay in the eternal return. Woe and joy interact dialectically, driving forward Zarathustra’s affirmation of the eternal return. Woe wants to overcome itself and therefore wants heirs: “I want children, I do not want *myself*.”<sup>58</sup> At the same time joy wants its own propagation, its

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<sup>55</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 329-330. Emphasis added.

<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 331.

<sup>57</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 340.

<sup>58</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 434.

fecundity, wants its own eternal return: “joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants everything eternally the same.”<sup>59</sup> Woe pushes towards the future, towards the eternal, in its own self-overcoming on the way to new creation in the child. Joy pushes towards the future, towards the eternal, in expectation of its own recurrence. As Zarathustra explains, these two are co-penetrated, tied together, “entangled, ensnared”: “Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends then you said Yes to *all* woe.”<sup>60</sup> This becomes clear to Zarathustra when he finally comes to affirm the eternal recurrence. The child, creation, will, and joy require that the self assert a resounding and unequivocal Yes to suffering and woe—even to the *small man*. Without this “going under,” the self cannot go through the process of upbuilding, cannot go from the No of the Lion to the Yes of the creative one, the child. It is the parabolic affirmation of the eternal recurrence that enables Zarathustra to overcome both his fear and his nausea and to utter the sacred “Yes” of the child.

Since my present task is to show the religious character of the Nietzschean self, particularly in how it relates to the eternal and transcendence, it is perhaps worth highlighting the analogical similarities between the eternal recurrence and the Jewish deity Yahweh (as discussed by Nietzsche in *The Antichrist*). Indeed, Nietzsche’s discussion of Yahweh seems to describe the Jewish God not as a founding metaphysical being, but as a parable expressing the Jewish will to power. According to Nietzsche, there are two alternatives for gods, one of which is to express a people’s will to power.<sup>61</sup> The second alternative for gods is that they represent a people’s *incapacity* for power, and this form is exemplified in the Christian God, which is seen as a force that props up the weak. Yahweh—at least up until the era of the kings—represents the former alternative. The Yahweh of this epoch of Jewish history “was the expression of a consciousness of power, of joy in oneself, of hope for oneself: through him victory and welfare were expected; through him nature was trusted to give what the people needed.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, for Nietzsche, Yahweh parabolically expresses the Jews’ “natural relationship to all things” (AC 594.). Yahweh, like the eternal recurrence, is a parable that facilitates the eternal Yes to existence, to becoming, to war, to victory, to defeat, to suffering, to power. Unfortunately, according to

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<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 434.

<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 435. A similar formulation is found in *Twilight of the Idols*: “That there may be the eternal joy of creating. That the will to life may eternally affirm itself, the agony of the women giving birth must also be there eternally.” In *The Portable Nietzsche*. Walter Kaufmann (trans.) (New York: Penguin Books, 1954) 562.

<sup>61</sup> Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 583.

<sup>62</sup> Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 594.

Nietzsche, Yahweh as eternal Yes was spoiled in the “Christianization” of God, which saw God become the “contradiction of life.”<sup>63</sup> Of course, the Nietzschean Yahweh is not a perfect analogue for the eternal recurrence, but the similarities are striking. When these parables are affirmed, both Yahweh and the eternal recurrence allow the individual: to proclaim the holy Yes; to relate to victory and defeat, woe and joy; to express his will to power. Both function parabolically—at least as Nietzsche formulates them—and religiously, enabling the self to relate to the eternal.

So how does the affirmation of the eternal recurrence help the self relate to its suffering, to engage it redemptively? For Nietzsche, it is only when one can create that one can move beyond suffering and make it acceptable. Without the capacity for the sacred Yes, the self is pulled inexorably towards revenge against a suffering past. However, with the reconciliation with the past that comes from the parabolic affirmation of eternal recurrence, the Nietzschean self is able to will redemptively, to redeem its suffering past. Nietzsche defines redemption as follows: “To redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all ‘it was’ into a ‘thus I willed it’—that alone should I call redemption.”<sup>64</sup> This “willing backwards” (if I may call it that) cannot be willing to change the past—that would be the enactment of revenge, “the will’s ill will against time and its ‘it was.’”<sup>65</sup> Instead, the “thus I willed it” must be an affirmation of what was, that it may come again, and come again eternally. If the Nietzschean self does not embrace the parable of the eternal recurrence, it has no power to redeem past suffering. However, with the eternal recurrence, the going under in suffering is constructive for the self and can beget the child. As Nietzsche puts it, “Creation—that is the great redemption from suffering...But that the creator may be, suffering is needed and much change...To be the child who is newly born, the creator must also want to be the mother who gives birth and the pangs of the birth-giver.”<sup>66</sup> In the eternal recurrence of the selfsame, woe and joy are dialectically intertwined—creation requires destruction, upbuilding requires a going under. Without the parabolic affirmation of this dialectic, the Nietzschean self cannot properly relate to the eternal and cannot reconcile itself with a suffering past.

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<sup>63</sup> Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 585

<sup>64</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 251.

<sup>65</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 252.

<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 199. This theme is also taken up in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*. Walter Kaufmann (trans. and ed.) (New York: Penguin, 1954) 562.

### 2.3 The Nietzschean Challenge

Having gone through this argument that highlights the religious textures of Nietzschean thought, I believe we can begin to see a tension in Taylor's most recent iteration of the modern moral order. Examining this tension will help illuminate the manner in which Christian agapeic transcendence functions authoritatively in Taylor's moral philosophy. To bring this tension into better focus, let me pose the following question: insofar as Nietzsche's philosophy accords a significant role to self-transcendence—or, "horizontal" transcendence<sup>67</sup>—and insofar as the upbuilding towards the creative self (embodied in the child) requires an emptying, or *kenosis*, why does Taylor set Nietzscheanism against other transcendent perspectives in his discussion of the modern moral order, since the Nietzschean account also describes how the encounter with transcendence decenters the self? It seems upon close investigation that the Nietzschean corner of the modern moral order has numerous points of correspondence with the transcendent corner.

Let me flesh this out a bit more. To begin with, many of the facets of Taylor's description of transcendence (quoted at length above) find points of resonance in Nietzschean thought. For example, the affirmation of the eternal recurrence naturally implies some "good beyond life," beyond the present life being lived, insofar as the self must will its own death and all that comes after it. It is this affirmation, the "thus I willed it", that permits the self to acknowledge its own annihilation in death as good and to will all that has been and all that will be. And it is as a consequence of this willing of the eternal return that the self overcomes itself, thus beginning a *new life* of creation. Of course, there is no room for *Theos* in the Nietzschean account, but this absence puts Nietzschean transcendence in company with Buddhism (and Levinas, on certain readings) and, as noted above, non-theistic conceptions of transcendence are important moral sources for Taylor's discussion of the modern moral order and their inclusion in his moral philosophy explains why he opts for the language of transcendence rather than the more exclusive language of theism.

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<sup>67</sup> This terminology is used by Regina Schwartz to describe "the project of self-transcendence," as opposed to "vertical transcendence" which "suggests leaving the immanent world, the phenomenal world, for another world." However, as Schwartz rightly points out, "these categories – vertical and horizontal – are heuristic distinctions that ultimately break down, for the vertical inflects the horizontal, and vice versa." See her introduction to *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature and Theology Approach the Beyond*. Regina Schwartz (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2004) x-xi.

However, not only are there points of resonance between Taylor and Nietzsche regarding transcendence, but the Nietzschean account, like the religious perspectives upon which Taylor focuses, also contains a radical decentering move. The use of kenotic language is no clearer in Nietzsche than at the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where the Nietzschean protagonist exclaims, “‘this cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become man again.’ Thus Zarathustra began to go under.”<sup>68</sup> And nowhere in Nietzsche is the emptying and decentering more climactic than in Zarathustra’s parabolic affirmation of the eternal recurrence, in which Zarathustra affirms the perpetual return of the small man. Through this decentering act, Zarathustra renounces a vital part of himself—his affinity for strength which is manifested in his loathing of the banality of the small man—but this renunciation is essential for him to relate himself properly to eternity and thereby to become the creator, the child who “lusts after eternity.”

Thus far, Nietzsche seems to fall within the constellation of moral perspectives that recognize some transcendent good, a good which calls life into question, but through that calling into question allows for a new, fuller life. What then leads Taylor, as an advocate of transcendence, to oppose Nietzsche’s moral philosophy and to characterize it as “anti-humanism”? It would seem that Nietzsche could only be described as an “anti-humanist” once we have some sort of basic agreement on what the human *is*. In other words, an ontology of the human is needed before making judgments about which philosophical, political and moral views can be classified as humanist or anti-humanist. Arguably, it is precisely on the question of what the essence of the human is, and, most importantly, *what kind of love this essence calls one to*, upon which Taylor’s critique of Nietzscheanism turns. The primary problem that Taylor finds in Nietzsche is that the latter rejects *agapê* (or some secular variant of this selfless love) root and branch. This is not to say that Nietzsche’s perspective lacks an erotic dimension; indeed, it is driven by love, an eros that is non-universal and often destructive. Unlike the saint whom Zarathustra encounters who loves God but not man, Zarathustra is clear about the object of his love: “I love man.”<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the revulsion and nausea that Zarathustra feels when confronted with the eternal return of the small man is deeply rooted in the small man’s inability to love creation, to lust after eternity, to *will*. As Nietzsche puts it, the last man blinks and asks, “What is love? What is creation? What is longing?”<sup>70</sup> And it is important to the present discussion that Nietzsche couples creation with love here, since for him creation manifests itself in destruction. The Nietzschean interplay

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<sup>68</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 122.

<sup>69</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 123.

<sup>70</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 129.

between love, creation and destruction, though it is both internal and external to the self, is described in its internal mode in the following passage from *Zarathustra*:

I am *that which must always overcome itself*...That I must be struggle and becoming and an end and an opposition to ends...Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it.<sup>71</sup>

Creation in Nietzsche manifests itself in negation, in destruction, in violence. In light of the central place that Nietzsche accords to destruction in his construal of love, it is unsurprising that Taylor finds fault with Nietzschean eroticism.

For Nietzsche, the essence of the human is will: the will that in its uncorrupted, *heroic* mode loves, destroys, creates. And if one accepts Nietzsche's anthropology of the uncorrupted human as destructive/creative will, then his moral and political philosophy is not only "humanistic," but is in fact more humanistic than what usually passes for humanism, driven as it is (on both Nietzsche and Taylor's historical accounts) by secular transpositions of Christian morality. Indeed, Nietzsche's would be the only true humanism insofar as his alone celebrates the heroic, the overman, the greatness of man and rejects the nay-saying "*castratism*" of Christianity, and its elevation of the weak through pity. Nietzsche's aphoristic depiction of good and bad in *The Antichrist* provides us with the basic guidelines for the articulation of a Nietzschean humanism:

What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness...The weak and the failures shall perish: first principle of *our* love for man. And they shall be given every possible assistance.<sup>72</sup>

The affirmation of the eternal recurrence certainly makes possible self-transcendence, and the decentering of the self enables it to affirm not only creation and life, but also (necessarily) destruction, negation and death—so the love we find on this reading of Nietzscheanism is quite obviously at odds with the biblical *agapê* that Taylor thinks is the strongest moral source for the humanism we see enacted in ethics as benevolence. As Taylor formulates it in "A Catholic Modernity?", the Christian conception of love, of *agapê*, is a response to the radical unconditionality of the fact that the neighbor is

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<sup>71</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 227.

<sup>72</sup> Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*. Walter Kaufmann (trans.) (New York: Penguin Books, 1954) 570.

created in *imago dei*.<sup>73</sup> And in light of Taylor's formulation that the decentering move that precedes *agapê* is a response in *obedience*— "Thy will be done"—we can see how far his Christian conception of love diverges from Nietzsche's, which is manifested not in *obedience*, but in resolute, *autonomous* willing. Surely, it is because of the critical discongruities between the Taylorian and Nietzschean conceptions of transcendence, love, and kenosis, and because of the disjuncture between Nietzsche's ontology of the human as will (with its propensity for destruction) and ethics as benevolence, that Taylor issues his Nietzschean challenge in the closing pages of *Sources of the Self*. And even though Nietzschean philosophy has been shown to acknowledge transcendence, which raises problems for Taylor's formulation of the modern moral order, it is unclear how Taylor might formulate it very differently. Taylor admits that his map of the modern moral order is overly schematic, which might seem to leave room for reformulation.<sup>74</sup> However, for Taylor, the articulations of transcendence that underwrite ethics as benevolence will always pit themselves against the anti-*agapê* of Nietzsche. Thus, the map of the modern moral order we find in "A Catholic Modernity?" and *A Secular Age* is the one that naturally follows from Taylor's philosophical and historical account, inflected as it is by his religious commitments.

I have shown in this chapter the central place of transcendence, especially as imparted through the gospels, in Taylor's formulation of the modern moral order and his analysis of Nietzsche. This introductory sketch of transcendence was shown to be inclusive, non-dogmatic, and attentive to the demands of religious pluralism. But insofar as his moral thought seems to begin and end with *agapê*, we can anticipate objections about the epistemological authority that Taylor accords to this conception of self-sacrificial love as a basis for opting for an ethics of benevolence over the heroic ethic that Nietzsche embraces. Is this move by Taylor a "leap of faith"? For Søren Kierkegaard, for example, Incarnation constitutes an offense against reason, and perhaps Taylor needs to tap into that offensiveness to challenge what he takes to be the offensiveness of Nietzsche.<sup>75</sup> But unlike both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, Taylor has a regard for the academy—and the place of secular reason within it—and thus he chooses a less offensive

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<sup>73</sup> Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?" 35.

<sup>74</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 496.

<sup>75</sup> The concept of offence is a central theme in Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity*. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (trans. and eds.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

path to respond to the Nietzschean challenge: he constructs a counter-genealogy and fleshes out a moral ontology.<sup>76</sup>

Despite Redhead's claim that Taylor is critical of the genealogical approach in general, Taylor scholar Ruth Abbey has portrayed Taylor's work of historical retrieval as a genealogy.<sup>77</sup> Whereas Nietzsche's genealogy attempts to show that the orientation of morality towards benevolence ultimately brings about an inversion of all values, wherein the will turns against life, uttering a "No" instead of a "Yes," Taylor's genealogy wants to expose how the task of retrieval can serve to re-animate the transcendent sources that are necessary for our high moral commitments—including, of course, *agapê*. And, notably, Taylor himself describes *Sources of the Self* as a genealogy:

The book is genealogical. I start from the present situation, from formative ideas, from our conflicting forms of self-understanding, and I try to unearth certain earlier forms from which they arise...it is not a complete historical reconstruction, it is a very selective step backwards to rediscover certain sources.<sup>78</sup>

But, as Abbey points out, Taylor's genealogy differs from Nietzsche's in that "Taylor undertakes a genealogy of morals without a hermeneutic of suspicion," by which she means that "Taylor does not adopt a mercilessly skeptical or hostile attitude towards the values, self-understandings or moral sources of modern selfhood."<sup>79</sup> Taylor's adopts this non-hostile stance in an attempt to give a "best account" of the sources of the self. In order to understand what Taylor takes to be involved in the articulation of the best account, and why he does not begin his genealogy "suspiciously," it is necessary to contextualize the process of articulation within his wider moral philosophy, particularly his moral ontology. It is to this task that I turn in the next chapter.

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<sup>76</sup> For example, Taylor refers to the "nature of philosophical discourse... which has to try to persuade honest thinkers of any and all metaphysical or theological commitments." "A Catholic Modernity?" 13.

<sup>77</sup> Redhead, 96; Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 51; "Charles Taylor: Sources of the Self," in *Central Works of Philosophy Volume 5: The Twentieth Century: Quine and After*. John Shand (ed.) (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006) 268-269.

<sup>78</sup> Charles Taylor, "From Philosophical Anthropology to the Politics of Recognition: An Interview with Philippe de Lara," *Thesis Eleven* 52 (1998), p. 362.

<sup>79</sup> Ruth Abbey, "Charles Taylor: Sources of the Self," 269.



### Chapter 3: The Self and the Good: Expressivism, Transcendence and Weak Ontology

In his groundbreaking book *Sustaining Affirmation*, Stephen K. White makes the claim that Taylor's philosophical programme is best understood in terms of "weak ontology," which is to say that it recognizes its own contestability and its own limits. White discusses the differences between 'strong' and 'weak' ontologies in the following terms:

Strong are those ontologies that claim to show us 'the way the world is,' or how God's being stands to human being, or what human nature is. It is by reference to this external ground that ethical and political life gain their sense of what is right; moreover, this foundation's validity is unchanging and of universal reach...[Weak ontologies accept] the idea that all fundamental conceptualizations of self, other, and world are contestable. [Furthermore], there is the sense that such conceptualizations are nevertheless necessary or unavoidable for an adequate reflective ethical and political life.<sup>80</sup>

The ontological turn to weak articulations of the kinds of realities that underwrite and animate our moral judgments and our conceptions of the good is significant on White's account for at least two fundamental reasons. First, ontologically weak conceptions of the self, the other and the world escape the serious foundationalist problems that can plague strong ontology. And second, unlike modern accounts of the subject that conceptualize it as disengaged from any background—thus leading White to describe it as the "Teflon subject"<sup>81</sup>—the weak ontological turn acknowledges the inescapability of ontological claims necessary for a deep, rich, textured account of selfhood, otherness and the good.<sup>82</sup> Unlike the Teflon subject, which strives for unimpeded "frictionless motion," weak ontology offers an account of subjectivity that is ultimately "stickier" than the Teflon variant, wherein the self is inexorably shaped by a number of existential realities. White identifies "language, mortality or finitude, natality or the capacity for

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<sup>80</sup> Stephen White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) 6-8.

<sup>81</sup> There is an obvious connection between White's Teflon subject and the Cartesian disengaged subject and the Lockean "punctual" self discussed throughout *Sources of the Self*, as well as the "buffered self" of *A Secular Age*. See *Sources of the Self*, 49, 143-176, 320; *Hegel*, 6-7; *A Secular Age*, esp. 37-42, 134-142, 300-307.

<sup>82</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 4-5.

radical novelty, and the articulation of some ultimate background source” as constitutive facets of human being that ontologically weak anthropologies incorporate in light of their universality.<sup>83</sup>

White acknowledges that the Taylorian account is formative of his own understanding of weak ontology and moral sources. White’s early work on the ontological turn described Taylor as a “border runner between strong and weak ontology,” an assessment which ostensibly carried with it a pressing need to disentangle the weak ontology of Taylor’s moral and anthropological account from the strong ontology presumed to be a constitutive component of his theism.<sup>84</sup> However, further study of Taylor’s moral and political programme brought about a shift in White’s interpretation of Taylor’s theistic and ontological commitments, with White finally concluding that Taylor’s “Christian sources might actually qualify as weak ontology.”<sup>85</sup> White argues that what is critical for the weak ontological turn is a shift in the “how” rather than the “where” of ontological commitments. White moves away from the standard secularist line that establishes a spatial distinction of private and public spheres, demarcating the spaces within which ontological claims can and cannot comfortably be made. Against this kind of spatialized imaginary, White instead emphasizes the *manner* in which ontological commitments are articulated and enacted. And on this point, White asserts that the manner in which Taylor draws from his theism is ontologically weak – or, as Ruth Abbey succinctly puts it, White’s classification of Taylor’s theism as weak ontology “means that theism shapes and prefigures, but neither determines nor dictates, [Taylor’s] political and ethical values.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> White, “Weak Ontology: Genealogy and Critical Issues,” *The Hedgehog Review* 2005 (Summer), 17. See also *Sustaining Affirmation*, 9.

<sup>84</sup> See White’s “Weak Ontology and Liberal Political Reflection,” *Political Theory* 25/4 (August 2007), 506.

<sup>85</sup> White, “Weak Ontology: Genealogy and Critical Issues,” 14.

<sup>86</sup> Ruth Abbey. “Turning or Spinning? Charles Taylor’s Catholicism: A Reply to Ian Fraser.” *Contemporary Political Theory* 5 (2006), 172. Abbey also discusses White’s interpretation of Taylor as a weak ontologist in a previous work (see her “Primary Enemy? Monotheism and Pluralism,” in *How Should We Talk about Religion*. James White (ed.) (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) 211-229). Interestingly, it is only in this recent reply to Fraser that she casts doubt on whether Taylor’s theism is in fact best understood as weak ontology. In the more recent work her critique runs as follows: “While White’s supple analysis of the role of theism in Taylor’s thought is highly illuminating, it seems to either overlook or accord insufficient attention to the powerful link between Taylor’s theism and his pluralism. Once a theistic ontology appears as the foundation for pluralism, at least in certain important respects, we might find ourselves back in

White acknowledges that there is something to the suspicion that the strong /weak distinction is but another iteration of familiar distinctions such as metaphysical/antimetaphysical (or post-modern) or foundational/antifoundational. But he argues that there is a subtle yet important difference between the two. The purpose of White's new terminological distinction of "weak ontology is to call greater attention to the kind of interpretive-existential terrain that anyone who places herself in the 'anti' position must explore at some point."<sup>87</sup> White argues that he hopes "to shift the intellectual burden here from a preoccupation with what is opposed and deconstructed, to an engagement with what must be articulated, cultivated, and affirmed in its wake."<sup>88</sup> He provides us with new terminology, but also a new set of methodological demands. Weak ontology must navigate around the philosophical dangers of metaphysics and foundationalism, and thus only offer "figurations of [anthropological] universals, whose persuasiveness can never be fully disentangled from an interpretation of present historical circumstances."<sup>89</sup> In light of the historical situatedness of any ontological figuration, the weak ontologist is fully cognizant of the contestability implicit in all accounts of human being. Because of the built-in contestability of weak ontology, the weak ontologist does not attempt to provide a foundationalist justification for politics and ethics, according to which justification is understood in a straightforward, unidirectional manner where a linear path leads from a foundation to an incontestable and fairly self-evident political or ethical system. Instead, White describes a tripartite relationship in the movement from weak ontology to politics and ethics, wherein "critical energy and discrimination [flow]" between 3 corners: 1) the "prefiguring...ontological concepts" themselves; 2) "the judgments and norms relevant to specific contexts of action"; and 3) the subject's "historical 'we' claims and narratives."<sup>90</sup> Weak ontology does indeed provide us with the means to discuss the good life and fullness, to give an account of right behavior, political responsibility, and dignity—but it does not proceed foundationally, instead attempting to remain fully attentive to the place of individual judgment and historical imbeddedness and the non-linear (and not always easily discernable) relationship between ontological claims and political and ethical ones.

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the land of strong ontology, according to which there is a clear and direct relationship between ontological claims and ethical prescriptions. Perhaps what Taylor offers is a strong ontology with important pluralist components that issues in an ethics and politics with important pluralist components." 172-173.

<sup>87</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 8.

<sup>88</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 8.

<sup>89</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 9.

<sup>90</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 11-12.

Ruth Abbey is a particularly relevant interlocutor here because while she applauds White's analysis of Taylor's moral ontology, she is not fully convinced that Taylor's theism, especially insofar as it constitutes a "foundation" for his pluralism, is not in fact better understood as strong ontology.<sup>91</sup> Because Abbey is generally a careful reader of Taylor's work, and an influential contributor to scholarship on Taylor, her uncertainty about White's conclusions on this point warrants further investigation. Thus, I will consider whether Taylor's pluralism in fact emerges from a strong ontology. And given the depiction of strong ontology that is sketched out by White, according to which strong ontologists either ignore or deny the contestability or uncertainty involved in the "[passage] from ontological truths to moral-political ones," I would suggest that it is potentially problematic if Taylor's pluralism is arrived at via a strong ontology.<sup>92</sup> Obviously, a strong, foundationalist, or overly programmatic ontology could indeed make Taylor's theism vulnerable to the charge that it has deeply ideological and dogmatic components. The presence of these sorts of dogmatic components might raise questions about the suitability of such a moral ontology as a point of departure for a truly pluralistic politics, since the rigidity of dogmatism concerning truth claims would seem to undermine the kind of openness to difference that constitutes any deep pluralism.<sup>93</sup> In order to explore whether the problematic possibilities that issue from strong ontology in fact plague Taylor's religious thought, I will take up Abbey's insight about the relationship between Taylor's theism—especially if it is seen as implying a strong ontology as Abbey suspects—and his commitment to pluralism. To

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<sup>91</sup> Abbey, "Turning or Spinning? Charles Taylor's Catholicism: A Reply to Ian Fraser," 172-173. Though Abbey discusses White's interpretation of Taylor in earlier work, it is only in her recent reply to Fraser that she casts doubt on whether Taylor's theism is in fact best understood as weak ontology. In the more recent work her critique runs as follows: "While White's supple analysis of the role of theism in Taylor's thought is highly illuminating, it seems to either overlook or accord insufficient attention to the powerful link between Taylor's theism and his pluralism. Once a theistic ontology appears as the foundation for pluralism, at least in certain important respects, we might find ourselves back in the land of strong ontology, according to which there is a clear and direct relationship between ontological claims and ethical prescriptions. Perhaps what Taylor offers is a strong ontology with important pluralist components that issues in an ethics and politics with important pluralist components," "Turning or Spinning," 172-173

<sup>92</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 6.

<sup>93</sup> It is worth underscoring that Ruth Abbey does not suggest anywhere in her work that the relationship between ethics and (strong) ontology in Taylor is problematic. I thank Abbey for her clarification on this point.

that end, I will give an account of how Taylor's theistic commitments unfold within his larger project in ways that are not only fully reconcilable with his pluralism, but also that are best understood in terms of weak ontology. This requires an exploration of how Taylor's conception of transcendence plays a constructive moral and anthropological, and not just ideological, role in his moral and political programme, and an account of how the kenotic structure of his theism calls into question the possessive movements of strong ontology.

White's discussion of Taylor's weak ontological inclinations attempts to show how the Taylorian engagement with expressivism prevents the latter's theism from playing ontological trump cards. I shall make a similar argument in this chapter. White asserts that "Taylor is saying that our modern experience of expressivism offers certain insights that theism today must integrate," and that one of the upshots of expressivism for Taylor is that "God as a moral source is now inextricably entangled with subjective articulation."<sup>94</sup> White's focus is on Taylor's exploration of Mann, Rilke, Pound, Dostoyevsky and D.H. Lawrence as points of access to expressivism. These kinds of literary figures are attractive to Taylor, White argues, because "they make central to human being moments of intense mutual vivification between an intensified subjectivity and sources external to it."<sup>95</sup> Through their focus on epiphany, these figures aligned themselves with theism against the "cold, disengaged reason" of the Enlightenment.<sup>96</sup> The argument in this chapter also aligns expressivism with theism in Taylor's philosophy, but the emphasis is somewhat different. Rather than focusing on the role of the epiphanic figures mentioned above, I will focus on the role of Herder as the primary figure in Taylor's engagement with expressivism. It will be shown below how Herder's anthropological account and his philosophy of language figure centrally in Taylor's own anthropology and moral ontology. Following White's more general claim, I will show the ways in which Taylor's expressivist anthropology, building as it does on Herder, has contestability engrained into it with his concepts of articulation and the hermeneutical stance, as well as how the contestability of weak ontology shapes Taylor's discussion of theism. These sections of the chapter are meant to complement White's own analysis of Taylor's expressivism, but the illumination of Herder's formative influence will render a fuller picture of Taylor's expressivism. Finally, the chapter will close with a discussion of how Taylor's theism is ontologically weak not only because of the expressivist currents in Taylor's anthropology and moral ontology, but also because dispossession is central to his understanding of transcendence. I will argue that the kenotic

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<sup>94</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 62.

<sup>95</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 61.

<sup>96</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 59.

shape of Taylor's theism is not only compatible with the weak ontology that comes out of expressivism, but that kenosis actually underlies the contestability of his wider anthropology and moral ontology.

One of the ultimate objectives of this chapter is an analysis of Taylor's moral ontology, but it is important to note that his conception of the good is inextricable from his philosophical anthropology. Thus, it is prudent and necessary first to consider his discussion of selfhood because of the extent to which his moral theory is founded on the premise that our conceptions of the self and the good are deeply implicated in one another. For example, the opening passage of *Sources of the Self* contains the following assertion: "Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes."<sup>97</sup> This relationship between the self and the good dominates much of *Sources of the Self*, and a central task that Taylor sets for himself in Part I is to trace out some of these thematic connections. The interconnection between selfhood and the good is also evident in Taylor's more recent "The 'Weak Ontology' Thesis," his contribution to a special issue of *The Hedgehog Review* that centers around White's innovative work on the demands of ontology in a post-foundationalist milieu. Though he affirms the central elements of *Sustaining Affirmation*, Taylor notes that he prefers different terminology from that adopted by White. Regarding this "change in nomenclature," Taylor states:

I prefer the term 'philosophical anthropology' when we talk about the issues that we can't just leave aside when we engage in the human sciences. I want to use this latter term in the broadest sense, which will include much of what we call the "humanities"...My term "philosophical anthropology" is meant to cover much of the same matters as White does with "ontology": 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.<sup>98</sup>

Nuances in terminological distinctions aside, what is striking is that "ontology" (as its used by White) and "philosophical anthropology" are so intimately related for Taylor that they are easily interchangeable here—so much so that Taylor employs them together throughout the article in such a

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<sup>97</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 3. On this point, Ruth Abbey claims that any discussion of morality without a discussion of selfhood (or vice versa) in Taylor's work must be based on an artificial distinction, since his account does not lend itself to such a division. See Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 9.

<sup>98</sup> Taylor, "The 'Weak Ontology' Thesis," *The Hedgehog Review* Summer (2005), 35.

way that suggests their synonymity.<sup>99</sup> And of course, we should not be surprised that Taylor prefers the language of anthropology, given his preference to engage in moral theory agentially, beginning with the self. White's ontological account is clearly bound up in moral ontology (though weak ontology is of course also centrally concerned with an ontology of the human), and in light of the analytic correlation between philosophical anthropology and selfhood, the connectedness of selfhood and morality for Taylor (and, presumably for White at some level) is again brought to the fore implicitly in this passage. It is the close relation between selfhood and the good that prompts Taylor to claim that "we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find orientation to the good."<sup>100</sup> Much more could be said about how these two elements are thematically intertwined for Taylor, but this preliminary glimpse into Taylor's contention that selfhood and the good are constitutively related should suffice for my immediate purpose, which is to justify the trajectory of a chapter on moral ontology, passing as it does at length through Taylor's philosophical anthropology. Surely, the connections between selfhood and morality in Taylor's philosophy will become increasingly evident as the two themes are discussed below in turn.

### 3.1 Taylor's Expressivism: Herderian Roots

In chapter two, I referred to Taylor's account of the modern moral order in *Sources*, according to which the self arises out of naturalism, expressivism, and theism.<sup>101</sup> According to the second of these sources, the self achieves its potentialities via expressive activity.<sup>102</sup> A particular conception of expressivism which draws heavily on the work of Herder is at the heart of Taylor's anthropological account, especially as expressivity is conceived as a challenge to the atomism and instrumentalism that issue from the naturalist viewpoint. And notably, Taylor's expressivism as a central facet of his understanding of modern selfhood gives rise to one of his most important contributions to political theory, his "politics of recognition." Taylor's attraction to expressivism, as mentioned in chapter one, is at least partly motivated by his view that naturalist moral sources alone render a dangerously shallow account of human subjectivity, and that the expressivist constellation of sources serves as an important corrective to dominant

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<sup>99</sup> See "The Weak Ontology Thesis," 36, 39, 41.

<sup>100</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 34, cf. 33, 41, 105.

<sup>101</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 495-521.

<sup>102</sup> See Taylor's *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 13-29; *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 1-14.

naturalistic anthropologies. Correlatively, Herder's expressivism is perhaps best understood as a reaction against the conventional naturalistic anthropological account of the Enlightenment. This Enlightenment anthropology, which continues to exert significant influence today, objectifies human nature, partitions the human mind into discrete (and often opposing) faculties, and envisions the human as instrumentally rational, independent of emotion and will.<sup>103</sup> As Taylor succinctly puts it, Herder's expressivism "can be seen as a protest against the mainstream Enlightenment view of man—as both subject and object of an objectifying scientific analysis."<sup>104</sup> The Enlightenment model of self-defining subjectivity is characterized by a tendency to objectify the world of phenomena and, correspondingly, to stress the dichotomy of subject and object. This dualism, Taylor argues, essentially prohibits any conceptions such as "meaning," "expression," and "purpose" from being used as descriptors for objective reality, since such notions tend to be understood purely noetically, restricted to the mind of the human subject.<sup>105</sup> Expressivism, on the other hand, can be seen as an attempt at a renewed anthropology that allows for meaning, purpose and expression beyond the *mental* life of human subjects. The central idea in expressivism is that human life is fundamentally the realization of a *self* and of purpose through acts of expression:

[Expressivism] added the epoch-making demand that my realization of the human essence be my own, and hence launched the idea that each individual (and in Herder's application, each people) has its own way of being human, which it cannot exchange with that of any other except at the cost of distortion and self-mutilation.<sup>106</sup>

Though Herder was not necessarily the originator of this notion (we can see nascent elements of it in Rousseau, for example) Taylor argues that it is Herder who gives expressivism its most seminally influential formulation, adding as he does the pivotal idea that each human has a unique subjectivity and mode of being.<sup>107</sup> Herderian expressivism maintains that humans are

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<sup>103</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 13.

<sup>104</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 1.

<sup>105</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 14.

<sup>106</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 15.

<sup>107</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 30. Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 1. Taylor argues that what is original in Rousseau is that he aligned the distinctions between good and evil, virtue and vice, with the "distinction between dependence on self and dependence on others. Goodness is identified with freedom, with finding the motives for one's



able to reach their “highest fulfilment in expressive activity,” and this enables human lives to be conceptualized narratively as “expressive [unities].”<sup>108</sup> The expressivist view of subjectivity attempts to unite the human with the natural world, rejecting the Enlightenment bifurcation of mind and body in favor of a conception of subjectivity as an expressive unity, a perspective that has deep resonances with a new conception of the natural world that later animates the Romantic movement of the eighteenth century. In the Enlightenment dualism of mind/body, exemplified in Cartesianism, the body is the first part of nature to be objectified, and is seen as separable from mind. Expressivism recognizes that subjective expression requires the context of *nature* to be actualized, and that the relationship between humans and the natural world must be understood in terms of complementary expressivity.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, the universe is itself understood as a form of expressive unity. Taylor writes,

[To] see nature just as a set of objects of potential human use is to blind ourselves and close ourselves to the greater current of life which flows through us and of which we are a part. As an expressive being, man has to recover communion with nature, one which had been broken and mutilated by the analytic, desiccating stance of objectifying science.<sup>110</sup>

Of course, this influential idea was taken up most significantly by Goethe and embraced by the Romantics, but it is deeply rooted in Herderian expressivism. Herder’s anthropology reacted against a view of nature as means and supply, and added philosophical expression to the sometimes less formulated thought of earlier thinkers who also conceptualized an essential unity between humans and the natural world.

Herder’s theory of expressive subjectivity also extends beyond self-making, incorporating as it does an influential view of human life as necessarily and essentially social. According to Herder, our highest expressive potentialities are only possible within the context of a community and culture. This is not to say that society and culture are to be understood instrumentally, with humans meeting their needs and overcoming various obstacles via their membership in a society. Indeed, this is precisely the

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actions within oneself.” Taylor also notes that Rousseau’s view is not radically subjectivist. While it is true that the inner voice identifies what is good, it is also true that the inner voice is rooted in a conception of universal good. See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 355-363.

<sup>108</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 2.

<sup>109</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 3.

<sup>110</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 3.

atomistic and utilitarian view against which Herder was reacting. Herder understood the community itself to have a “level [of] expressive unity,” and he described the Volk as “the bearer of a certain culture which sustains its members; they can isolate themselves only at the cost of great impoverishment.”<sup>111</sup> Just as each subject has its unique measure and way of expression, so too does a given culture or society. Each culture has a unique idea or form which it ought to realize, so that we can speak of a sort of cultural or group authenticity that mediates against the “excesses [of] modern expressive individualism.”<sup>112</sup>

Though Herder’s expressivism develops as a reaction against the atomizing, dualizing forces of Enlightenment thought, and thus “appears as a throwback...to the unity of Aristotelian form, a unity which unfolds as human life develops,” Taylor is adamant that Herderian expressivism is utterly distinct from Aristotle’s classical view of a human life as fixed and fulfilling an idea independent of the human subject.<sup>113</sup> The differences are at least twofold. First, Aristotle saw human life as oriented towards equilibrium and stability. On this view, there are external forces that threaten that order and harmony, but the human form is nevertheless inclined towards order.<sup>114</sup> This is quite distinct from Herder’s perspective, which begins with a notion of free subjectivity: “[The] human form involves an *inner force* imposing itself on external reality, perhaps against external obstacles.”<sup>115</sup> The realization of the human form may tend towards equilibrium and order, as posited by Aristotle, but what is essential for Herder is that the realization is generated *internally*, as a “manifestation of an inner power.”<sup>116</sup> Each human life is in the hands of the subject herself, a radically subjective element that is absent in Aristotle’s stance on the human form and human life. A second concept that Herderian expressivism challenges in the Aristotelian view concerns the determinacy of human life, according to which the “idea” that a human life realizes is determined before the life has even been lived. For Herder, on the other hand, “the realization of a form clarifies or makes determinate what that form is.”<sup>117</sup> The determinacy of the life of a human subject becomes so only by being expressively fulfilled—the expression itself establishes the subject’s determinacy. Taylor describes how a person may express herself to another, and through the process, also make what she feels more clear or exact. By making her feelings or intuitions determinate through this process

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<sup>111</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 2-3.

<sup>112</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 3.

<sup>113</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 2-3.

<sup>114</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 15.

<sup>115</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 15. Emphasis added.

<sup>116</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 15.

<sup>117</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 16.

of clarification, she can empower herself to realize her aspirations. This can also work in another direction, which ultimately is compatible with the previous example. If a subject acts in a situation where his ideas remain inchoate, those enactments though not based on clearly defined ideas or emotions may actually bring intellectual and emotional clarity, and thus Taylor reasons that “the fullest and most convincing expression of a subject is one where he both realizes and clarifies his aspirations.”<sup>118</sup> Herderian expressivism, then, is based on a theory of self-realization wherein each individual life is unique and the subject is compelled to actualize and fulfil the potential of her subjectivity, thus the act of expression takes on moral significance because we are all called to realize our unique selves, to express our selves authentically. And through the expressivity of this free subjectivity, we make *ourselves* determinate via our discernment, refinement, and attainment of aspirations. Taylor sums this up nicely:

In the course of living adequately I not only fulfil my humanity but clarify what my humanity is about. As such a clarification of my life-form is not just the fulfilment of purpose but the embodiment of meaning, the expression of an idea. The expression theory breaks with the Enlightenment dichotomy between meaning and being, at least as far as human life is concerned. Human life is both fact and meaningful expression; and its being expression does not reside in a subjective relation of reference to something else, it expresses the idea which it realizes.<sup>119</sup>

There are very deep resonances with this facet of Herder’s expressivism and Taylor’s concept of articulation. Articulation is fundamentally concerned with the clarification of moral sources, and because (as has already been underscored above) the self and the good are intertwined, the process of articulation is a process of self-determination, of self-making. More needs to be said about the importance of articulation in Taylor’s moral ontology, but it is necessary first to discuss the formative role of Herder’s expressivist philosophy of language in Taylor’s thought, since it is within the Herderian linguistic account that articulation and interpretation—two essential activities of the Taylorian self—must be contextualized.

Taylor centres his discussion on two central modes in which human expressive activity takes place, the first of which is spoken language. The second medium is artistic expressivity, though art understood not in an Aristotelian *mimetic* way, but as an *expression* of the potentialities of nature and the human. For Taylor, the new theories of language and art are

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<sup>118</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 16.

<sup>119</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 17.

important not only because they are philosophically rooted in expressivism, but because both “formed part of a new developing theory of man.”<sup>120</sup> In other words, both theories formed alongside Herderian expressivism, but also opened up the possibility for new anthropological formulations that revolve around the primacy of expressions. The new understanding of art that arose in the eighteenth century was founded upon this conception of expressivist subjectivity. Traditionally, within much of the western world, art tended to be approached as Aristotelian mimesis, whereby all art, whether poetry, tragedy, or music, is a “mode of imitation” of what is found in nature.<sup>121</sup> Against the mimetic view, the new expressivist conception of art envisioned the artistic process not as fundamentally imitative, but instead as the dynamic creation of artistic works that express an idea or sentiment without necessarily referring to some external object in nature beyond the artwork itself.<sup>122</sup> The shift from the mimetic to the expressivist mode brought about a new focus on the creative process of the artist, according to which a work of art is understood as an expression of the “profound feelings of the artist,” where the process of creation “completes” the artist and “expands her existence.”<sup>123</sup> Taylor makes the important point that art as expression is not subjective in what he terms the “restrictive sense,” and that a work of art is to be understood as a referent to truth. The artistic process is not seen simply as an outpouring of emotion, but as a means to transform feelings and thoughts into their highest forms: “[The] highest art is so because it is true to Nature; but not in the sense of an imitation, rather as the highest and fullest expression of its potentialities.”<sup>124</sup> And since this conception of art gives humans media through which to express some of their highest potentialities, it is unsurprising that Taylor argues that such an understanding of art is deeply religious in some important respects: “The awe we feel before artistic originality and creativity places art on the border of the numinous, and reflects the crucial place that creation/expression has in our understanding of human life.”<sup>125</sup> Art as expressivity stresses the transformative power of the artistic process, giving an artist access to some of nature’s highest “truths” that may not be equally accessible (if at all) through purely ratiocinative means. And thus Taylor asserts that a “Bach cantata articulates a certain

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<sup>120</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 21.

<sup>121</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. James Hutton (New York: Norton, 1982) See particularly chapters 1-5.

<sup>122</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 18.

<sup>123</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 20.

<sup>124</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 20.

<sup>125</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 376.

mode of Christian piety, in a way that cannot be substituted for by treatises on theology.”<sup>126</sup>

Alongside this new understanding of art, which reaches its apogee in the work of Goethe and the Romantics, Herder developed a philosophy of language that is centrally animated by his expressivist anthropology. The primary claim in Herder’s philosophy of language is that human language is not simply and purely referential but fundamentally expressive. Herder’s philosophy of language begins as a rejoinder to what has been called the “designative” approach to the study of the link between language and meaning. The designative approach is taken up by thinkers like Hobbes, Locke, and perhaps most significantly for Herder, Condillac. Taylor defines the designative approach as follows: “Words get their meaning from being used to designate objects. What they designate is their meaning.”<sup>127</sup> The importance of Condillac—at least for Herder—is that he begins with this premise and proceeds to provide an account of the origins of human language, an account that Herder’s philosophy of language rejects. Condillac begins with a distinction between what he identifies as “natural signs” and “instituted signs.” In a hypothetical narrative illustrating how human language might have originated, Condillac describes two pre-linguistic children in a desert. These two children have the capacity to utter sounds or cries as “natural expressions of feeling,” the types of utterances that for Condillac fall into the category of natural signs.<sup>128</sup> Condillac claims that these natural signs can and do develop into instituted signs, which for him are what we use in human language. The contentious issue for Herder concerns the *process* which Condillac claims takes place in this fable whereby natural signs become instituted signs. Condillac argues that when child A witnesses child B uttering some natural sign—Condillac uses the example of a cry of distress—child A comes to perceive the natural sign as signifying something—in Condillac’s example, that which causes child B’s distress. Eventually, child A would learn to use verbally the original cry (of distress) to designate the object (of child B’s distress). Through this type of designative process, a natural sign becomes an instituted sign, and each child would have her first word. Through more and more interactions of this type, each child would build up her lexicon and human language would develop.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Taylor, “Leading a Life,” in *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reasoning*. R. Chang (ed.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) 179; cf. *Philosophical Arguments*, 110-111; and Abbey, Charles Taylor, 45.

<sup>127</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995) 80.

<sup>128</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 80.

<sup>129</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 80.

Herder's *On the Origin of Language* makes a compelling and relatively straightforward case for why Condillac's hypothesis is utterly inadequate.<sup>130</sup> Condillac, Herder argues, presupposes the existence of human language without adequately discussing where it originates and how exactly it is generated. Herder asserts that the two children in Condillac's hypothetical account already have the *capacity* to understand the referential nature of words, that they refer to some object. Herder's central criticism is that Condillac's account does not discuss how that capacity develops *ab initio*. As Taylor puts it, "[Condillac's] explanation amounts to saying that words arose because words were already there."<sup>131</sup> Once one has the faculty for understanding the referential quality of words, then as a matter of course it would follow that one would be able to undergo the process that Condillac depicts with the two children in the desert. However, for Herder, it is precisely this capacity that must be understood and Condillac seems to neglect the generative source of the development of the faculty of language. Taylor notes that Herder does not offer us a suitable alternative that accounts for the origins of human language, but through his critique of Condillac Herder does provide us with an expressivist philosophy of language that raises serious challenges to the designative approach.<sup>132</sup> The following passage from Taylor nicely encapsulates the essence of Herder's philosophy of language:

On [Herder's] theory words have meaning not simply because they come to be used to point or refer to certain things in the world or in the mind, but more fundamentally because they express or embody a certain kind of consciousness of ourselves and things, peculiar to man as a language-user, for which Herder uses the word 'reflectiveness' (*Besonnenheit*). Language is seen not just as a set of signs, but as the medium of expression of a certain way of seeing and experiencing; as such it is continuous with art. Hence there can be no thought without language; and indeed the languages of different peoples reflect their different visions of things.<sup>133</sup>

This view of language represents a radical shift away from the designative theories of human language developed by philosophers such as Locke and Condillac. The new Herderian approach emphasized that words do not simply represent and designate the objects that they identify because

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<sup>130</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *On the Origins of Language*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 99-103.

<sup>131</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Importance of Herder," 81.

<sup>132</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Importance of Herder," 83.

<sup>133</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 17-18.

language must be recognized fundamentally as the means by which a human subject reflects on the world and simultaneously a medium through which she expresses herself. According to Herder, the human subject is necessarily situated in the world and language must therefore be understood as a “reflective stance towards things” in the world.<sup>134</sup> Human language’s sources are rooted in the subject’s feelings and attitudes about particular phenomena that arise from the connection between the situated subject and the objects she encounters. Taylor points out that the relationship between a subject and the objects around her can be understood and described outside the linguistic dimension, but this cannot be the case when the subject’s actions towards and involving objects are understood in expressive terms, where an action “both actualizes [the] stance of reflection and also presents it to others in public space. It brings about the stance whereby we relate to things in the linguistic dimension.”<sup>135</sup> For a subject to operate within the linguistic dimension, she must correctly understand and make interpretive judgments about what words mean, or as Taylor puts it, she must be able to “use and respond to signs in terms of their truth, or descriptive rightness, or power to evoke some mood, or recreate a scene, or express some emotion, or carry some nuance of feeling, or in some such way to be *le mot juste*.”<sup>136</sup> This is closely linked with what Taylor calls a “holism of meaning,” a notion that implies that a given word cannot have meaning in and of itself, independent of other words. Instead, a single word only has meaning against the background of an articulated language: “A word has meaning within a lexicon and a context of language practices, which are ultimately embedded in a form of life.”<sup>137</sup> The notion of a “linguistic dimension” is Taylor’s, but the formulation is deeply Herderian. As Taylor himself notes, Herder’s objection to Condillac’s story of the origins of human language consists primarily in Herder’s recognition that a child that understands a cry of distress from another as a word must already be operating from within the linguistic dimension.<sup>138</sup> To perceive a cry as a word requires that a subject be able to *reflect*—a reflection that is necessarily by a subject that is situated—and since the act of expression *actualizes* the stance of reflection, not only does the situated subject who uses language operate in the linguistic dimension, but her expressive speech acts help “[*constitute*] the linguistic dimension.”<sup>139</sup>

Taylor argues that Herder’s claims about the “constitutive role of expression” and the “holism of meaning” lay the foundations for a number of

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<sup>134</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 92.

<sup>135</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 92.

<sup>136</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 84.

<sup>137</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 93.

<sup>138</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 87.

<sup>139</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 92. Emphasis added.

formative ideas in the philosophy of language that collectively raise serious challenges to the designative approach to the philosophy of language. First, the designative approach tends to endorse the view that words are simply and fundamentally apparatuses that a language user organizes and controls to achieve her ends. Against this, the expressivist view conceptualizes language not as something that is simply employed as a tool, but that also shapes the subject as she exercises her linguistic faculty. Expressivism emphasizes that language is not static but is constantly reconstructed and reformulated through speech activity, and that it is to be understood as a “pattern of activity by which we express/realize a certain way of being in the world...but the pattern can be deployed only against a background we can never fully dominate...In relation to language, we are both makers and made.”<sup>140</sup> Second, the designative approach to language maintains that words are used primarily to chronicle and convey human thought—what Taylor identifies as the “descriptive dimension” of language.<sup>141</sup> On the classical designative view, language simply communicates what is already felt or thought by the subject. Alternatively, Herder’s expressivist view of language stresses that language does not simply *describe*, but also enables humans to *transform* sentiment through an expressive linguistic act. Taylor describes what is radically innovative in this notion:

The revolutionary idea implicit in Herder was that the development of new modes of expression enables us to have new feelings, more powerful and refined, and certainly more self-aware. In being able to express our feelings, we give them a reflective dimension that transforms them.<sup>142</sup>

A purely descriptive understanding of language overlooks the manner in which language can expressively transform inchoate emotions and intuitions, unlike the Herderian expressivist theory of language which underscores the transformative role that language plays in humans achieving a more refined self-awareness. Third, Herder provides us with an expansive conception of what can be encapsulated within human language. If language is envisioned as an expressive activity through which human subjects are mentally and emotively transformed, then it follows that modes of expressive activity outside of speech and prose that function in this manner should be recognized as a part of our linguistic arsenal. The creative activities of poetry, dance, music, and other forms of art are incorporated into Herder’s philosophy of language as expressive media—and here we see the

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<sup>140</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 97.

<sup>141</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 97.

<sup>142</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Importance of Herder,” 97-98.



continuities between the expressivist view of art discussed above and Herder's contribution to the understanding of human language. Fourth, Herder's expressivist view maintains that it is important to stress that human language necessarily develops between interlocutors within the context of a *Volk*. If language is not purely descriptive, as in the designative approach, and language is constantly being re-created through the "life of the speech community," then language cannot develop within a disengaged, solitary subject. As Taylor puts it, "The language I speak, the web I can never fully dominate and oversee, can never be just *my* language; it is always *our* language."<sup>143</sup>

In this section, I have provided an account of the multi-faceted construction of Herderian expressivism as it appears throughout Taylor's work. Taylor spends significant space expounding on the importance of Herderian expressivism in nearly all of his books, be they on the sources of secularity, ethics, religion, epistemology or political philosophy.<sup>144</sup> The internalization of fundamental elements of Herder's expressivism is evident, so much so that a neo-Herderian anthropology is at the very centre of Taylor's own philosophy and is pivotal in shaping Taylor's view of human subjectivity.<sup>145</sup> However, something must be said about the Hegelian undercurrents in Taylor's expressivism before moving to a more focused discussion of how expressivity is operative in Taylor's moral programme.

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<sup>143</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Importance of Herder," 98-99. This aspect of Herderian expressivism is a particularly monumental one for Taylor, and is at the core of much of his work on Quebecois and Canadian politics.

<sup>144</sup> See, for example, Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, esp. 13-27; 81-84; 567-570; *Hegel and Modern Society*, esp. 1-14; "The Politics of Recognition," 30-32; "Language and Human Nature," *Human Agency and Language*, 227-234; *Sources of the Self*, 368-390; *The Malaise of Modernity*, 25-29; "The Importance of Herder," *Philosophical Arguments*, 79-99; *Varieties of Religion Today*, 79-107; and *A Secular Age*, 343-345, 579-580, 709, 755-6, 759-760.

<sup>145</sup> Taylor himself acknowledges his Herderian roots, and describes how Herder strongly resonated with him because of Taylor's own bilingual upbringing and his concomitant political sensitivity for the predicament facing Francophones in Canada: "In Herder I found inspiration, ideas that were very fruitful for me, precisely because I was from [Quebec]. I was able to understand him from the situation I had experienced outside school, outside university, and I was able to engage with his thought, internalize it, and (I hope) make something interesting out of it." Charles Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, ed. Guy Laforest (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) 136.

### 3.2 Expressivism and Taylor's Hegelianism

In a recent article, Gregory Millard and Jane Forsey attempt to critique Taylor's project through a Grantian lens that examines Taylor's engagement with expressivism, but their examination focuses largely on the formative role of Hegel in Taylorian expressivism. They make the important point that for Taylor, like Hegel, reason often serves to rein in intuition.<sup>146</sup> Millard and Forsey's reading of Taylor's expressivism is not incompatible with the account I have presented above. Though Taylor shares some affinities with the Romantics, his understanding of the role of reason in achieving any kind of synthesis surely pulls him in significant ways towards the Hegelian side of the spectrum. It is worth underscoring that Taylor's expressivism incorporates the important Hegelian concept of *recognition*. Taylorian expressivism emphasizes the role of the other in the development of individual identity, an anthropological emphasis that buttresses against both instrumentalism and atomism by connecting human subjectivity to interlocutory subjects who provide the recognition constitutive of selfhood. Taylor's expressive self is only a self when it is recognized by other selves who also seek recognition. Selves are bound together in what Taylor calls "webs of interlocation," and their selfhood is intimately tied to mutual recognition. Through dialectical interaction, subjects mutually shape one another and thus rely on the dialogical relationship to reach together the highest potentialities of human subjectivity.

Taylor's politics of recognition begins with the insight that the identity of a subject is closely linked to the way that others apprehend and respond to the subject's perceived identity, "a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being."<sup>147</sup> The basic claim is that one's identity is fundamentally shaped by the recognition, non-recognition and misrecognition from others. Where recognition is withheld, or subsumed by either non- or misrecognition, the identity of either a group or individual runs the risk of becoming distorted and damaged. Because one's interlocutors significantly shape one's identity on Taylor's expressivist account, a denial of recognition constitutes a form of violence against identity, a move which is particularly devastating when a "destructive identity" is externally imposed and eventually becomes internalized, often resulting in self-deprecation. According to Taylor, the result of misrecognition and non-recognition has often been a "crippling self-hatred." To understand a lack of recognition as merely a lack of respect is to ignore

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<sup>146</sup> "Moral Agency in the Modern Age: Reading Charles Taylor through George Grant," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 40/1 (Winter 2006), 182-209.

<sup>147</sup> Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 25.

the potentially detrimental consequences it can have on individual and group identities.<sup>148</sup>

The Herderian expressivism that calls for one to discover her own way of being has deep resonances here. This original way of being is necessarily generated from within the individual and cannot be dictated by society alone. Nevertheless, it is essential for Taylor—following Hegel—that we recognize the constitutively dialogical nature of human existence, especially as it concerns self-realization. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor asserts, “One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it.”<sup>149</sup> In other words, selfhood is necessarily a social phenomenon. Taylor further expands on this idea:

I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding – and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call ‘webs of interlocution.’<sup>150</sup>

Taylor’s notion of webs of interlocution functions in a manner that is reminiscent of Herder’s *Volk*, at least insofar as the *Volk* within Herder’s account is related to the self-realization of individuals. In both cases, self-realization involves a coming to grips with “languages of self-understanding,” and Taylor’s formulation here evokes the Herderian tenet that language is an activity that is necessary for humans to express and realize a particular way of being in the world, both individually and collectively. And like Herder, Taylor argues that it is crucial that we recognize that different expressive modalities—and here he refers to the “languages” of speech, prose, art, gesture, and love—develop only through interlocutory interaction with others.<sup>151</sup> But while Taylor’s contention that a self exists only among other selves is related to Herderian expressivism, a *dialogical* notion of identity, wrapped up as it is in the concept of recognition, is more distinctly Hegelian—there is no analogous conception of a dialectic of recognition between persons within a community in Herderian expressivism. Herder’s philosophy has been linked (rightly or wrongly) to modern ethnonationalism, particularly its most violent historical dispensations.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 25-26.

<sup>149</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 35.

<sup>150</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 36.

<sup>151</sup> Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 32.

<sup>152</sup> Perhaps the most influential early work that interprets Herder in this way is Robert Ergang’s *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism* (New York:

The addition of the Hegelian concept of recognition allows Taylor's expressivism to mediate against the putatively negative modalities of expressivism which some argue issue from Herder's formulation. It is Hegel and his notion of a "dialectic of recognition" that provides the basis for reciprocity in Taylor's politics of recognition. This Hegelian idea is famously expounded in the dialectic of the master and the slave, which for Taylor represents the earliest significant contribution to the politics of recognition.<sup>153</sup> Taylor sums up the idea underlying the dialectic of the master and the slave, which is central to his expressivism and his politics of recognition, as follows:

[Humans] seek and need the recognition of their fellows. The subject depends on external reality. If he is to be fully at home this external reality must reflect back to him what he is. In the dialectic of desire, we are faced with foreign objects which we then destroy and incorporate; what is needed is a reality which will remain, and yet will annul its own foreignness, in which the subject can nevertheless find himself. And this he finds in other men in so far as they recognize him as a human being.<sup>154</sup>

By incorporating Hegel's dialectic of recognition in his expressivism, Taylor connects the subject to her interlocutors much more deeply in terms of identity and political relationality than is possible within Herderian expressivism alone. In Taylor's formulation, mutual recognition is necessary if subjects are to be fully "recognized as human beings," a demand which mediates against a conception of the other as an object which can be subjected to instrumentalization or violence.<sup>155</sup>

A final brief point regarding the role of Hegel in Taylor's expressivism concerns the primal place of nature in expressivity. Taylor's expressivism,

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Columbia University Press, 1931). For a recent introduction to the ways in which Herder is read as a nationalist, see Dominic Eggel, Andre Liebich, and Deborah Mancini-Griffoli, "Was Herder a Nationalist?" *The Review of Politics* 69 (2007), 48–78. Eggel, Liebich and Mancini-Griffoli offer a rejoinder to accounts that attempt to link Herder to German nationalism and argue that there are elements in Herder's politics that safeguard against despotic political dispensations.

<sup>153</sup> "Politics of Recognition," 35-36.

<sup>154</sup> Taylor, Hegel, 152; cf. "The Politics of Recognition," 50.

<sup>155</sup> Similarly, Jean Bethke Elshtain argues that the Taylorian formulation that one is a self only among other selves leads to what she terms a "deep toleration" in Taylor's philosophical anthropology. See Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Toleration, Proselytizing, and the Politics of Recognition: The Self Contested," in *Charles Taylor*, ed. Ruth Abbey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 137-138.

following Herder, emphasizes communion with nature, which is itself understood as an expressive unity. By connecting subjectivity to the natural world, expressivism provides an anthropological framework that challenges the scientific and technological stance of human subjects standing over the world as object. Within expressivism, the natural world is conceived as a subjective unity rather than as means and supply, a conceptualization that can mediate against the more violent and instrumentalist modes of technology which are a central concern for Taylor. The idea that expressivism requires communion with the natural world (understood as a unity) is expounded by Herder, but it is arguably given a more developed philosophical formulation in Hegel. So once again, to get a full grasp of Taylor's expressivism, it is necessary to attend to the Hegelian influences, as Millard and Forsey rightly do.

However, while Hegel's contribution to Taylor's philosophical thought is significant, my contention is that it is the place of Herder in Taylor's work that is unique, and more central to his expressivism, especially in relation to naturalism, thus laying the foundations for his own philosophical anthropology. Furthermore, although Taylor's philosophy may draw on a number of Hegelian themes and perspectives, it is arguable that Taylor is not a "pure" Hegelian for at least two key reasons, both of which merit brief mention. First, Hegel, in contradistinction to the Romantics, held the view that synthesis must be achieved ultimately through reason rather than art or intuition. As Taylor puts it, "The synthesis in art is not rejected—Hegel throws nothing away—but it is subordinated as the first stage of absolute spirit to the higher realizations in religion and, at the summit of clarity, in philosophy. Hence reason as conceptual clarity takes the central role in his synthesis."<sup>156</sup> Though Taylor like Hegel recognizes the value and conceptual authority offered by rationality, Taylor underscores the unique importance of the Romantic view of art, according to which art is able to communicate truths that may be incommunicable through the more ratiocinative approaches exemplified by philosophical discourse. So whereas for Hegel philosophy can more effectively disclose higher truths than can art, Taylor shares some affinity with the Romantic position, declaring the view that subordinates art to philosophy *a priori* to be a "depressing prospect."<sup>157</sup> For Taylor, then, our best access to the highest truths must come through some sort of integration of reason *and* art or intuition—or, to put this in terms of Taylor's Christian theism, our best access to the highest truths about God, about Incarnation, must come through an integration of the truths disclosed *both* through Bach's cantatas (for example) *and* theological treatises. Taylor thus fuses Romanticism's emphasis on artistic expression with Hegelian

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<sup>156</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 48-49; cf. *Hegel and Modern Society*, 12.

<sup>157</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 479.

reasons, and thus diverges from Hegel on the singular primacy of reason in achieving synthesis. In light of this fusion, it is difficult to talk about Taylor's expressivism in only Hegelian terms—and it is certainly revealing that Hegel's denial of the role of artistic expression in the achievement of synthesis prompts commentator Michael Rosen to argue that perhaps Hegel was not an expressivist at all.<sup>158</sup> Taylor's commitment to Christian theism also produces a divergence from a purely Hegelian position. Following Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel, Taylor contends that the Hegelian view which holds that "the only locus of God's spirit is in man, and that this spiritual life is nothing but the unfolding of conceptual necessity, [rules] out the kind of radical freedom to which faith relates."<sup>159</sup> Taylor also cites Karl Barth's criticism that "making the dialectical method of logic the essential nature of God" means that Hegel is unable to accommodate the Christian concepts of grace and divine love.<sup>160</sup> Taylor argues that these insights from Kierkegaard and Barth help to disclose how the Hegelian view trivializes fundamental aspects of Christian life and worship. For example, he suggests that the Hegelian philosopher seems to have no need for the crucial Christian practices of prayers of petition or thanks: "What [the Hegelian] does is to contemplate his identity with cosmic spirit, which is something quite different [from a Christian conception of prayer]."<sup>161</sup> Consequently, Taylor concludes that Hegel's ontology is ultimately incompatible with Christian faith as Taylor understands it.<sup>162</sup> In light of the authority of Christian transcendence in Taylor's philosophy and his claim that Hegel's ontology is irreconcilable with Christianity, it is evident that Taylor's own programme veers away from Hegel at important points. Taylor's conception of Christian theism cannot accommodate a view of God as rational necessity.

### 3.3 Articulation and the Good

For Taylor, it is only through an understanding of the historical significance of expressivism that we can begin to come to grips with the philosophical roots of our moral commitment to ideals such as authenticity,

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<sup>158</sup> See Michael Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 124. For a brief reply to Rosen, see Smith. 250, footnote 12.

<sup>159</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 493.

<sup>160</sup> Barth, quoted in Taylor, *Hegel*, 493. Original source is Barth's *From Rousseau to Ritschl* (London: SCM Press, 1959) 304.

<sup>161</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 494.

<sup>162</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 494.

individualism, and creative expression. Thus it is unsurprising that the expressivism that Taylor fleshes out has a distinctly *modern* character:

Expressive individuation has become one of the cornerstones of modern culture. So much so that we barely notice it, and we find it hard to accept that it is such a recent idea in human history and would have been incomprehensible in earlier times.<sup>163</sup>

Surely the Herderian ideal that each human has her own measure is thoroughly modern and Taylor traces how particular dispensations of expressive individuation contribute to the relatively recent turn to the often shallow “ethics of authenticity.”<sup>164</sup> In these more shallow modalities of expressivity, one’s own way of being or measure may be reduced to choices about style or fashion which are “expressed” largely through consumptive activity—buying the shoes that say something about who I am, driving a certain automobile because it communicates something about my aesthetic sensibilities as well as my affluence (or refusal to pursue affluence, as the case may be), etc. But as should be clear from the foregoing discussion of expressivism, Taylor thinks that there is a very *deep, powerful* animating moral force at the heart of the expressive account of human subjectivity, whereas what is encountered in the more shallow modes of the ethics of authenticity, though they emerge from expressivism, represents a degeneracy of the original ideal as articulated by the likes of Herder. And even though some of the major facets of expressivity develop within the context of modernity (becoming even more deeply entrenched in the modern psyche in the aftermath of the counterculture of the sixties with its affirmation of individual expression and authenticity), Taylor’s study of expressivism helps to uncover the foundational and inescapable role that language, interpretation and articulation play in ontological accounts of the human.<sup>165</sup> According to Taylor’s chronicle of the development of modern selfhood, these anthropological categories are entirely inescapable for moderns and must be at the center of any anthropological account that seeks

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<sup>163</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 376.

<sup>164</sup> This theme is a central focus of Taylor’s *Malaise of Modernity*, so central in fact that the American release of the book (originally delivered as a Massey lecture) is entitled *The Ethics of Authenticity*.

<sup>165</sup> Ruth Abbey distinguishes between the ontological and historical dimensions of Taylor’s approach to selfhood. The unchanging, ontological facets upon which Abbey focuses include “the centrality of self-interpretation, the fact that humans are animals with language and the dialogical nature of selfhood” – facets which I have shown above to be illuminated for Taylor by an expressivist anthropology. See Abbey’s *Charles Taylor*, 56-72.

to be meaningful to the modern subject. Expressivity, with its fundamental ideals of interpretation and articulation, must be given serious consideration in any attempts at a full account of the modern subject.

Influenced as it is by expressivism, Taylor's own philosophical anthropology is deeply hermeneutical and illuminates the centrality of interpretation and self-understanding as our means for accessing meaning. This hermeneutical stance assumes "that our interpretation of ourselves is constitutive of what we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality, nor as an epiphenomenon, which can be by-passed in our understanding of reality."<sup>166</sup> And predictably, given the focus on meaning, articulation, interpretation and self-understanding, the philosophy of language (following Herder) is central to Taylor's own anthropological account. Meaning is generated through interpretation, and the hermeneutical stance cannot be understood in terms of a simple linearity, for there is no obvious direct line between an object of meaning and an interpreting subject (a view that was shown above to be at the center of designative accounts of language):

[A] hermeneutical view requires a very different conception [of language]. If we are partly constituted by our self-understanding, and this in turn can be very different according to the various languages which articulate for us a background of distinctions of worth, then language does not only serve to *depict* ourselves and the world, it also helps *constitute* our lives. Certain ways of being, of feeling, of relating to each other are only possible given certain linguistic resources. Without a certain articulation of oneself and of the highest, it is neither possible to *be* a Christian ascetic, nor to *feel* that combination of one's own lack of worth and high calling (the 'grandeur et misère' of Pascal), not to be *part* of, say, a monastic order.<sup>167</sup>

Interpretation relies on the webs of interlocution which provide the subject with the inter-subjective languages and frameworks to make sense of the world, to interpret the world's significance and meaning for the self—thus Taylor follows Herder in eschewing the linear account of language operative in the designative approach, blind as it is to the ineluctability of inter-subjective meaning.

Indeed, one can accordingly approach *Sources of the Self* as Taylor's own articulation, his "best account", of the nature of moral consciousness for

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<sup>166</sup> *Human Agency and Language*, 47.

<sup>167</sup> *Human Agency and Language*, 9-10. See Millard and Forsey for their formulation of Taylor's hermeneutical stance as a circular rather than a linear model in "Moral Agency and the Modern Age," 185.



modern subjects. His articulation begins with a genealogy, a historical recovery and reclamation, and thus Taylor understands *Sources* to be a regenerative work aimed at reviving the articulacy of often disregarded (but still powerful and necessary) modern moral sources: “The intention of this work was one of retrieval, an attempt to uncover buried goods through rearticulation—and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring the air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit.”<sup>168</sup> The process of articulation is for Taylor both imperative and inescapable if moderns wish to avoid the descent into either the psychopathological or nihilistic abyss, for “[without] any articulation at all, we would lose all contact with the good, however conceived. We would cease to be human.”<sup>169</sup> Articulation is a constitutive part of moral consciousness, a basic feature of the human condition *tout court*, but Taylor contends that the gravity of the process of articulation is qualitatively different for moderns in their quest for meaning than it was for our premodern predecessors, since the latter faced a “fundamentally different existential predicament.” An exemplum here is Martin Luther, whose “intense anguish and distress before his liberating moment of insight about salvation through faith” was a consequence of a “sense of inescapable condemnation, irretrievably damning himself through the very instruments of salvation, the sacraments. However one might want to describe this, it was not a crisis of meaning. This term would have made no sense to Luther in its modern use.”<sup>170</sup> Taylor observes that the widespread experience of meaninglessness within modernity has been accompanied by a perhaps not unrelated shift in the “dominant patterns of psychopathology.”<sup>171</sup> The change in dominant psychopathologies is one from a milieu in which the frequency of phobias, hysterias and fixations dominated to “a time when the main complaints centre around ‘ego loss’, or a sense of emptiness, flatness, futility, lack of purpose, or loss of self-esteem.”<sup>172</sup> Taylor does not attempt to map out any direct links between this shift in pathological patterns and the historical variation in existential predicaments, but he is clear that it is “overwhelmingly plausible a priori that there is some relation; and that the comparatively recent shift in style of pathology reflects the generalization and popularization in our culture of that ‘loss of horizon’, which a few alert spirits were foretelling for a century or more.”<sup>173</sup> The palpable increase in the pathologies of ego loss makes the work of articulation even more urgent on Taylor’s account, since powerful and

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<sup>168</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 520.

<sup>169</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 97.

<sup>170</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 18.

<sup>171</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 19.

<sup>172</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 19.

<sup>173</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 19.

illuminative articulations of our moral sources represent important bulwarks against the nihilistic slide which has become widespread in modernity.<sup>174</sup>

Taylor's moral philosophy, especially as it is set forth in *Sources of the Self*, revolves around a moral ontology, an account of the "background picture which underlies our moral intuitions," and his analysis of the nature of these sorts of undergirding realities leads him to a discussion of the "frameworks which articulate our sense of orientation in the space of questions about the

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<sup>174</sup> A central theme of this chapter centers on how Taylor's account of the self stresses the importance of the subject's imbeddedness in history. In at least one important regard, this underscoring of the historical sets him against Kierkegaard's view that the move towards the Christian demands that we strive for contemporaneity with Christ. Whereas Kierkegaard wants to eschew the primacy of the historical as it relates to the self relating itself to its creator, I would argue that Taylor would hold that such a move is unavailable to us as moderns, and that the achievement of full contemporaneity with the apostolic experience is an impossibility in modernity. This is a consequence in shifts in anthropology (our self-understanding) and epistemology (the way we talk about knowing and truth). The expressivism that is central to Taylor's account of modern selfhood is incomprehensible for the Jewish and Greco-Roman social imaginaries. Surely, there are anthropological continuities between first century Christians and moderns—such as finitude, natality, and our capacities as language users—but the modern epistemological situation that Taylor depicts allows for nothing more than best accounts that are always provisional. And perhaps the offensiveness of Incarnation that Kierkegaard claims was circumvented within Christendom is more inescapable for moderns because of the predominance of skepticism regarding most dispensations of theism—if theism in general is offensive, then even more so must the crucified One be. But as Taylor's example of Luther demonstrates, our existential predicament is qualitatively different from that of our predecessors. Taylor's exercise of retrieval presumes that the historical developments that have contributed to our moral consciousness are highly significant. The logical extension of Taylor's analysis of Luther is that the Apostles would not have struggled with the abyss of nihilism, whereas meaninglessness is a primal historical reality for moderns. For Kierkegaard, on the other hand, history is important as the setting for Christian living, as the starting point for the dialectical movement of the self as it relates to the eternal, but the movement of history as such has no eternal significance for Kierkegaard. Much more could be said about this, including for example the demands and limits of the different authorships of Taylor and Kierkegaard (historico-philosophical versus theo-philosophical, respectively), but what should be plainly evident is the substantial importance of the historical within Taylor's conception of Christianity.

good.”<sup>175</sup> Taylor underscores the importance of our moral intuition as a point of access to the moral sources which in turn shape the “inescapable frameworks” or “horizons” which enable us to find our moral bearings, giving us a sense of where we stand in relation to the good. Taylor explains how an account of the good is preceded by a moral intuition of a source that has a hold on us:

[Because ontological] accounts have the status of our moral instincts...[we] can no longer argue about them at all once we assume a neutral stance and try to describe the facts as they are independent of these reactions, as we have done in natural science since the seventeenth century...But it doesn't follow from this that moral ontology is a pure fiction, as naturalists often assume. Rather we should treat our deepest moral instincts, our ineradicable sense that human life is to be respected, as our mode of access to the world in which ontological claims are discernible and can be rationally argued about and sifted.<sup>176</sup>

For Taylor, the moral significance of these gut responses is poignantly exemplified in the gospels, wherein Jesus “is portrayed as being moved ‘in the bowels’ by compassion (splangnizesthai).”<sup>177</sup> An analogous depiction is found in the gospel of Luke, where Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan depicts a love that is enacted out of pity, a moral discernment that has visceral, intuitive roots: “Agapê moves outward from the guts.”<sup>178</sup> This intuitionist depiction in the Gospels is important for Taylor as it relates to the grounds for ethical pluralism. The fact that our access to the sources that animate and sustain enactments of Christian love is situated within *intuition*, “in the guts,” means that such moral truths exceed any single account (though exceptionality and exclusivity are often claimed) since moral intuition cannot be located within a single perspective, but a moral intuition’s hold on us is instead fleshed out and given increased power through the process of articulation in a *best* account amongst a pluriformity of others.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 41.

<sup>176</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 8.

<sup>177</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 115; cf. 554, 640, 741. This insight comes to Taylor through Ivan Illich. The importance of Illich for Taylor will be discussed in some detail in chapter five.

<sup>178</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 741.

<sup>179</sup> In informal discussions with Taylor at conferences over the last decade, as well as via e-mail contact, he has stated more explicitly how the intuitive nature of moral life implies that moral sources cannot be restricted to or contained by a particular doctrine or system. Consider the following e-mail correspondence in

It does not follow from this that we cannot talk about correctness; indeed, the articulation that more correctly expresses, illuminates, formulates or makes sense of an intuited moral source should be talked about as the *best* (or, at least, a *better*) account. Taylor's formulation assumes a plurality of accounts, all of which are better or worse at correctly articulating a particular vision of the good, but it also assumes that even the worst account can say *something*, however inchoately, about the sources that animate it. But it is the *best account* that illuminates the good most fully or clearly for us, and such an account is best precisely in terms of its correctness and its power to move us. As Taylor puts it,

[In] the most evident examples the power [of an articulation of the good] is not a function of the formulation alone, but of the whole speech act. Indeed, the most powerful case is where the speaker, the formulation, and the act of delivering the message all line up together to reveal the good, as the immense and continuing force of the gospel illustrates. A formulation has power when it brings the source close, when it makes it plain and evident, in all its inherent force, its capacity to inspire our love, respect or allegiance.<sup>180</sup>

In this passage, Taylor reveals how scripture can be approached in these terms of an articulated account. What religious texts can do is open up the possibility for belief and potential points of access to the good, and once again, articulation is the *sine qua non* in the enlivening of these potentialities. It is once again worth quoting Taylor at length:

the goods I have been talking about only exist for us through *some* articulation. The rather different understandings of the good which we see in different cultures are the correlative of the different languages which have evolved in those cultures. A vision of the good

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which Taylor discusses the understanding of the nature of the "justification" one might find in the Gospels: "the key to '[justification]' is not the following of some formula or set of rules, but a kind of turn of the heart. And this is understood in a very 'gut sense' way. The Biblical term for 'He took pity on them' in Greek is cognate to the word for bowels, intestines. The Incarnation partly means that the highest way [of] being human, the love we get from God and mediate on [to] others is a gut matter; and that [without] this, the best moral code is helpless, and can even be destructive." Taylor examines these themes in great detail in *A Secular Age*, and I discuss them below in chapter five. I am grateful to Justin Klassen for sharing this electronic correspondence with Taylor with me.

<sup>180</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 97.

becomes available for the people of a given culture through being given expression in some manner. The God of Abraham exists for us (that is, belief in him is a possibility) because he has been talked about, primarily in the narrative of the Bible but also in countless ways from theology to devotional literature. And also because he has been talked *to* in all the different manners of liturgy and prayer.<sup>181</sup>

As seen in these passages, Taylor situates moral truth intersubjectively; the power we experience in and the value we ascribe to moral sources is inseparable from the webs of interlocution within which those sources and frameworks are given articulation. This facet of Taylor's moral theory seems to be missed by commentator Michael Morgan, as Ruth Abbey rightly points out. Morgan mistakenly takes Taylor to be defending a form of strong moral realism, which understands constitutive goods to be "objective components of our moral universe" which can be abstracted from the human experience of them.<sup>182</sup> Taylor does not talk about moral goods independent of the ways in which they are experienced and articulated by subjects. Of course, this does not mean that Taylor is some sort of Humean subjectivist, for he does not believe that our moral judgments are simply statements of approbation and disapprobation. Taylor acknowledges that expressivism, the ethics of authenticity, as well as post-Romantic art, consist of a high degree of self-reflexivity and a slide to "subjectivation," but he also distinguishes between a subjectivation of "manner" and a subjectivation of "matter," and argues that a movement towards one does not *ipso facto* imply a movement towards the other.<sup>183</sup> Indeed, Taylor makes the interesting claim that "[if] authenticity is being true to ourselves, is recovering our own 'sentiment de l'existence,' then perhaps we can only achieve it integrally if we recognize that this sentiment connects us to a wider whole."<sup>184</sup> Correlatively, Taylor often talks about our assessments of moral sources in terms of "strong evaluation," wherein our moral judgments comprise "discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged."<sup>185</sup> So for Taylor, unlike for Hume,

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<sup>181</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 91.

<sup>182</sup> See Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 27 fn 16; Morgan, "Religion, History and Moral Discourse." In *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*. James Tully and Daniel Weinstock (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 52-53.

<sup>183</sup> Taylor, *Malaise of Modernity*, 87-91.

<sup>184</sup> Taylor, *Malaise of Modernity*, 91.

<sup>185</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 4. See also Taylor's "What is Human Agency?" in *Human Agency and Language*; "Understanding and Ethnocentricity," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, 120.

moral philosophy ought not move towards a subjectivation of *matter*. On Taylor's account, goods are not morally valuable simply because we approve of or affirm them (as they are for Hume). Instead, strong evaluation centers on the assertion that moral goods are "normative for desire. That is, they are seen as 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."<sup>186</sup> Strong evaluations proceed from the basic assumption that our moral judgments have a referent (beyond pleasure and pain) and are moral only insofar as they are attuned to a moral good which has authority independent of subjective approbation—a notion that is unacceptable to subjectivist moral philosophy of the Humean sort.

In light of Taylor's portrayal of strong evaluation and our relation to sources external to the self, we can see that Morgan's claim about Taylor's moral realism is not completely wrongheaded; Morgan simply misinterprets the kind of realism that Taylor advocates. Ruth Abbey's monograph on Taylor has a helpful section on his moral realism that serves a corrective of sorts against accounts that ascribe a strong realist viewpoint to Taylor's ethics. Against Nietzschean anti-realism (which holds that "there are no facts, only interpretations"), Abbey outlines how realists in general acknowledge that there are interpretations, but that these interpretations refer to real moral facts that enable us to talk about the viability and rightness of the interpretations themselves.<sup>187</sup> One branch of realism holds that moral goods "actually do exist independently of human beings; that people are right in feeling themselves to be responding to something outside and independent of them when they admire and pursue certain goods."<sup>188</sup> According to this type of realism, this description of the reality of moral goods accurately depicts the moral world as it actually exists and not simply the manner in which selves experience moral life.<sup>189</sup> At the opposite end of the moral realist spectrum lie perspectives which resist talking about the reality of moral goods beyond how "individuals experience their moral life," but still acknowledge that moral goods are normative for desire.<sup>190</sup> Abbey argues that Taylor's particular brand of moral realism lies in the middle of this spectrum. On the one hand, it recognizes the necessity to account for the way that humans experience moral life—it takes seriously the roles of individual

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<sup>186</sup> Taylor, "Understanding and Ethnocentricity," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, 120

<sup>187</sup> Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 26-27. The quote from Nietzsche (which is cited in Abbey) comes from his *Will to Power*. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (eds.) (New York: Vintage Books, 1968) 481

<sup>188</sup> Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 27-28.

<sup>189</sup> Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 28.

<sup>190</sup> Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 27.

perception and interpretation for morality. On the other hand, Taylor's moral realism also acknowledges that subjects actually experience these goods as having an authority independent of their experience of them. Thus his perspective is not only irreducible to the Nietzschean maxim that "there are no facts, only interpretations," but also emphasizes that subjects are aware of a good's non-subjective authority in their experiences of that good. This non-subjective authority largely accounts for why a subject affirms a particular good—because it is good independent of one's judgment of it. So on Abbey's reading, Taylor's moral realism takes as its point of departure the primacy of moral experience and consciousness, while also affirming "that the most plausible explanation of morality is one that takes seriously humans' perception of the independence of the goods."<sup>191</sup> Abbey's interpretation is supported by textual evidence in *Sources*. Consider two passages (both quoted in Abbey) wherein Taylor gives an account of the reality of moral sources that speaks to the way that his particular brand of moral realism inhabits the middle ground between the two kinds of realism described above. The first echoes Taylor's notion of a best account, though with a slightly different trajectory:

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 others.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 29. Abbey uses the terms "strong" and "weak" to identify the extreme types of realism. Whereas the strong positions underscore the independence of moral sources, the weak ones emphasize the subject's experience of the sources. Abbey claims that Taylor is neither a strong nor a weak realist, but a "falsifiable" realist. She writes, "Taylor concludes that unless and until a moral theory emerges that can explain why the human urge to respond to goods as if they had an independent existence is unconnected to reality, realism is the most persuasive approach to moral life. Hence my designation of it as a falsifiable rather than strong: Taylor concedes that an explanation of moral life could appear that showed his to be erroneous. This is clear from an important passage in *Sources of the Self*, where he posits that the best account of moral life does include reference to transcendent moral sources. However, whether these sources are necessarily non-anthropocentric is not so clear; Taylor's hunch is that they are 'but all this remains to be argued out.'"

<sup>192</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 57.

A few pages later, Taylor poses the following rhetorical question which links the realness of things to the articulations of those realities by persons, thus bringing together the central aspects of both strands of realism: “How else to determine what is real or objective, or part of the furniture of things, than by seeing what properties or entities or features our best account of things has to invoke?”<sup>193</sup>

Like Abbey, Millard and Forsey discern the nature of Taylor’s moral realism, and they offer a helpful depiction of how Taylor’s moral ontology is bound up in his anthropology. They describe Taylor’s perspective on the realness of moral goods within the context of the hermeneutical stance of the expressive self: “our values are meanings imbedded in the frameworks that we have created through our interpretive understanding; and, because these meanings are intersubjective on the one hand, and because our situatedness in these frameworks is inescapable on the other, these values cannot help but be real for us.”<sup>194</sup> It is precisely because these sources must be understood to be real on the Taylorian account that *Sources of the Self* provides a response to the epistemological tension raised by Redhead that was mentioned briefly in chapter two. Unlike Nietzsche, Taylor does not proceed with a hermeneutic of suspicion, and thus his genealogy does not set out to expose modernity’s moral commitments to be the product of revenge, weakness, etc. He begins by looking at how moderns experience moral life and then proceeds to illumine some of the sources that can and do underpin such commitments. And for Taylor, the basic fact that moderns have such commitments and experience their sources as real is epistemologically compelling enough for them to be considered real—the epistemological grounding for these moral commitments is to be found in the nature of moral experience and the way that these goods have meaning between selves, an interdialogical existence from which the “sticky” (as opposed to Teflon) self is unable to disengage. Thus, the realness of moral sources such as *agapê* is testified to by the continued pull these sources have on us, the way they animate us morally, precisely because we experience them as *real* and not as *projections*. But the epistemological predicament that faces moderns as a consequence of moral (and religious) pluralism means that we cannot assume that other selves experience the reality of a source that moves us, and thus our expositions of these goods cannot claim to have any authority beyond a best account if they are to be attentive to the contemporary demands of pluralism. And as Taylor’s moral vision exemplifies, it is possible and morally and anthropologically constructive to receive the best accounts

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<sup>193</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 68.

<sup>194</sup> Millard and Forsey, 188.



of others with a hermeneutic of generosity, rather than Nietzschean suspicion, while still engaging in debate about the rightness of accounts.<sup>195</sup>

### 3.4 The Catholic Roots of Taylor's Pluralism

In light of the foregoing discussion, we are now better able to return to the issues raised at the opening of the chapter: namely, whether Taylor's ontological account is best described as "weak" or whether his Catholicism repositions his ontology on the side of strong ontology. I have shown in the preceding sections how Taylor's expressive anthropology and his moral ontology lay the groundwork for his moral realism. Furthermore, it was shown how our experience of moral life requires articulation and that this experience is articulated in terms of a best account which must always be provisional and subject to revision through engagement with other "best" accounts, and thus "[plays] no ontological trump cards" (to borrow a phrase from Stephen White).<sup>196</sup> In these regards Taylor's anthropology and moral ontology seem to fall into White's category of weak ontology. But what about Abbey's claim that Taylor's theism "founds" his pluralism? As will be discussed in a moment, Taylor does draw upon the tripartite structure of the Trinity to give a normative account for pluralism. This is surely what Abbey observes in Taylor's work that seem to place him in the realm of strong ontology. We could also add to this Taylor's understanding of strong evaluation, which suggests that moral sources are normative for desire: that they are moral goods that one *ought* to desire whether he chooses to or not. While Taylor's formulation is no doubt very subtle, and Abbey's analysis of it discloses much of the nuance, we can nevertheless see how a generous reader like Morgan could construe—correctly or not—Taylor's philosophy to

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<sup>195</sup> Unlike Ronald Beiner's usage of "hermeneutical generosity" in regards to Taylor's approach to theory in *Sources of the Self*, it should be clear that I am employing the phrase non-pejoratively. Arguably, the hermeneutic of generosity that lies at the center of Taylor's normative moral and political vision is a significant part of what makes it attractive, and what makes it compatible with modern pluralism. For Beiner, on the other hand, Taylor's hermeneutical generosity should be an object of critique. According to Beiner, "Taylor gives us a picture of our condition that is a little more reassuring than our contemporary situation actually warrants. Moreover, this resolve to survey the modern landscape with a bountiful interpretive generosity (sometimes to the extent of giving modern identity the benefit of the doubt) is dictated by Taylor's conception of what it is to do social theory." See his *Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit: Essays on Contemporary Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 151-166.

<sup>196</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 63.

be advocating the view that moral sources (such as *Theos*) are “objective components of our moral universe” or “self-independent goods...[that are] objectively real.”<sup>197</sup> Indeed, one can at this point understand the suggestion that such destinations can indeed *seem* to be pointing to a strong ontology. But I want to suggest instead that careful attention must be paid to the unique character of Taylor’s conception of transcendence here. For it is in fact his grounding of all of this in a particular kind of theism that shows that it need not entail a strong ontology, against which the kind of pluralism he is advocating would be undermined.

As Ruth Abbey rightly points out, the creationist nature of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam contributes to the substructure of Taylor’s ontological moral pluralism.<sup>198</sup> Taylor asserts that one of the most significant discernments of Abrahamic monotheism is “that God as creator himself affirms life and being, expressed in the very first chapter of Genesis in the repeated phrase: ‘and God saw that it was good.’”<sup>199</sup> It is because life is good that martyrdom is sacrificial—a part of the witness of the martyr is the dispossession of life itself, an unfathomable good that is given up in love and obedience. Taylor outlines how this basic fact of the goodness of life distinguishes the death of Jesus from the death of Socrates, regardless of the comparisons that abound. Taylor writes,

Socrates tries to prove to his friends that he is losing nothing of value, that he is gaining a great good. In his last request to Crito, to pay his debt of a cock to Asclepius, he seems to imply that life is an illness of which death is the cure (Asclepius being the god of healing whom ones rewards for cures). Socrates is serenely untroubled. Jesus suffers agony of soul in the garden, and is driven to despair on the cross, when he cries, ‘why hast thou forsaken me?’ At no point in the passion is he serene and untroubled.<sup>200</sup>

Whereas the Stoic renouncing of life is a renouncing of something that is external to the good, the Christian renunciation of life in martyrdom, and exemplified in Jesus’ cruciform sacrifice, endorses as a valuable good the very life which is being relinquished. Taylor argues that the kenotic surrendering of life by Christian martyrs gives rise to the paradox that “Christian renunciation is an affirmation.”<sup>201</sup> It is because creation is good for Jew, Christian, and Muslim, that these religious traditions must also affirm the

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<sup>197</sup> Morgan, “Religion, History and Moral Discourse,” 53.

<sup>198</sup> See Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 13.

<sup>199</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 218.

<sup>200</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 219.

<sup>201</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 219.

pluriformity that characterizes creation. The very nature of creation in its diversity demands an attunement to difference, since the heterogeneity is constitutive of the creation that God affirms as good in Genesis.<sup>202</sup>

In addition to this creationist influence, Taylor's pluralism is also guided by his Trinitarianism, and it is his discussion of the Trinity that represents the most explicitly Christian formulation of how (Christian) transcendence implies pluralism. In "A Catholic Modernity?" —a paper

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<sup>202</sup> Unfortunately, there is no place in Taylor's account where he connects his understanding of the importance of creation with the kenotic conceptualization of transcendence discussed in chapter two. In this regard, I would argue that the Christian philosopher and mystic Simone Weil is a helpful source that bridges this gap in Taylor's philosophy. She illuminates how the act of divine creation is itself a kenotic movement, and that the creation of the world represents a process of divine "decreation," a conceptualization of God's creative act which the Canadian philosopher George Grant summarizes as "a withdrawal, an act of love, involved with all the suffering, renunciation, and willingness to let the other be, that is given in the idea of love." Divine love is manifested kenotically in the creation of the world because the act of decreation constitutes a withdrawal agapeically motivated, and thus stands against the understanding of creation which sees it fundamentally as self-expansion. As Weil puts it, "Relentless necessity, wretchedness, distress, the crushing burden of poverty, and of labor which wears us out, cruelty, violent death, constraint, disease – all these constitute divine love. It is God who in love withdraws from us so that we can love him." She argues for the importance of renunciation and self-dispossession in ethics, because in such abasement we imitate "God's renunciation in creation. In a sense, God renounces being everything" by creating the world, and it is in this sense that creation is actually God's decreation. Thus, it is precisely in the goodness of creation that Taylor underscores that Weil claims we witness God's self-abnegation and the key to ethical life as kenosis: imitating and taking part in this facet of divine life means that "[we] should renounce being something. That is our only good." Weil and Taylor do take renunciation in different directions, since for Weil there is a tendency towards asceticism as exemplified in her own life. Taylor on the other hand, as was discussed in chapter two, worries that the attraction to asceticism amongst reformers tends to neglect the symbiosis between renunciation and flourishing enacted agapeically. However, regardless of this difference, Weil's concept of decreation provides a helpful resource to connect two important elements of Taylor's philosophy—his kenotic understanding of transcendence and his view that creation displays in its multiplicity what God affirms as good. See George Grant, *The George Grant Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) 264; and Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) 78-86. I discuss this aspect of Weil's work in my forthcoming "George Grant and Augustine of Hippo on Human Will and Technological Mastery" *Studies in Religion*, 38/1 (2009).

delivered at his reception of the Marianist award from the Society of Mary—Taylor underscores how the Greek *katholou* “[comprises] both universality and wholeness; one might say universality through wholeness,” and that this dual nature of Catholicity enjoins Catholics, and presumably all Christians, to resist the coercive, and often violent, drive towards univocity which “[strives] to make over other nations and cultures to fit it.”<sup>203</sup> This formulation of universality through wholeness has clear resonances with the discussion of the goodness of creation above, but it is the correlation that Taylor traces out in this lecture between Catholicity (comprising universality and wholeness) and the way in which humans are created in *imago dei* that is of present interest. As he puts it,

unity-across-difference, as against unity-through-identity, seems the only possibility for us, not just because of the diversity among humans, starting with the difference between men and women and ramifying outward...[It] seems that the life of God itself, understood as trinitarian, is already a oneness of this kind. Human diversity is part of the way in which we are made in the image of God.<sup>204</sup>

So just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are a relationality *and* a unity, so paradoxically, or perhaps better put, *mysteriously*, do humans embody simultaneously both diversity and unity. This Trinitarian conception of human relationality adds a compatible theistic element to Taylor’s wider anthropology, insofar as both imply a multiplicity of individual and cultural expressions, and as he himself notes Herder’s own conception of complementarity has “an explicitly Christian source, even if not explicitly rooted in Trinitarian theology” —so the continuities between Taylor’s expressive anthropology and the more theistic anthropological components should be unsurprising in light of Herder’s influence on Taylor.<sup>205</sup> This notion of the triunity of the Godhead as a referent for human unity-across-difference also ramifies into Taylor’s more communitarian formulations of what it is to have a social existence characterized by fullness. Taylor’s Trinitarianism implies a deep pluralism (especially combined with the pluriformity of expressions that follow from his anthropology), but as the following

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<sup>203</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 14. In light of this formulation, it is unsurprising that a little further into the piece Taylor warns against “the project of Christendom,” which though “inspired by the very logic of incarnation” is “doomed” as a historical project because of the coercion involved in governing. See 17.

<sup>204</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 14-15.

<sup>205</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 114.

quotation suggests, it also places our access to the good life in our communal nature:

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 is what passes between persons, and we are made in God's image.<sup>206</sup>

Taylor's Catholicism supplies him with yet another anthropological fortification against the monological conceptions of the human that is presumed in most atomistic socio-political accounts. Thus, his theistic commitments complement, or more precisely *underlie* (ontologically), his understanding of modern pluralism while also contributing to an alternate socio-political vision to those radical individualist accounts which envision society as a *fragmented* conglomerate of self-interested individuals bound together by some sort of contractual obligation.

There is clearly a compelling case that Taylor's articulation of this normative moral vision is best categorized as weak ontology. Taylor himself asserts that the sorts of "qualitative distinctions" that we make when we consider how the self is oriented in moral space inevitably produces "contestable answers to inescapable questions," a formulation which echoes White's description of the tendencies of weak ontology.<sup>207</sup> Prima facie, Taylor's utilization of theistic arguments, and in particular his Trinitarian formulation, seem to fall within the realm of strong ontology. Recall White's definition of strong ontology quoted at the opening of this chapter: "Strong are those ontologies that claim to show us 'the way the world is,' or how God's being stands to human being, or what human nature is." Surely, when taken on its own, Taylor's account of how our being created in the image of God leads to the twofold claim that unity-through-diversity is the only available option, and that the fullness of human life is to be found in what passes between humans, seems to meet the basic criteria of strong ontology. However, his theistic formulations must be contextualized within his wider anthropological and moral vision. He consistently discusses Christianity and scripture, and even theism in general, as a best account of what it is to be human and to live the good life, an account that issues forth from the hermeneutical stance and that takes history seriously. Stephen White surely has philosophies like Taylor's in mind when he ascribes "deep historical

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<sup>206</sup> Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?" 114,

<sup>207</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 41.

interpretation and existential analytic” to weak ontology.<sup>208</sup> Thus, Taylor’s Catholicism also meets the requirements of weak ontology when it is taken in the larger context of his moral ontology.<sup>209</sup>

So, perhaps White’s original assessment that Taylor is something of a border runner between strong and weak ontology is not completely off the mark, since Christian theism does provide Taylor with the formulation that the diversity-cum-unity of social life reflects how we are created in God’s image, although Taylor’s hermeneutical and historical sensibilities (central as they are to his moral ontology and anthropology) would seem to anchor Taylor’s ontology on the weak side of the spectrum. But in light of the foregoing discussion, coupled also with the previous chapter’s depiction of the kenotic nature of transcendence which resides at the very center of Taylor’s religious thought, I suggest that it is not possible to understand Taylor’s moral enterprise properly in terms of strong ontology, insofar as

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<sup>208</sup> Stephen White, “Weak Ontology and Liberal Political Reflection,” *Political Theory* (August 1997), 509.

<sup>209</sup> The presence of these “stronger” ontological formulations in a paper delivered to the Society of Mary should be unsurprising. As Taylor himself notes at the beginning of the piece, theistic issues “have been at the center of his concern for decades,” but have remained implicit because of the “nature of philosophical discourse... which has to try to persuade honest thinkers of any and all metaphysical or theological commitments.” Taylor recognizes some of the difficulties that arise when theistic perspectives are introduced into philosophical debate, and thus his more theistic claims in a text like *Sources of the Self*, which has a readership that goes beyond the confessional, arise when considering how theism can indeed be the best account to talk about moral life—over and above, say, utilitarianism. Because “A Catholic Modernity?” was delivered to an audience that already shares some theistic affinities, Taylor is able to articulate his normative moral and political vision without having to make the case that theism is the best account—his audience (for the most part) would already be convinced that Christian theism offers a better account of the good than utilitarianism ever can. This is not to say that Taylor does not recognize the contestability of theism in a confessional context; the assumption is that members in a Marianist society are participants in the contestation over whether Christian theism is the best account—and thus he says elsewhere that “my’ best account... may just as easily be ‘our’ best account. No one thinks totally alone; the Cartesian ideal is unrealisable integrally.” See “Reply and Re-articulation,” *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, 227. The task Taylor sets forth for himself when addressing the Marianist society is to give a best account of Christianity, to give a Christian account that best describes what it is to live a good life, to live agapeically—a best account that to a large extent is already shared. See “A Catholic Modernity?” 13ff.

Christian kenosis is by definition “weak, dispossessive of “being”, always giving itself up, never seeking power. Thus, if we want to call Taylor’s kenotic perspective “strong”, it would seem that the categorical distinction between “weak” and “strong” begins to break apart analytically. At the very least, such a kenotically “strong” ontological formulation is difficult to reconcile with those strong ontologies that “carry an underlying assumption of certainty that guides the whole problem of moving from the ontological level to the moral-political,” the kinds of strong ontology that share a filiation with and often animate those self-assured religious movements that seek to make over the saeculum to fit their particular normative understanding of how things ought to be.<sup>210</sup> Surely, on Taylor’s account, such “Constantinian” modes of making over the world should be given a wide berth.<sup>211</sup> Our situatedness in the world, in history, does not allow us to claim this kind of exceptionalism or triumphalism: “My community, my history, exceptional models, and my own reflection, have all combined to offer me a language in which I make sense of all this” in a best account.<sup>212</sup> But an equally crucial point for the present discussion concerns how Constantianism runs against the grain of transcendence as kenosis. Taylor’s vision of the good, insofar as it is centrally animated by a kenotic conception of transcendence, cannot lay the groundwork for any kind of discourse that seeks power—as, I would suggest, strong, foundationalist ontologies tend to do. I would argue further that though what might be called “discursive Constantianism” may seem less overtly political than the actual making over of the world by governments, militaries, and other institutions (including the church, synagogue, and mosque), the discursive modality of the Constantian must be recognized as an attempt to seek coercive power over other discourses. Such an agonistic battle of ideologies is arguably a part of any Constantian activity, but surely kenotic moral sources which resist power and instead seek abasement cannot be the sources for such an ideological striving for possession. Taylor’s moral philosophy is not motivated by any kind of Constantian triumphalism, but is instead interested in carving out the ontological space

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<sup>210</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 6-7.

<sup>211</sup> The term “Constantian,” is employed in many post-Christendom political theologies, and most influentially in the work of John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. One concise description of Yoder’s conception of Constantianism, which captures what I am discussing here, describes it as “the fall of the church from its calling as servant into the libidinous desire for historical mastery and political domination.” See P. Travis Kroeker “Why O’Donovan’s Christendom Is Not Constantian and Yoder’s Voluntarism Is Not Hobbesian: A Debate in Theological Politics Re-defined” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 20 (2000), 42.

<sup>212</sup> Taylor. “Reply and Re-articulation,” *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, 227.

(in a 'weak' mode) necessary for moderns to function as moral beings, and for Taylor, this means resuscitatively bringing "the air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit" through a re-articulation of the transcendent sources that move us. And as I have suggested here, both the mode in which Taylor talks about transcendence, and the nature of the transcendent source that Taylor draws from in his best account, are compatible with the political demands of pluralism and the ontological demands of a post-foundationalist world.

Given the importance of language for Taylor's account—including especially how language is so important for his anthropology—the way in which we talk about the good, transcendence, and moral sources is crucially important. If the good is dispossessing, then it would follow that our articulations of the good be similarly dispossessive. Thus, a case can be made for how Taylor, for theological (in addition to philosophical, anthropological and methodological) reasons, would want to follow Stephen White and underscore the *how* of weak ontology: the demands of weak ontology require a similitude of word and deed, with the form of both reflecting the contestability of weak ontology. In her helpful article entitled "Faith Beyond Nihilism," Alexandra Klaushofer offers a depiction of how this kind of contestability is built into Taylor's philosophy, a component of his thought that I have argued in this chapter is fully attentive to the demands of contemporary pluralism. The article compares Taylor's philosophical approach with the work of the Radical Orthodox theologian John Milbank, and in this passage Klaushofer illuminates how the form of Taylor's best account is such that it effectively brings together his Christianity and pluralism, a move that on her reading is unavailable to Milbank because of the form of his account. Klaushofer argues that Milbanks's "brand of communitarianism"

stays within the perspective of his own spiritual community, retaining an inward-looking focus on the internal features of Christianity that impacts on the status of his central claim, which reads something like 'I am a Christian because Christianity *is* the best account'. In contrast, Taylor's might be restated as: 'I recognize that what I see as the best account is only so because of my contingently constituted identity,' thus dropping the exclusivist claim that tends to superiority. In other words, his external move, in conjunction with his internal position, engenders the holding in balance of two options which might previously have seemed incommensurable: nurturing one's own while remaining open to the stranger...[Unlike Taylor] Milbank fails to acknowledge the fact of pluralism in contemporary reality and the



way in which it impinges on the internal dynamics of each belief-system and the status of its claims.<sup>213</sup>

Whether this is an accurate depiction of Milbank's position or not is outside the scope of this work, but what can be discussed here is how the "brand of communitarianism" that Klaushofer ascribes to Milbank is arrived at methodologically via strong ontology. Taylor's ontological account is at odds with this kind of perspective, precisely because of the self-assured form that Klaushofer describes in Milbank's formulation. Such self-assuredness is problematic from the Taylorian perspective, both because it does not take full account of the modern epistemological predicament which limits us to best accounts articulated by historically situated interpreting subjects, and because as a Christian account it does not seem to embody the "discursive abasement" that arguably corresponds to transcendence as kenosis. What I have suggested in this chapter is that the form of Taylor's normative political vision is fundamentally cruciform and kenotic, taking an analogous form to the moral source that animates it, and thus resists the drive for power, whether it be discursive or institutional. The nature of moral experience within modernity as understood by Taylor means that the form of his best account must steer clear of the exceptionalism or triumphalism that Klaushofer ascribes to Milbank—such a position is unavailable to him for theological, anthropological, and moral ontological reasons.

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<sup>213</sup> Alexandra Klaushofer, "Faith Beyond Nihilism: The Retrieval of Theism in Milbank and Taylor." *Heythrop Journal* 40 (1999), 147. Klaushofer's critique of Milbank continues as follows: "Of course, in Milbank's terms the external move is exactly what is to be avoided, one which constitutes a reductive attempt to secularize that which stands on its own terms. And yet, by reason of his refusal of this move, his presentation of Christian meaning appears, it is [sic] own way, just as unrealistic as the old, metaphysically grounded version was, carving out an otherworldly space within the imagined walls of Augustine's city of God. The price of the certainty that reigns inside the CITY is an attempt to circumnavigate a wider reality made up of multiple claims to meaning, both religious and non-religious." 147. It is precisely this wider reality with which Taylor's philosophical project is attempting to come to grips.

## Chapter 4: Transcendence Revisited: A Response to D.P. Baker and Ian Fraser

In the fifth chapter, I will continue my exploration of Taylor's anthropology. The focus there will be on the role of the body in Taylor's thought, and in particular his discussion of some of the ways in which the dominant trends in certain modern philosophical and theological quarters have obscured the self's embodiment or "enfleshment". Before moving on to any further engagement with Taylorian anthropology, however, I first want to attend to two recent contributions to scholarship on the question of Taylor and religion by Ian Fraser and Deane-Peter Baker. What makes Fraser and Baker relevant to our present purposes is that both have written monographs that speak to the central place of Christianity in Taylor's philosophical programme and have written on the subject relatively recently and thus engage Taylor's most recent work, much of which has the strongest explicit focus of all his writing on the nature of modern religious consciousness. Baker and Fraser both make claims about the ways in which Christian transcendence functions as a moral source for Taylor, though each of their readings of Taylor differs to varying extents from the interpretation I am fleshing out here.

Fraser is highly critical of the ways in which Taylor's religious commitments inflect his philosophy (as evidenced by the polemical subtitle of his book: *Transcending Charles Taylor*), while Baker understands Christianity to be a morally constructive element in Taylor's programme. Yet both share a common reading of the authoritative function of Christianity in Taylor's moral philosophy. Consider a pair of statements that express what I take to be the same basic claim about the nature of Taylor's theism. First, Baker ascribes a normative and prescriptive claim to Taylor's moral theory that is related to Christianity. On Baker's view, Taylor holds the view that "the structure of our morality and the incomparably higher good...*must be based in terms of Christian theism* (Best Account)."<sup>214</sup> This reading, which seeks to understand Taylor's theism both normatively and prescriptively, is also found in Fraser, who asserts that Taylor's view rests on the "contention that a truly benevolent act is *only possible if you open yourself up to God*."<sup>215</sup> Fraser's formulation here couches Taylor's position in terms of theism, but as we will see below, Fraser's emphasis is on Christian theism specifically. These two very short quotes are enormously suggestive, and display the roots of a shared element in Fraser and Baker. Against my portrayal of Taylor's Christian thought—which claims that his notion of transcendence is

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<sup>214</sup> Baker, 123. Emphasis added; cf. Baker 145.

<sup>215</sup> Fraser, 46. Emphasis added.

dispossessive, attentive to the contemporary demands of pluralism in its inclusivity, open to a multiplicity of moral sources, diverse as a basic demand of catholicity (“universality through wholeness”), and resistant to the lure of power that can be a primary motivating force lurking behind prescriptive and exclusivist claims—Baker and Fraser characterize Taylor’s theism in a manner that is generally reminiscent of earlier mostly critical scholarly engagements (such as articles by Quentin Skinner and Melissa Lane) of *Sources of the Self*. According to this interpretation of *Sources*, Taylor’s position is that *only theism*, and in particular *Christian theism*, can provide an adequate moral source.<sup>216</sup> I will argue below that both Fraser and Baker misrepresent Taylor’s discussion of transcendence, and even though Baker reads Taylor much more carefully than Fraser, they arrive at similar conclusions that suggest that Taylor’s Christianity is relatively exclusivist and restrictive. The present task, then, is to examine evidence in Taylor which suggests that a different interpretation of his theism is not only possible, but more consistent with Taylor’s wider philosophical programme, and in particular the description of transcendence that has been offered in previous chapters.

#### 4.1 Unstacking the Deck: A Response to Ian Fraser

I shall begin by responding to Ian Fraser’s critical reading of Taylor on religion. My rejoinder to Fraser is certainly the more extensive one offered in

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<sup>216</sup> Quentin Skinner, “Who Are ‘We’? Ambiguities of the Modern Self,” *Inquiry* 34 (1991), 147; Melissa Lane, “God or Orienteering? A Critical Study of Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self*,” *Ratio* 5 No. 1 (1992), 48. Though a response to both Skinner and Lane would certainly be relevant in the present chapter, I have opted to focus my attention on Fraser and Baker, both because the latter two commentators dedicate significant portions of their monographs to Taylor’s religious work, and because their monographs are recent and thus account for newer developments in Taylor’s scholarship beyond *Sources of the Self*. Lane’s position is given thorough consideration by Baker, including an appropriation of central elements of her interpretation, though he does tend to reformulate them somewhat. As for Skinner’s critiques, Taylor himself has responded in two different essays. See “Comments and Replies,” *Inquiry* 34 (1991), 237-254; “Charles Taylor Replies,” in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, James Tully (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 213-257. Though both Fraser and Skinner’s readings of Taylor’s theism are deeply polemical, Skinner fails to attempt to engage Taylor’s actual positions with the depth that Fraser does. Consequently, an engagement with Fraser rather than Skinner is arguably more helpful for the purposes of the present chapter

this chapter, largely because his account of how Christianity shapes Taylor's philosophy is so different from the reading I am offering here. Fraser argues that Taylor's Christian theism is both rigid and dogmatic, factors that he maintains undermine Taylor's endeavor to offer a truly pluralist ethics and politics. Fraser claims to show Taylor's "arguments to be contradictory and ultimately to undermine his preference for difference across diverse belief systems, thereby exposing his restrictive theism."<sup>217</sup> Establishing this thesis is Fraser's central task in the second chapter of his book, and the bulk of his criticisms of Taylor's wider project hinge on his claim that Taylor's theism is restrictive. Ruth Abbey will be a helpful ally as I respond to this claim of restrictiveness, for at least two reasons. First, her description of Taylor's moral philosophy rests on what is arguably a closer and more comprehensive reading of Taylor's *oeuvre*. And second, Fraser's construal of Taylor in his recent book, *Dialectics of the Self*, does not change in any dramatic ways from the one offered in his earlier article, "Charles Taylor's Catholicism," an article to which Abbey responded critically in her "Turning or Spinning". The absence of any major revisions from the earlier essay to the later monograph suggests a fundamental disagreement with Abbey's own reading of Taylor, since Fraser rarely veers from his original argument despite the constructive criticism provided by Abbey's response. As will become clear, I am in agreement with many facets of Abbey's perspective, and some of the deficiencies that I see present in Fraser's construal of Taylor stem from misrepresentations of Taylor's well-established positions, many of which are underscored in "Turning or Spinning". Thus, I will follow Abbey by suggesting places where Fraser diverges from Taylor's actual positions en route to his conclusions about the restrictiveness of Taylorian theism. The upshot of this will be a further clarification of Taylor's views on transcendent/ theistic moral sources. My critical response to Fraser will complement Abbey's essay and shore up her critique of Fraser's interpretation, but my emphasis will be on the how he ignores the dispossessive character of Taylor's transcendent perspective—an element which is highly pertinent to the present work and which is absent in Abbey's otherwise very meticulous rejoinder.

According to Fraser, Taylor's position—or more accurately, Taylor's "hunch" — "is that the significance of human life *should* be articulated and understood theistically rather than non-theistically."<sup>218</sup> This claim, which sets up Fraser's critique of Taylor's Catholicism, alludes to a somewhat tentative formulation that is put forward in the final chapter of *Sources of the Self*, in which Taylor makes reference to his intuition that theism outstrips exclusive humanism in certain

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<sup>217</sup> Ian Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self: Transcending Charles Taylor* (Charlottesville, Va.: Imprint Academic, 2007) 4.

<sup>218</sup> Fraser, 31. Emphasis added.

ways. Taylor alludes to his hunch in reference to the Nietzschean challenge (discussed above in chapter two) that raises the question of whether or not moderns have access to the kinds of moral sources necessary to support their commitments to high standards of benevolence. In an attempt to underscore the significance of this Nietzschean challenge, Taylor demarcates a “range of questions around the moral sources which might sustain our rather massive professed commitments in benevolence and justice,” and asks whether the naturalist perspective, purged of all theistic buttressing, can sustain these moral standards. It is important to examine closely Taylor’s actual formulation, since it is immediately apparent that Fraser’s depiction of Taylor’s hunch is misleading and problematic in at least two respects. The passage in question from *Sources of the Self* is as follows:

I am obviously not neutral in posing these questions. Even though I have refrained (partly out of delicacy, but largely out of lack of arguments) from answering them, the reader suspects that my hunch lies towards the affirmative, that I do think naturalist humanism defective in these respects—or, perhaps better put, that great as the power of naturalist sources might be, the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater.<sup>219</sup>

A better exegesis of this passage is certainly possible than the one offered by Fraser, not only through a closer attention to Taylor’s language, but especially via the contextualization of this assertion within Taylor’s wider project. When we examine Taylor’s actual phrasing, it is immediately evident that Fraser has mischaracterized Taylor’s position. There is no explicitly prescriptive aspect in the passage from *Sources*—no “should,” as Fraser alleges. Furthermore, Taylor formulates his hunch in terms of amplitude, as greater/lesser rather than either/or, the latter of which is suggestive of Fraser’s “rather than”. Taylor’s questions in this section of *Sources* center around whether exclusive humanism can sustain ethics as benevolence. And on this score, Taylor’s hunch is that theism is incomparably better than exclusive humanism in most respects, but such a claim does not necessarily lead us to conclude, as Fraser assumes, that Taylor says we *should* articulate things in terms of Christian theism alone.

In addition to this inaccurate portrayal of the phrasing in *Sources of the Self*, a second problem surfaces in Fraser’s evaluation of Taylor’s hunch because he fails to contextualize it within Taylor’s central concerns in the book. *Sources of the Self* is not a short monograph, and Taylor goes to great lengths in his narrative of the roots of the modern self to explore and illuminate the wide range of moral sources that enliven the modern moral

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<sup>219</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 517-518.

order. He does not emphasize the irreconcilability of moral sources in this genealogy, but rather discusses how a multiplicity of sources motivate individual selves and underwrite their moral commitments. Indeed, even within Taylor's own project, we find a range of moral frameworks at work, and as was shown in the previous chapter, his own anthropology is situated at the confluence of theistic and expressivist streams. I will return to the issue of pluralism below in my engagement with Baker. But what needs to be underscored here is that the thrust of the quoted passage is this: there are drawbacks to exclusive humanism as it relates to ethics as benevolence, and in general exclusive humanism/scientism, where it functions hegemonically (that is, *exclusively*), encounters all sorts of problems—social, anthropological, moral, etc. The dangers of humanism as an *exclusive* source are a persistent concern of Taylor's, both before and after *Sources of the Self*. Indeed, in the introduction to his *Philosophical Papers*, for example, Taylor refers to himself as a "monomaniac" whose primary philosophical concern has been to challenge the view that humans are best understood in scientific terms, and one of his more influential essays critiques scientistic anthropologies for their inability to account for human self-interpretation.<sup>220</sup> This is not the only point in *Dialectics of the Self* where Fraser fails to situate a claim or position of Taylor's within the context of his larger project. For example, Fraser criticizes Taylor for not providing in "A Catholic Modernity?" examples of philosophers that "fall under this rubric" of exclusive humanism.<sup>221</sup> It is difficult to take such a criticism seriously, since for anyone familiar with Taylor's genealogy of the modern self it is very clear what kinds of positions he has in mind because his entire project is unremitting in its polemic against the hegemony of the exclusive humanist perspective.

So Fraser's portrayal of Taylor's hunch misses the mark. This alone is not an insignificant blow to Fraser's contention that Taylor's theism is restrictive since, as Abbey notes, Taylor in *Modern Social Imaginaries* "is still presenting his belief that humans have an ineradicable bent toward the transcendent as a 'hunch.'"<sup>222</sup> Indeed, he has maintained this language even in *A Secular Age*.<sup>223</sup> If Taylor's hunch is in fact as dogmatic and exclusivist as Fraser construes it to be, it would be appropriate to identify it as an element of Taylor's theism that cuts against the grain of his pluralism. It is perhaps worth noting Abbey's recognition that although Taylor continues to

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<sup>220</sup> See the opening page of the shared introduction from *Human Agency and Language* and *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. See especially "Interpretation in the Sciences of Man" in the latter text, 15-57.

<sup>221</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 35.

<sup>222</sup> Ruth Abbey, "Turning or Spinning," 174, n11; cf. Taylor's *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 51.

<sup>223</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 147, 609.

formulate his claim about the importance of theism and transcendence for our moral thinking in the intuitive and speculative language of a hunch, “the more one repeats a claim, the less convincing it becomes to present it as a hunch.”<sup>224</sup> Abbey’s discernment on this point could be helpful for Fraser’s case against Taylor, though the implications of this repetition of language would need to be connected to other aspects of Fraser’s argument, since it is evident that Abbey is making a different point than Fraser. Abbey is suggesting that the hunch is less tentative than Taylor perhaps is willing to admit, but such an assuredness about the suitability of transcendence over exclusive humanism as a source for ethics as benevolence is not obviously opposed to the description of transcendence offered in the present work. One can be confident that a kenotic transcendent source can be a powerful motivator for ethical action—surely most Christian ethicists would agree with such a view. Fraser’s construal of Taylor’s hunch does yield an incompatible reading of Taylor, but as I have suggested here, he arrives at such a point through a distortion of the actual substance of the claims made at the end of *Sources of the Self*. I will now turn to some of the critical trajectories of *Dialectics of the Self*, and I will show how there is a tendency in Fraser’s book to distort Taylor’s views on religion and transcendence.

## 4.2 Transcendence and Inarticulacy

One of Fraser’s main lines of criticism takes as its focus Taylor’s inability to articulate his claims about the ways in which transcendence operates in the modern moral order. Fraser notes how Taylor, in response to Rosemary Luling Haughton’s apprehensions about the use of “transcendence” in “A Catholic Modernity?”, displays a sensitivity to the criticism regarding his linguistic choices. And thus, as Fraser accurately points out, Taylor’s “Concluding Reflections and Comments” alludes to the hesitation with which he ultimately elected to use of “transcendence”. As mentioned in chapter two, Taylor had significant misgivings about using a term that is not only “abstract and evasive”, but also “so redolent of the flat and content-free modes of spirituality we get maneuvered into in the attempt to accommodate both modern reason and the promptings of the heart.”<sup>225</sup> However, regardless of these reservations, and after “erasing it with particular gusto”, Taylor chose to reinstate the term. He explains that though the term is perhaps too slippery and vague, he reinstated it because he “wanted to say something general, something not just about Christians.”<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Ruth Abbey, “Turning or Spinning,” 170.

<sup>225</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 105.

<sup>226</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 105.

Taylor continues: “I needed a term to talk about all those different ways in which religious discourse and practice went beyond the exclusively human, and in exhaustion I fell back on ‘transcendent.’ (But I haven’t given up hope of finding a better term.)”<sup>227</sup>

On Fraser’s reading, Taylor’s inability to find the appropriate terminology for his theistic position constitutes a form of moral inarticulacy that ultimately opens up his theism to a powerful criticism. Fraser asserts that by Taylor’s own admission “he has no substantial vocabulary to express the transcendent dimension that exclusive humanism denies.”<sup>228</sup> This is extremely problematic, Fraser continues, because “transcendence is crucial for [Taylor’s] Catholicism and is what he says distinguishes the latter from exclusive humanism. At the core of his Catholic vision therefore is a notion of the transcendent that Taylor cannot fully articulate.”<sup>229</sup> Fraser posits that the magnitude of this terminological failure is inestimable in light of the central role that articulacy and expression play in Taylor’s moral programme. This line of reasoning leads Fraser to the conclusion that “for Taylor, the failure to articulate a moral source is damaging because it means losing contact with the good and thereby strikes at what it means to be human. So the failure to articulate transcendence severely weakens Taylor’s Catholicism as an orientation to the good.”<sup>230</sup> If we are convinced by Fraser’s argumentation here, serious questions arise about Taylor’s account of the continued significance of transcendent sources in the modern moral order. Indeed, such a criticism, if compelling, would doubtlessly strike at the core of Taylor’s moral ontology, especially insofar as it accords a central significance to the place of theism/transcendence. After all, a fundamental claim of Taylor’s moral ontology is that a moral source has power when the best formulation or articulation “makes [the source] plain and evident.”<sup>231</sup> Now, in order to evaluate Fraser’s assessment that Taylor lacks a “substantial vocabulary to describe the transcendent,” it is necessary to refine Fraser’s point of attack more than he himself does. Surely, Fraser cannot mean that Taylor’s philosophy as a whole lacks what might be called (for sake of ease) “theological” vocabulary. After all, Taylor’s short essay “A Catholic Modernity?” alone touches on a range of religious/transcendent themes. In terms of Christian thought he discusses Trinitarian theology, Christology and Incarnation, pneumatology, political theology, ecclesiology, theological anthropology, theological ethics, and more. The essay also discusses very explicitly the nature of transcendence as it functions in Buddhist ethics. Thus,

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<sup>227</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 106.

<sup>228</sup> Fraser, 36.

<sup>229</sup> Fraser, 36.

<sup>230</sup> Fraser, 37.

<sup>231</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 97.



we can assume that Fraser must be making a more narrow claim that focuses only on Taylor's use of "transcendence".

To be sure, Fraser is astute to raise questions about Taylor's choice to reinstate the terminology of "transcendence", something that Taylor would readily admit. But while Taylor's nomenclature is perhaps too indeterminate or maybe even obscurantist, these characteristics arguably arise because Taylor is attempting to categorize a type of comportment to particular kinds of moral sources—those that affirm something beyond life, moral perspectives that are irreducible to the purely immanent. Taylor asserts that he has chosen terminology that, despite its flaws, is conceivably expansive enough to describe suitably the ways that various religious traditions understand the relationship between the individual and the moral source that moves her most fundamentally, trumping all other moral sources. For the Christian, this *transcendent* moral source is understood incarnationally, trinitarianly, cruciformly, etc. For Buddhists, transcendence is understood with regards to ultimate reality, and the way that an appropriate comportment to ultimate reality leads to enlightenment and the virtue of compassion. Taylor is highly attuned to the limitations of the language of theism to describe this range of moral positions, since Buddhism (despite the "pantheon" of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas which we find in what might be best described as the more metaphysical modalities of Buddhist thought) cannot be easily understood as a tradition that venerates, worships or even believes in *Theos*; thus Taylor's hesitant reinstatement of "transcendence" (over theism). The central flaw in Fraser's criticism of Taylor's nomenclature is that he reasons that Taylor's inability to articulate, to give a name to, this moral source undermines his Catholicism. There are at least two problems with Fraser's line of reasoning.

First, Fraser conflates the articulation of a moral source, a more primal moral activity, with Taylor's more *theoretical* task of fleshing out the modern moral order, a descriptive account that seeks to illuminate how moral sources function in modernity. Taylor's argument in "A Catholic Modernity?" is not that Buddhism and Christianity (and all other religions that affirm a hypergood "beyond life") share a common moral source, but that these traditions all *share a common way of relating* to certain kinds of moral sources that enables religious people to affirm something as good beyond their present lived life, a position which Taylor thinks is unavailable to purely immanent perspectives. And this way of relating to a ("transcendent") moral source is a characteristic of perspectives that fall within a particular category that Taylor demarcates in the modern moral order. Recall the passage cited in chapter two in which Taylor discusses Millian ethics vis-à-vis "transcendent" perspectives. I quote it here once again at length, because it gets at the heart of what is common amongst the range

of moral positions that Taylor seeks to delineate with this somewhat ambiguous term:

What I mean by this is something more like: the point of things isn't exhausted by life, the fullness of life, even the goodness of life. This is not meant to be a repudiation of egoism, the idea that the fullness of my life (and perhaps those of people I love) should be my only concern. Let us agree with John Stuart Mill that a full life must involve striving for the benefit of all humankind. Then acknowledging the transcendent means seeing a point beyond that. One form of this is 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...What matters beyond life doesn't matter just because it sustains life; otherwise it wouldn't be 'beyond life' in the meaning of the act.

The present point is that Taylor, as exemplified in this passage, is interested in how this range of "transcendent" perspectives enables analogous compartments to moral sources, and thus opens up analogous modalities of ethical life that take us beyond an exclusive immanentism. He is *not* interested in equating the particular Trinitarian, incarnated moral source that moves Christians to a life of *agapê* with the particular non-theistic moral source of Buddhism that opens up paths to *karuna* and *annatta*. Fraser seems to conflate Taylor's description of the modern moral order—which describes the range of moral perspectives that are dominant in modernity—with the actual moral sources that empower these perspectives. It is the articulation of the latter (in best accounts) that Taylor holds is a fundamental moral activity, since (as was discussed in chapter three) Taylor's position is that fuller accounts can provide us clearer access to the sources that empower our moral lives. Of course, Taylor's attempts to give a penetrating description of the modern moral order has implications for articulation, but perhaps it is best to understand this as a subordinate (though nevertheless significant and necessary) mode of articulation. The more primary mode of articulation concerns itself with the nature of a moral source, and the most powerful examples for religious traditions on this score would presumably be scriptural "best accounts". We might recall Taylor's discussion in *Sources of the Self* in which he talks about the Christian Gospels in these terms.<sup>232</sup> Arguably, this kind of articulation is of a higher order than the historical narrative that Taylor offers—most formidably in *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*, though also in "A Catholic Modernity?"—in which he sets out to

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<sup>232</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 96-97.

highlight the ways in which moral sources already move us, even though (as in the case of theistic sources) we may not acknowledge the actual pull of a given source. Taylor's form of narrative seeks to give us a renewed access to sources that have been occluded, but the narrative does not attempt to offer a new theology (for example) but to demonstrate through genealogical means that previously articulated sources continue to have a hold on us, diminished though their power may be. That is why Taylor describes his project in *Sources of the Self* as a *retrieval*. However, it is not generative in the way that the Gospels are for Christians, for the Gospels articulate a new conception of God, of salvation, of what it means to be created in the image of God, of being, etc. At least in regards to Christian theism, Taylor's work of retrieval is an attempt to re-tap sources that have been already been given their primary and most basic articulation through revelation. And though foundational formulations that provide theological insight from the likes of Augustine, Aquinas, etc. are obviously characterized by a different kind of authority than that which sets scripture apart, I would argue that the former are still articulations of a more primary variety, in that they provide *insight*—something received as both *new* and *true* for Christianity—into the nature of God. Arguably, Taylor's work of articulation generally does not aspire to this kind of theological insight—though his work on the kenotic shape of transcendence would seem to stand out in this regard.

The second fundamental problem with Fraser's critique (already alluded to above) is that he pays insufficient attention to the fact that Taylor opts for his slippery nomenclature in order to identify an expansive category of moral positions, a nomenclature that is attentive to the demands of religious pluralism. As was indicated above, Taylor's work quite clearly employs the rich language of Christian theology, and so Fraser's claim that Taylor has no substantial vocabulary to describe aspects of the transcendent is puzzling. Since Fraser is fully aware that Taylor's rationale in using "transcendence" is to employ a more expansive nomenclature that allows him to speak meaningfully about non-immanentist moral sources beyond the Christian, we can only speculate as to Fraser's motivations in formulating such a critique.<sup>233</sup> For the more suspicious critic, it may seem that he is "stacking the deck" in order to make a case against Taylor's theism. At the very least, Fraser's claims that the viability of Taylor's Catholicism as an orientation to the good is compromised by his lack of theological terminology miss the mark.

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<sup>233</sup> In a passage which makes it plainly evident that Fraser is aware of Taylor's motives in the latter's lexical choices, Fraser writes "[Taylor] recognizes that the term transcendence is both 'abstract' and 'evasive', but he used the term because he wanted to say something general which could appeal to all people, not just Christians." See *Dialectic of the Self*, 36.

It is possible to take up some of these lines of criticism about inarticulacy and couple them with a more careful reading. Such an analysis, rather than trying to emphasize Taylor's Catholic inarticulacy, might instead raise questions about Taylor's ability to give a credible pluralist account of transcendence. After all, Taylor's uneasiness about this terminology arises from its obscurity, but what I have outlined in the previous paragraphs is that he employs "amorphous" (that is, lacking an easily discernible structure) language precisely because he wants to flesh out a moral programme that is pluralist, and thus extends beyond an exclusive Christianity (for example). But of course, regardless of whether Taylor's project can withstand this kind of criticism,<sup>234</sup> such a reading would surely compromise Fraser's claim that Taylor's theism is inflexible and dogmatic. The weakness, if it is that, is that in his aspiration to be inclusive, flexible and deeply pluralist, Taylor is compelled to fall back on the "loose" and somewhat imprecise language of transcendence, rather than the more "restrictive" language of "theism" which by definition excludes non-theistic traditions like Buddhism. In other words, a more appropriate criticism of Taylor's linguistic choices would proceed from the claim that Taylor is perhaps not rigid or restrictive enough—a direct contradiction to Fraser's central thesis about Taylor's Catholicism. But surely the criticism that Taylor's Catholicism as an orientation to the good is undermined because of the lack of a theological lexicon cannot hold water.

#### 4.3 Buddhism and Transcendence

A second thread of Fraser's argument that sets out to show the restrictiveness of Taylor's religious thought addresses the handling of Buddhism in "A Catholic Modernity?" Fraser suggests that Taylor gives a somewhat skewed account of Buddhism, and that he is guilty of (amongst other things) reductionism. For example, Fraser claims that Taylor "clearly equates Christian 'agape' with the Buddhist notion of 'karuna' just as he

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<sup>234</sup> A Taylorian has many resources in her arsenal that mitigate against this line of criticism, many of which have been discussed in previous chapters. For example, Taylor believes that best accounts are part of an ongoing (and most likely, interminable) dialogue aimed at negotiating and refining competing positions. There is no reason to think that Taylor expects his formulation in "A Catholic Modernity?" (and elsewhere where transcendence is used) to be definitive and final. Furthermore, there are many aspects of his anthropology and moral ontology that aim at a human rather than cultural normativity. We also find resources in his theistic thought, such as his views that catholicity requires both wholeness and diversity, and that our plurality reflects for Christians how we are created in the image of God.

mistakenly suggested the Christian ‘decentered self’ can be seen in the ‘same terms’ as the Buddhist ‘no self’.”<sup>235</sup> Fraser accuses Taylor of doing precisely what Taylor has previously warned against in the engagement with other traditions. In other works, Taylor emphasizes that truly recognizing another religion “means precisely not trying to reduce it to some common denominator, not trying to fudge the differences with Christianity, because often the power of this faith resides in what differentiates it from mine.”<sup>236</sup> On Fraser’s reading, even though Taylor’s stated goal is to bring Buddhism to bear on his argument in order to meet what he claims is a basic element of Catholicity—diversity or difference—Fraser insists that Taylor is “merely subsuming [Buddhism]...under the Catholic banner.” According to Fraser, this subsumption is seen in the following way:

As we have seen, Taylor argues that acknowledging the transcendent means in Christian terms aiming beyond life or opening yourself to a change in identity. In Buddhism, for example, he notes, how this change is a radical one in that it is a movement from “self to ‘no self’ (*anatta*)”, but he then adds that the “Christian faith can be seen in the same terms: as calling for a radical decentering of the self, in relation with God.” What therefore appeared to be different between Catholicism and Buddhism can, according to Taylor, now be seen as the ‘same’. In that sense he thinks he achieves unity-across-difference, but such an elision does seem problematic because a ‘decentered self’ is precisely that, ‘decentered’, whereas a ‘no self’ is not ‘decentered’ at all, it is what it says: a ‘no self’.<sup>237</sup>

Fraser is correct to point out that the language of ‘decentering’ is problematic when we talk about Buddhism, particularly insofar as the ‘self’ that reaches Enlightenment is actually *extinguished*, not decentered. Fraser also argues that “[far] from pointing to something ‘beyond life’ as Taylor would like to suggest, the Buddha is pointing to this life and the end of suffering in the here and now.”<sup>238</sup> Fraser claims that Taylor has couched his discussion of Buddhist transcendence in such a way that obscures the Buddhist emphasis on the blissful cessation of *samsara*. Fraser quotes a passage in which the Buddha, upon leaving the endless cycle of rebirth, proclaims “I have lived the

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<sup>235</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 41-43.

<sup>236</sup> Taylor, “Charles Taylor Replies,” 229.

<sup>237</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 40.

<sup>238</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 42.

pure life; what had to be done has been done; henceforth there will be no further rebirth for me.”<sup>239</sup>

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor once again describes the dispossessive movement that he locates at the center of Christian and Buddhist ethics, though in the more recent text he refers to the extinguishment of the ‘self’:

In both Buddhism and Christianity, there is something similar in spite of the great difference in doctrine. This is that the believer or devout person is called on to make a profound inner break with the goals of flourishing in their own case; they are called on, that is, to detach themselves from their own flourishing, to the point of the extinction of self in one case, or to that of renunciation of human fulfillment to serve God in the other. The respective patterns are clearly visible in the exemplary figures. The Buddha achieves Enlightenment; Christ consents to a degrading death to follow his father’s will.<sup>240</sup>

This passage is certainly more in line with Buddhist views that emphasize “self”-extinction, and thus this later reformulation appears to be attentive to the kinds of concerns that Fraser raises.<sup>241</sup> But in *A Secular Age*, despite identifying the common ground that Christianity and Buddhism share in terms of renunciation, Taylor is more cautious about what he claims the ethical ramifications are for Buddhism. He expounds how renunciation itself cannot be construed as “true flourishing” for Christianity as it is for Stoicism, but that “the very point of renunciation [for Christianity] requires that the ordinary flourishing foregone be confirmed as valid.” Taylor insists that renunciation “doesn’t negate the value of flourishing; it is rather a call to

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<sup>239</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 42. Fraser’s source is Richard Gombrich, “Introduction: The Buddhist Way,” in *The World of Buddhism*, Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich (eds.) (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984) 9.

<sup>240</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 17.

<sup>241</sup> Another place in *A Secular Age* where Taylor displays a sensitivity to the nuances of this important element of Buddhism comes in a footnote in which he expresses the limitations of his term “fullness.” He writes, “‘Fullness’ has come to be my shorthand term here for the condition we aspire to, but I am acutely aware how inadequate all words are here. Every possible designation has something wrong with it. The glaring one in the case of ‘fullness’ is that according to one very plausible spiritual path, visible clearly in Buddhism, for instance, the highest aspiration is to a kind of emptiness (sunyata); or to put it more paradoxically, real fullness only comes through emptiness. But there is no perfect terminological solution here, and so with all these reservations I let the word stand.” 780, fn.8. Notably, Christian kenosis also represents an emptying, but one which is preceded by a filling up through grace.

centre everything on God,” and as the martyr exemplifies, this decentering may demand that one renounce life itself. But the consequence of all of this, Taylor argues, is that one’s renunciation can “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.”<sup>242</sup> So in his portrait of Christianity he depicts a paradoxical relation between renunciation and flourishing. Taylor is more restrained, however, in drawing similar conclusions about Buddhist ethics. He provides evidence that suggests that similar conclusions might be drawn, such as the connection in Buddhism between renunciation and compassion for suffering beings, as well as the “analogy between karuna and agape.” Still, Taylor confesses he is “not sure” that the paradoxical link between renunciation and flourishing that forms the center of Christian ethics is also fundamental to Buddhism.<sup>243</sup>

One thing that should be noted in this more recent formulation is how careful Taylor is to steer clear of reductivist pronouncements about Buddhism. Far from seeking out common denominators between Christianity and Buddhism, or equating *agapê* and karuna, Taylor describes them *analogically*. Against Fraser, I would suggest that this formulation is consistent with his arguments in “A Catholic Modernity?” which describe how Christianity and Buddhism have corresponding accounts of how the encounter with transcendence calls the self into question, begetting a ‘selflessness’ that can enable ethics as benevolence. But unlike the reformulation in *A Secular Age*, Taylor’s earlier formulation is tilted more towards Mahayana Buddhism, a tradition in which the saintly figure of the Bodhisattva, the great being of compassion, delays the extinction of his/her ‘self’ in order to attend to the suffering of sentient beings, to help them overcome the cyclical existence of *samsara*, characterized as it is by desire and the consequent wretchedness that arises from one’s inability to satiate desire. The notion of a decentering move is much more difficult to accommodate in the Theravadin perspective because of its emphasis on the extinguishment of “self” that flows from enlightenment. So how important is Taylor’s reformulation in *A Secular Age* for his earlier portrayal of Buddhism? Should we understand this reformulation as a signal that Taylor has simply “brushed up” on his Buddhism, and that the earlier formulation is deficient in whatever respects it deviates from the more recent one?

One answer to these questions can be arrived at if we consider a bit further the different emphases within Buddhism, a theme that is taken up in Jeffrey Stout’s review of *A Catholic Modernity?* Stout argues that Taylor’s conclusion that “exclusive humanism stifles spiritual aspirations that should not be stifled” is unsustainable because of the imprecision of the terms of his

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<sup>242</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 17-18.

<sup>243</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 18.

critique—and here, Stout, like Fraser, zeroes in on Taylor’s language of transcendence as it relates to Buddhism.<sup>244</sup> The imprecision is as follows. Stout contends that non-theistic forms of Buddhism “aspire to a type of transcendence of self that resists explication in the metaphysical terms Taylor otherwise associates with the transcendent something ‘beyond life’” (Stout presumably has the Theravadin tradition in mind here).<sup>245</sup> To be sure, Stout is right that Taylor’s conception of the transcendent fits more straightforwardly within the Mahayana tradition than it does within the more patently non-theistic Theravadin school. Taylor’s language in this regard certainly requires refinement as Stout suggests—and we find such

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<sup>244</sup> Fraser discusses this review of *A Catholic Modernity?*, but is worth noting that he exaggerates Stout’s own assertion, referring to Stout’s critique of Taylor’s formulation as a contradiction, whereas Stout himself is actually concerned with the precision of Taylor’s argumentation, as seen in Stout’s concluding statement that “the terms in which Taylor casts his critique are too imprecise to sustain his conclusion.” See Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 37; Jeffrey Stout, Review of *A Catholic Modernity?* in *Philosophy in Review*, 21/6 (2001), 425-427.

<sup>245</sup> Stout, 426. Stout also claims that one can reach for the change of identity that Taylor stresses in his moral thought “without aspiring to a metaphysical state that transcends life and without having a faith in the existence of a divinity who transcends life.” Stout wonders whether notions of self-transcendence don’t also help us to “avoid the stifling of the human spirit.” Stout mentions thinkers like Emerson, Dewey and Santayana as figures that have explored “self-transcending religious possibilities that do not involve commitments to transcendent metaphysics.” My argument in chapter two provides a response to this criticism from Stout. I argued there that Taylor’s working definition of “transcendence” is in fact capacious enough to accommodate self-transcendence. I suggested there that his language of “beyond life” as it relates to transcendence, and his view that transcendence is something “on which life itself originally draws,” need not lead us to the conclusion that transcendence for Taylor falls within the rubric of theism, though Stout certainly assumes that it does. We can only speculate as to whether Taylor intentionally formulated his conception of the transcendent in a manner that accommodates notions of self-transcendence. What we can say, as I showed in chapter two, is that especially when we understand his notion of transcendence in such a way, his understanding of the agapeic (contra Nietzschean transcendence) becomes even more illuminated. A second point in response to Stout concerns the shift in Taylor’s language from “theism” to “transcendence”. The fact that Taylor includes Buddhism in his categorical distinction (i.e. those who acknowledge a good beyond life), together with the shift in language, seems to imply that Taylor does not necessarily mean “beyond life” in the metaphysical sense that Stout assumes.



refinement in the passage quoted from *A Secular Age*. However, we can also speculate that Taylor's discussion of Buddhism is more predisposed to the Mahayana perspective because of its strong focus on compassion (*karuna*), and the way that this ideal vivifies moral life in such a way that exceeds but simultaneously fortifies and enhances human flourishing itself. This is not to say that Theravada Buddhism has no place for compassion, but the emphasis in that school is on liberation through individual effort, achieved through, for example, processes of meditation and intellection in which the Buddhist, through proper knowledge and wisdom about the nature of ultimate reality, extinguishes all desire—and the exemplar in this regard is the *Arhant*, or 'worthy one', of which the Buddha is the first example. Compare this with the Mahayana school, in which exemplarity is found in the Bodhisattva, the enlightened being who, moved by compassion, assists other beings to overcome their suffering. Thus, in Mahayana ethics, we arguably find a stronger focus on the other. Admittedly, this is a somewhat crude distinction (compassion vs. wisdom) since these two schools of Buddhism are interested in both compassion and knowledge of ultimate reality. But the present point is simply that the emphasis that Mahayana Buddhism places on compassion resonates more deeply with Taylor's moral philosophy.

If there is something to this "karunic bias", then some may object that Taylor consequently fails to consider or represent the diversity of Buddhism (a slightly different criticism than the one offered by Fraser, Stout, and others, that accuses Taylor of collapsing all forms of Buddhism to fit within a more "metaphysical" rendering). Against such an objection, I would argue that any preference that Taylor may have for what might be called karunic Buddhism finds its motivation in moral and philosophical reason, and that such an inclination is consistent with his discussion of his own Christian tradition.<sup>246</sup> Indeed, Taylor's discussions of Christianity are critical of (Catholic and Protestant) Christian traditions, practices and beliefs that have instead tended towards the triumphalistic, or, in other words, that have lost touch with the agapeic or kenotic. As I suggested in chapter two, Taylor is not interested in simply reviving all forms of transcendence, since many modes of self-transcendence (for example) can be violent and cut against the grain

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<sup>246</sup> In a passage which clearly suggests that Taylor is fully attuned to some of the different emphases within Buddhism, he notes that the Paccekabuddha (a concept from the Theravadin school) who is "concerned only for his own salvation...is ranked below the highest Buddha, who acts for the liberation of all beings." He identifies two Buddhist ideals—self-liberation and the liberation of other sentient beings—both of which are fundamental. It is highly relevant that in this description of the hierarchy of enlightened beings, he underscores Buddhism's emphasis on *karuna* and the highest Buddha's concern for the other. See Taylor, "The Immanent Counter-Enlightenment," 388.

of our modern moral commitments (as I argued was the case with Nietzsche). Instead, he begins from our commitment to ethics as benevolence—and his philosophical task is not to formulate an apology for this form of ethics, since one of his central claims in *Sources of the Self* is that moderns are already committed to it—and then proceeds to delineate how these commitments are strengthened by the kinds of transcendence that call immanence into question but that concomitantly lay the ground for human flourishing. A central tenet of Taylor's position on transcendence is that agapeic/karunic sources are exactly the kinds of moral sources that have led to our high moral standards regarding benevolence, and thus it is this type of transcendent moral source that he seeks to recover. Though his account may not present equally all types of Buddhism (or Christianity, for that matter), the present point is that his emphasis on particular schools or traditions stems from his initial point of focus, ethics as benevolence. So while his portrayal of Buddhism in *A Secular Age* has a wider emphasis (on both karuna and sunyata), his emphasis in "A Catholic Modernity?" is fully in line with his ethical concerns there because karunic Buddhism has a focus on the other enframed within a conception of human flourishing that is irreducible to pure immanence (the latter of which is exemplified in philosophical perspectives like that of John Stuart Mill).

#### 4.4 Unconditional Love

A final area of concern for Fraser is Taylor's discussion of Christian love as an unconditional comportment to the other. Taylor maintains that an optimal way to buttress ethics as benevolence is found in Christian spirituality, though it is notable that he refers to Christianity as but one way out of the Nietzschean dilemma, a formulation that is suggestive because it obviously implies (against Fraser's reading of Taylor) the possibility of other ways. Christian spirituality offers two routes, both of which arrive at the same place for Taylor: "a love or compassion that is unconditional—that is, not based on what you the recipient have made of yourself—or as one based on what you are most profoundly, a being made in the image of God."<sup>247</sup> Taylor continues (and here is where the formulation gets problematic according to Fraser): "Now, it makes a whole lot of difference whether you think this kind of love is a possibility for us as humans. I think it is, but only to the extent that we open ourselves to God, which means, in fact, overstepping the limits set in theory by exclusive humanisms."<sup>248</sup> Now this is surely a theistic formulation, but, before moving on to the details of Fraser's

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<sup>247</sup> Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?" 35.

<sup>248</sup> Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?" 35.

critique, something must be said about the context of “A Catholic Modernity?”. Taylor delivered the lecture at his reception of the Marianist award, and thus we should not be surprised by Taylor’s more theological approach in this paper. He is addressing theists, as a theist, about theological ethical concerns (or, to be more specific, he is addressing Catholics, as a Catholic, about Catholic ethics). Thus his disclosure at the beginning of the paper that “A Catholic Modernity?” takes up theological “issues that have been at the center of my concerns for decades.” He explains how such concerns “have been reflected in my philosophical work, but not in the same form as I raise them this afternoon, because of the nature of philosophical discourse (as I see it anyway), which has to try and persuade honest thinkers of any and all metaphysical or theological commitments.”<sup>249</sup> This declaration of a consciously theological approach should be kept in mind when we assess the formulations in “A Catholic Modernity?”. And it should also be underscored that this uncharacteristically exclusivist theistic proposition represents the *only* passage in “A Catholic Modernity?” where Taylor makes such a rigid claim about the unparalleled moral power of a faith in *Theos*. Moreover, at some level, the nature of the formulation should leave us unsurprised by the theistic claim. When Taylor frames things anthropologically in terms of being created in *imago dei*, it naturally follows that *God* is a part of the equation. But regarding what Taylor designates in the first path, according to which an individual receives compassion or love unconditionally not based on her achievements, more must be said. Presumably Taylor thinks that exclusive humanism alone cannot get us there, but the unequivocally theistic formulation—that we can only get there by opening ourselves up to God—with regards to path number one could be deemed more inflexible than what we find elsewhere in Taylor’s discussions of transcendence. Let us consider Fraser’s critique of Taylor’s depiction of unconditional love in order to assess whether the latter’s theism is in fact restrictive on this score.

One of Fraser’s main points of criticism centers on Taylor’s discussion of exemplarity, and raises questions about Taylor’s choice of Mother Teresa as an “exemplar for offering unconditional love.”<sup>250</sup> Fraser’s portrayal of Taylorian exemplarity focuses in on two passages. The first is found in *Sources of the Self*, in which Taylor lists the philanthropy of Mother Teresa (along with Jean Vanier) as an alternative “pattern” to views that affirm the other *conditionally*. Taylor has in mind those conditional views that base what is owed to others upon their meeting certain criteria derived from “a vision of human nature in the fullness of its health and strength.” Taylor suggests that the careers of Mother Teresa and Jean Vanier exemplify models

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<sup>249</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 13.

<sup>250</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 44–45.

of benevolence moved by *agapê*, and that these agapeic models stand in stark contrast to the conditional affirmation that hinges on the vitality or potentialities of the other (which Taylor suggests may or may not be characteristic of the naturalist humanist affirmation). For Taylor, the agapeic model, rather than the conditional model, opens up a comportment to the other that reaches out to the other even (or perhaps, *especially*) in the other's brokenness.<sup>251</sup> Taylor asserts that Christian love prompts "us to extend help to the irremediably broken, such as the mentally handicapped, those dying without dignity, fetuses with genetic defect"—a claim with which Nietzsche would contemptuously agree.<sup>252</sup> A second passage which considers Christian exempla is found in Taylor's reply to Michael Morgan in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*. There, Taylor discusses "God's love and affirmation of the world, and human beings," which he sees "refracted in the lives of exceptional people, whom [he calls] for short saints." Taylor acknowledges that by talking about saints and love he is giving a "Christian 'spin'" to this account of exemplarity, but that "exceptional individuals, showing very similar spiritual strengths, will account for their lives very differently in other spiritual traditions."<sup>253</sup> For Taylor, these exemplars in other traditions are to be understood as analogues because, even though they may not understand their exemplarity in terms of love, they do not understand their responsibility to the other in a conditional way. I would suggest further that their way of being is analogous for Taylor insofar as they understand unconditionality as something that is evoked by the dispossessive encounter with a transcendent source.

Despite Taylor's attempts to consider the significance of exemplars in non-Christian (theistic and non-theistic) religious traditions, Fraser maintains his focus on the ostensibly exclusivist theistic formulation in which Taylor posits that a philanthropy will lack unconditionality unless its proponents open themselves up to God. When this claim is taken out of the context of Taylor's wider moral philosophy (attentive as it is to the demands of pluralism, as I have suggested above), it is undoubtedly controversial and debatable. But Fraser does not merely take the postulation out of context, but amplifies and distorts it. He misidentifies Taylor's position by claiming that it is "Taylor's contention that a truly benevolent act is only possible if you open

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<sup>251</sup> It may need to be emphasized that my use of the adverb "especially" does not undercut the universality or unconditionality of agape. Christian theology emphasizes that a fundamental feature of any post-lapsarian anthropology is the inescapability of brokenness for all persons as a consequence of sin, disobedience, a disordered will, etc. Certain details of this aspect of Christian thought will be discussed a bit more below in regards to the figure of the saint.

<sup>252</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 517.

<sup>253</sup> "Charles Taylor Replies," 226-230.

yourself up to God.”<sup>254</sup> In other words, Fraser is ascribing to Taylor the view that not only unconditionality, but *benevolence across the board* is unavailable to non-theists—an obvious misconstrual, to be sure. But as Fraser fleshes out this line of criticism, he adds another twist, suggesting that Taylor’s “holier than thou attitude” has him in a single stroke underscoring the dubiousness of the moral motivations of non-theists. A more careful reading of Taylor’s works of moral philosophy renders a radically different picture. The account of moral ontology that takes up the first hundred pages of *Sources of the Self* describes a plurality of moral sources—theist, expressivist, exclusive humanist, etc., and, of course, the endless combinations of these—that motivate modern selves and orient them to the good. At no point does Taylor conclude that non-theistic sources do not contribute to ethics as benevolence. Indeed, we find a highly relevant passage in “A Catholic Modernity?”, in which Taylor describes how “modern, secularist culture...carried certain facets of Christian life further than they ever were taken or could have been taken within Christendom.”<sup>255</sup> Taylor points to the proliferation of the affirmation of universal human rights that characterizes “modern liberal political culture” as but one significant example of this. In other words, on Taylor’s view there are in modern secular political culture sources, including but not limited to theistic ones, which contribute to ethics as benevolence.<sup>256</sup> Furthermore, it is fairly evident that one of the main conclusions of *Sources of the Self* is that exclusive humanism *alone* cannot sustain our high moral commitments, and that the best accounts offered by certain theistic traditions are more compelling for Taylor on this point. However, Taylor does not make the much bolder assertions that exclusive humanism is unable to give some kind of articulation of why other humans deserve our benevolence, or that theism is the *only* source for benevolence. This is obviously not his position. Indeed, in the passage in which Taylor discusses Mother Teresa he alludes to the problematic potentialities of a scientific perspective that upholds benevolence based on one’s strength and/or health. Taylor’s implied criticism is not about whether such a perspective is capable of sustaining philanthropy, but rather whether such a view can sustain it *unconditionally*.

It is also worth adding that in his commentary on exclusive humanism Taylor’s emphasis is on moral sources, and more specifically the inability of exclusive humanism, disintricated from all other moral sources (transcendent, expressivist), to support its allegiance to benevolence. In no place of which I am aware does Taylor question whether individual exclusive

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<sup>254</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 46.

<sup>255</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 16.

<sup>256</sup> Ruth Abbey also criticizes Fraser on this point. See “Turning or Spinning,” 169.

humanists experience exclusive humanist sources as adequate for their moral lives. Such a conclusion would cut against the grain of his moral realism (which as discussed in chapter two affirms that moral agents actually experience moral sources as having an authority independent of their experience of them, and thus are experienced as real). Nor is there any convincing evidence to sustain Fraser's far-reaching contention that Taylor believes that "non-theists are incapable of unconditional love."<sup>257</sup> The crucial point that somehow eludes Fraser is that Taylor's concern is about the suitability of available moral sources to sustain our extensive commitments to benevolence. It is when we talk about the power of these sources to undergird our philanthropic—which in its adjectival form means, quite literally, "human loving"—aspirations that Taylor will claim that transcendent sources—and in particular, those kenotic forms of transcendence that call the self into question—eclipse the power of exclusive humanist sources to "love the human" unconditionally. So when Fraser asserts that Taylor is arrogant "to tell the non-theist that although her actions and motivations are exactly the same as the theist, they must be conditional and inferior," he mischaracterizes Taylor's actual perspective because Fraser fails to mention the role of sources and of best accounts in Taylor's moral ontology. For a criticism of Taylor to gain any purchase here, it needs to give an account of how a best account of moral sources, shorn of any reference to transcendence, can articulate convincingly the grounds for a non-provisional benevolence. It is tautologically true that the non-theist moved by unconditional love—the "same motivation" alluded to by Fraser—is capable of loving the other unconditionally, but what Fraser fails to produce is a case for how exclusive humanism as a moral source motivates an agent to love unconditionally. Indeed, dominant moral discourses, such as utilitarianism, do not even aspire to trade in the economy of love, but rather base moral judgments on calculative and instrumental reason.

To return to Fraser's discussion of exemplarity, he states his reservations about Taylor's emphasis on the figure of the "saint". Fraser calls into question Taylor's references to Mother Teresa in this regard, asserting that Taylor is once again guilty of theistically spinning his account of benevolent exemplars. Fraser states that

[when], like Taylor, I look at the world and see individuals, theists or non-theists, undertaking extraordinary benevolent acts I admire them whilst recognizing that they are also fallible human beings. Taylor, instead, has to spin doctor them into paragons of virtue who are purveyors of unconditional love. The problem with this is that it

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<sup>257</sup> Ian Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 46.

accepts uncritically the practices of these people that might not be as 'saintly' as Taylor supposes.<sup>258</sup>

Fraser argues that Taylor's "extreme position" does not allow for accounts, like the one provided by the Christian feminist Elizabeth Stuart, which holds up the saintly figure who enacts for us certain ways of being that we might "celebrate and tap into...whilst also acknowledging that not all of her life was about flourishing, that some of it might have been about [the] withering of herself and others."<sup>259</sup> Fraser concludes that Taylor's uncompromising viewpoint on exemplarity prohibits him from taking seriously this conceptualization of the flawed exemplar "because he assumes that saints engage only in acts of unconditional love."<sup>260</sup> Fraser's portrayal of Taylor's notion of sainthood is puzzling because it assumes that according to Taylor saints are only capable of unconditional love, that they are flawless in their motivation—which Taylor never claims. Indeed, anyone even nominally familiar with Christian theology would appreciate that such a depiction of human action and motivation in saints veers away from orthodoxy since it does not allow for the place of sin, nor the complex and often competing motivations that are central to most Christian anthropologies. Few theologies circumvent the topic of human sin (though some theologians surely emphasize it more than others), and Augustine's concept of the will as an aggregate of loves that must be properly ordered—in saints or otherwise—is but one well known account of the multiple motivations that are acknowledged in Christian anthropologies.<sup>261</sup> So apart from ascribing something to Taylor that does not exist in any explicit way in his discussion of saints, this criticism from Fraser demonstrates a certain level of unfamiliarity with orthodox Christian thought (as well as an inattentiveness

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<sup>258</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 45.

<sup>259</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, *Spitting at Dragons: Towards a Feminist Theology of Sainthood* (London: Mowbray, 1996) 133. This text is cited by Fraser in *Dialectics of the Self*, 45.

<sup>260</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 45.

<sup>261</sup> We find a nice formulation of this anthropological vision in the closing paragraphs of Augustine's Sermon 335C ("On the Feast of the Martyrs"): "I am not saying that you should have no loves; I simply want your loves to be properly ordered. Put heavenly things before earthly, immortal things before mortal, everlasting things before transitory ones. And put the Lord before everything, and not just by praising him, but also by loving him." See *Augustine's Political Writings*. Translated and edited by R.J. Dodaro and E.M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

to relevant scripture for that matter, such as Romans 11:32: “For God has imprisoned *all* in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all”).<sup>262</sup>

Ruth Abbey makes a related point concerning Fraser’s lack of attention to central thematic concerns within Christian theology. Abbey’s criticism centers on Fraser’s commentary on the nature of free will in Taylor’s theistic account. According to Fraser, Taylor’s theistic exposition of moral motivation, and in particular how unconditionality is tied to loving God, compromises individual autonomy. Fraser puts it as follows:

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. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor attempts to deny this by suggesting that “internalizing moral sources”, of which God is one such source, is accomplished by “free reasoning subjects” who have their own “internal powers of constructing or transfiguring or interpreting the world.” They most certainly do but in doing so they are not carrying out their own will but the will of God.<sup>263</sup>

Fraser also makes reference to Fergus Kerr’s observation that Taylor does not respond to a concern from Isaiah Berlin (Taylor’s mentor and doctoral supervisor at Oxford) that there are deterministic elements in Christianity that threaten the possibility of individual autonomy.<sup>264</sup> So, if I understand him correctly, Fraser’s critique is basically twofold, claiming first that agapeic enactments are not autonomous because they are motivated by “God’s reasoning” and not the reason of the moral agent, thus rendering true “self rule” impossible, and second (following Berlin and others who have made similar claims) that autonomy is threatened because of the determinism implied by divine omniscience and omnipotence. Abbey suggests that two fundamental problems emerge in Fraser’s contentions about Taylor’s construal of autonomy. First, Abbey points us to facets of Taylor’s philosophy that “reflect on the social and political conditions necessary for the realization of individual autonomy.”<sup>265</sup> She mentions Taylor’s essay

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<sup>262</sup> Emphasis added. To Fraser’s credit, we should note that the hagiographical amplifications we find in portrayals of the saints are not uncommon in Christian literature. It is not a rarity to find hagiographical work that resists implicating a given saint in disordered, sinful activity. But to assume, as Fraser seems to do in his book, that Christian saints always act with their loves properly ordered (to use an Augustinian formulation) occludes the post-lapsarian inescapability of sin.

<sup>263</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 57.

<sup>264</sup> Fergus Kerr, *Immortal Longings* (London: SPCK, 1997) 154-155; Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 58; Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 32-33.

<sup>265</sup> Abbey, “Turning or Spinning,” 171.



“Atomism” as perhaps the most important piece in this regard, but also notes how this theme is a persistent concern of Taylor. Abbey argues that the view that Fraser attempts to ascribe to Taylor, a view that would preclude religionists from realizing their autonomy, “is radically discontinuous with the rest of Taylor’s work.”<sup>266</sup> Unfortunately, Fraser does not explore other well-established elements of Taylor’s programme to find complementary or alternative formulations that may mitigate against the criticisms he poses regarding individual autonomy as it relates to theism.

This line of critique from Abbey is directed at Fraser’s earlier essay “Charles Taylor’s Catholicism,” and we do find a slight amendment in *Dialectics of the Self*, which consists of a reference to Taylor’s essay “Atomism” as well as a footnote directing the reader to Abbey’s response essay. But Fraser alludes to this contribution from Taylor to the topic of human autonomy only to claim that these facets of Taylor’s theism “sit uncomfortably” with Taylor’s concerns in “Atomism”. Fraser’s assumption seems to be that there is a significant internal tension in Taylor’s position on autonomy, but unfortunately he does not engage with the arguments in “Atomism” to show the discontinuities in Taylor’s thought. This shallow engagement turns out to be a problem because Fraser does not realize that the implications of this critique of Taylor are much larger than he suggests. It would seem that the logical extension of Fraser’s argument is that *any* moral source, if it compels or motivates an agent to act in a given way, undermines the moral autonomy of the agent. The moral ontology that Taylor depicts in *Sources of the Self* has at its very center an account of how moral sources move us, through, for example, an internalization of the reasoning of that source. Indeed, a best account is precisely an articulation of those internalized reasons, a formulation which suggests that the reasons at some point in time were *external* and required internalization. If one is convinced by Fraser’s argumentation that defines as heteronomous any agency whose autonomy is compromised by this kind of process of internalization, then a whole gamut of questions is raised about the nature of moral motivation. Against the kind of moral ontology that Taylor delineates, with its focus on moral sources, does Fraser want an account of agency that defines autonomy as a state of self rule completely cut off from all forms of externality? And what would such an agency look like?

It is unclear whether such an extreme position can be ascribed to Fraser, but his suggestions that the internalization of (theistic) sources leads to a heteronomous agency surely narrows the kinds of enactments that can be categorized as truly autonomous. It is unfortunate that Fraser fails to engage with Taylor’s “Atomism” because in that essay we find an account of autonomy that—apart from being much richer than the somewhat simple

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<sup>266</sup> Abbey, “Turning or Spinning,” 171.

and highly problematic one offered by Fraser—*requires* external influences for an agent to achieve her potentialities for autonomous agency. Against atomized notions of agency, founded as they are on “the self-sufficiency of man alone,” Taylor advocates perspectives (of which the Aristotelian is but one well-known one) that portray humans as social animals.<sup>267</sup> Taylor summarizes how non-atomistic accounts, such as the Aristotelian variant, claim that selves can only achieve their potential in community (recall Taylor’s formulation in *Sources* that a self can only exist among other selves). The non-atomistic perspective asserts “that living in a society is a necessary condition of the development of human rationality, in some sense of this property, or of becoming a moral agent in the full sense of the term, or of becoming a fully autonomous being.”<sup>268</sup> So in direct contradiction to Fraser’s formulation that holds that the internalization of external “logics” amounts to heteronomy, Taylor contends that autonomy is impossible without external sources and webs of interlocution. Furthermore, not only does Taylor’s formulation run counter to Fraser’s description of autonomy, but it is also the case that Fraser’s claim in *Dialectics of the Self* that Taylor’s more theistic notions of moral agency do not sit comfortably with his wider concerns about autonomy, as exemplified in “Atomism”, misses the mark. Much more can be said about Taylor’s conception of autonomous moral agency as it relates to his Catholicism, and thus I will return to the topic in the next chapter. As will be discussed there, in *A Secular Age* Taylor appropriates Ivan Illich’s exegesis of the parable of the good Samaritan in such a way that depicts a kind of autonomy in response to the neighbor that opens up a new kind of moral freedom, an autonomy that is enacted agapeically. This picture of a response in love to the other is irreducible to the kind of deterministic conception of Christian ethics that Fraser clearly thinks is inescapable. But the present point is simply that Fraser’s criticism of Taylor in *Dialectics of the Self* on the issue of autonomy is unable to gain any purchase because it does not take into account Taylor’s more developed positions on the issue, even though Abbey’s “Turning or Spinning” rightly directed Fraser to relevant sources in Taylor.

Abbey’s second point of contention concerns the absence in *Dialectics of the Self* of an engagement with the long history of scholarship that explores the implications for autonomy if an omniscient and omnipotent God exists, analyses that have been put forward by figures as diverse and towering as Augustine and Nietzsche.<sup>269</sup> She argues that Fraser’s conclusions about the impossibility of autonomy amongst theists are unable to gain any traction

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<sup>267</sup> Taylor, “Atomism,” 189. The well-known passage in which Aristotle posits that “man is a social animal” is found in the first book of his *Politics*.

<sup>268</sup> Taylor, “Atomism,” 190-191.

<sup>269</sup> Abbey, “Turning or Spinning,” 171

because they “[fail] to engage at any level with any of this long-standing and complex debate.”<sup>270</sup> These oversights on Fraser’s part that Abbey illuminates, alongside the inattention discussed above to the role of sin as it relates to Christian conceptions of the saint, are highly suggestive. They demonstrate a not insignificant level of theological naiveté. This factor, combined with Fraser’s tendency to either disregard or misrepresent Taylor’s established positions on a range of philosophical themes that are centrally relevant to his critique of Taylor’s “restrictive” theism, certainly impede his attempt to “transcend” the Taylorian project.

One final issue raised by Abbey that is relevant to the purposes of the present chapter brings us back to Fraser’s discussion of *agapê*. Fraser faults Taylor for actually including a condition in his account of Christian unconditional love. According to Fraser, “conditionality is also present [in Taylor’s own position] 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.”<sup>271</sup> Abbey’s response to this line of reasoning suggests that Fraser misconstrues in “Charles Taylor’s Catholicism” what it is that is unconditional in Taylor’s ideal of agapeic love. She observes that

it is true, tautologically so, that for Taylor when unconditional love for human beings is religiously inspired, it is conditional upon loving God. What is not a condition of that love is how much any particular person has achieved, attained or earned. Individuals are worthy of love or compassion simply by virtue of being humans.<sup>272</sup>

To illustrate her distinction, Abbey offers as an analogy the relation between parent and child, a relationship that is often characterized from the parental point of view as constituted by unconditional love. Abbey points out that the “unconditional” descriptor of parental love denotes the nature of the *extent* of love, rather than the *source*, which she points out is in fact “conditional upon the individuals being the parents’ children.”<sup>273</sup> The *extent* of love is unconditional insofar as parents love their children “irrespective of the child’s achievements or failures, talents or deficiencies.”<sup>274</sup> In his response to Abbey in *Dialectics of the Self*, we find that Fraser willingly admits that the parental relationship, just like the agapeic comportment to the other exemplified by people like Mother Teresa and Jean Vanier, is conditional in

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<sup>270</sup> Abbey, “Turning or Spinning,” 171.

<sup>271</sup> Ian Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 49.

<sup>272</sup> Abbey, “Turning or Spinning,” 171

<sup>273</sup> Abbey, “Turning or Spinning,” 170-171.

<sup>274</sup> Abbey, “Turning or Spinning,” 171.

terms of source, but he also claims that it is conditional in extent. He argues that parents extend love “if the children are somehow related to the parents (source), *and* if it is given by accepting the children for what they are (extent). Both aspects are necessary.” Fraser’s reply to Abbey does provide further clarification of what exactly it is that he thinks is conditional in Taylor’s account of unconditional love. If I understand Fraser correctly, he would say the following about Mother Teresa: her love is conditioned both by what the other is—a being created in the image of God—and by her *consent* to the fact that the other demands a response in love. However, while this does remove some of the unclarity of Fraser’s critique in “Charles Taylor’s Catholicism”, it also appears that Fraser’s clarification in *Dialectics of the Self* has actually obscured the distinction that Abbey makes. To be more specific, neither of the aspects that Fraser identifies as “source” and “extent” actually deal with the *extent* of unconditionality as Abbey describes it. There is something analogically helpful in Fraser’s point that parental love is contingent on both a kind of relationality (that “the children are somehow related to the parents”) *and* a consent to that relationality (“accepting the children for what they are”). But when Abbey discusses the way in which parental love is unconditional, she underscores that what is significant is that parental love is not conditioned by a child’s aptitudes or flaws. These kinds of particularities are disregarded. And so in the case of Mother Teresa, while Fraser would be right to claim that her love is conditional on the other being created in God’s image, and on her assent to the claim that that otherness makes on her, he cannot claim that the *extent* is conditional. The particularities of the other are not what demand one’s love according to the Gospels, but rather what they are universally: beings created in God’s image. And here we come to the crucial point: because the extent is unconditioned, the failures or weaknesses (or any other particularity) of the other do not undermine agapeic comportments toward the other. It is this characteristic of *agapê*, the unconditionality of extent, that offers for Taylor a favorable path over forms of philanthropy that he argues can become impregnated by a contempt for the other based precisely on the other’s particularity. This kind of “lofty humanism,” which Taylor claims is often motivated fundamentally by a recognition of the “human potential” of the other, can degenerate when an individual or people fail to actualize that potential. Because the subject of one’s philanthropy falls short in her particularity, Taylor observes how an “ugly dialectic” can unfold:

Before the reality of human shortcomings, philanthropy—the love of the human—can gradually come to be invested with contempt, hatred, aggression. The action is broken off or, worse, continues but is invested now with these new feelings, becoming progressively more coercive and inhumane. The history of despotic socialism (i.e.

twentieth-century communism) is replete with this tragic turn, brilliantly foreseen by Dostoyevsky more than a hundred years ago (“Starting from unlimited freedom, I arrived at unlimited despotism”), and then repeated again and again with a fatal regularity, through one-party regimes on a macro level, to a host of “helping” institutions on a micro level from orphanages to boarding schools for aboriginals.<sup>275</sup>

Taylor’s claim in “A Catholic Modernity?” is that *agapê* offers a way out of the repetition of this ugly dialectic because the *extent* of love is unconditional, so that the particularities of the other do not condition one’s love for the other. So when Fraser argues that Taylor’s theistic account of unconditional love is actually conditional because Mother Teresa’s “love for the poor is conditioned by the need for her to show her love to God” and because the poor are thus “a mediation on the path to loving God,” he fails to recognize what for Taylor is unconditional in the love of Mother Teresa.<sup>276</sup> Fraser does not engage with the actual point that Taylor is making, which is that *agapê* opens up a new path of love, a new comportment towards the other, that resists the ugly dialectic of lofty humanism. And it is able to resist it because *agapê* is not contingent on the particularities of the other, so the other never falls short as the recipient of love.

Fraser notes how Taylor, in his “Concluding Reflections and Comments” in *A Catholic Modernity?* entreats critical readers to “‘calm down and listen’ and not to dismiss [his views on theism] out of hand.”<sup>277</sup> Fraser states that he set out as his objective in his engagement with Taylor’s Catholicism to proceed with a hermeneutic of openness. My own purposes in this section have not been to judge Fraser’s motivation, to determine whether his analyses of Taylor are done in a “spirit of openness.” Rather, my intention has been to call into question Fraser’s claim that Taylor’s theism is highly restrictive. I have focused my attention on a range of claims by Fraser and shown the myriad ways in which his argument fails to bear out his conclusion that Taylor’s theism is restrictive. Many of the problems with Fraser’s claims were shown to stem from misreadings or misrepresentations of Taylor’s views. I shall now turn to Deane-Peter Baker, who reads Taylor much more closely, but nevertheless makes what I will argue is a critical error that leads him to a problematic conclusion about Taylor’s theism that corresponds with Fraser’s own allegations of restrictiveness and rigidity in Taylor.

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<sup>275</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 32-33.

<sup>276</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 50.

<sup>277</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 59; Taylor, “Concluding Reflections and Comments,” 125.

#### 4.5 A Multiplicity of Sources? A Reply To D.P. Baker

My response to Baker will be more straightforward. Baker is certainly an important contributor to scholarship on Taylor and religion, and his recent book effectively defends Taylor from critics, such as Melissa Lane and Gary Gutting, who have serious reservations about Taylor's conception of transcendence. Baker's discussion of Taylor's religious thought is arguably the best extensive engagement published to date, and is characterized by a close reading of Taylor—and on this latter point he clearly surpasses Fraser. Baker's book is an attempt to build on the epistemological work of philosopher of religion Alvin Plantinga. Baker argues that while Plantinga's contribution to Reformed epistemology represents the most comprehensive response to the *de jure* objection—which holds “that it is somehow irrational, a dereliction of epistemic duty, or in some other sense epistemically unacceptable to believe in God” —Taylor's moral philosophy presents us with resources that represent an important complement to Plantinga's work.<sup>278</sup> Baker rightly reads Taylor's historical narrative as a work of retrieval, an attempt to counteract “the epistemic loss that has occurred through time,” an epistemic loss which has consisted largely of an occlusion of transcendent moral sources.<sup>279</sup> Because our access to transcendence has been obscured, “we are left in the strange position of being committed to certain modes of life as being ‘right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower,’ but at the same time having our commitments lack force or power” because we don't have a clear access to the moral frameworks, which according to Taylor's moral ontology “make sense of those commitments.”<sup>280</sup> Baker takes up three claims that Melissa Lane holds to be central to Taylor's project, especially as presented in *Sources of the Self*. These three theses give

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<sup>278</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 1. Baker also identifies Nicholas Wolterstorff and William Alston as two other foundational figures in the Reformed epistemological movement that have contributed to scholarship against the *de jure* objection. Baker contrasts the *de jure* with the *de facto* challenge, which claims that “whatever the rational status of belief in God, it is, in fact, a false belief.” A good example of the *de jure* objection is found in Quentin Skinner's review essay of *Sources of the Self* (though Skinner's polemical formulation could also be read as a combination of both *de jure* and *de facto* objections). See “Who are ‘We’? Ambiguities of the Modern Self,” 148. The passage is cited at length above in the present chapter.

<sup>279</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 165.

<sup>280</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 135.

us an outline of what Taylor's moral philosophy offers to the argument against the *de jure* objection. The three claims are as follows:

- i) that we must have a morality ('the claim of morality'); ii) that we must have a morality with a certain structure, such that particular values are connected to conceptions of the good, or 'sources' ('the claim of structure'); iii) that we must have a morality based on an incomparably higher good ('the claim of transcendence').<sup>281</sup>

Baker appropriates these claims from Lane in his own reading of Taylor.

It should be noted that the present task is not to explore the ways in which Baker deploys the Taylorian philosophical arsenal in an attempt to bolster weaknesses he perceives in Plantinga's epistemology. I suggest that Baker intuitively correctly that Taylor's moral ontology, especially insofar as it seeks to disclose the fundamental place of transcendent sources in the moral motivation of selves, does indeed parry the *de jure* objection. And these three claims—morality, structure, transcendence—are primary facets of that ontology. I have suggested that Baker is a sympathetic reader of Taylor, and many of the components of his position resonate with or complement my own in the present work. However, Baker makes a critical error in his construal of Taylor's theism and moral ontology, and he does this by adding a fourth claim to the tripartite structure Lane discerns in Taylor's moral programme. Baker calls this fourth element the "claim of theism," according to which "we must understand the structure of our morality and the incomparably higher good on which our morality must be based in the terms of Christian theism."<sup>282</sup> In other words, Baker interprets Taylor to be making the stronger claim that Christian theism is the source upon which our morality *must* be based to be comprehensible, rather than the weaker claim (which I identify as Taylor's actual position) that Christian theism, and other articulations of transcendence, are indispensable if we are to support our high moral commitments, such as the ethics of benevolence. So what has Baker missed in Taylor's *oeuvre* that allows him to arrive at this stronger claim, a claim which he suggests is "crucial" for his concerns in the book, and which structures his reading of Taylor's theism?<sup>283</sup> On my reading, the sources for this oversight are at least twofold. First, throughout the bulk of *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, Baker underemphasizes the fundamentally pluralist structures that are built into the very centre of Taylor's philosophy—a problem that was also found in Fraser's discussion of Taylor's

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<sup>281</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 121; Melissa Lane, "God or Orienteering," 46.

<sup>282</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 123.

<sup>283</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 12.

“restrictive” theism. And second, Baker does not acknowledge the dispossessive character of the kinds of transcendence that figure into Taylor’s ethics. As was argued in the chapter on moral ontology, there is something in the very structure of (agapeic/karunic) transcendence that militates against deeply exclusivist and unnecessarily dogmatic entrenchments.

The tendency to place an insufficient weight on Taylor’s widely acknowledged commitment to pluralism is a common error amongst critics of his theism. As Ruth Abbey points out, both Quentin Skinner and Melissa Lane “impute to Taylor the belief that only theism can be experienced as an adequate moral source.”<sup>284</sup> And as was shown above, Fraser follows suit in his critical reading of Taylor’s theism. Abbey correctly argues that such a view is not Taylor’s. In a pertinent passage from *Charles Taylor*, she provides a concise description that nicely captures a core element of Taylorian pluralism. As she puts it there,

[Taylor] believes that in any person’s life there is always a multiplicity of goods to be recognized, acted upon and pursued. These goods are not only plural in the numerical sense but they are plural in an ontological sense; they are of qualitatively different types from one another and because of this, cannot always be harmoniously combined, rank-ordered or reduced to some more ultimate or foundational good.<sup>285</sup>

It is unclear how this moral pluralism, which is a well-established facet of Taylor’s philosophy, can be reconciled with the claims by Baker, Fraser, Lane and Skinner, which assert that *only* theism is authoritative for Taylor. A further relevant point from Abbey underscores how “contestability...is explicitly built into Taylor’s position,” not least because he couches his perspective in terms of a best account. Abbey directs critics to Taylor’s assertion in “A Catholic Modernity?” that he is merely giving a “perspectival reading” which should not be taken as a programmatic final word, but that must be judged alongside other perspectival accounts.<sup>286</sup> Abbey’s clarification here has deep resonances with the formulations of Stephen White that were discussed in the last chapter. The notion of weak ontology is

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<sup>284</sup> Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 32.

<sup>285</sup> Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 12. For some representative passages on Taylor’s pluralism, see *Sources of the Self*, 25, 61; “Reply and Rearticulation,” 213. Also, see Taylor’s discussion of the super-nova effect in *A Secular Age*, a term he employs to discuss the plurality of cross-currents of belief and unbelief that affect modern selves living in secular modernity. *A Secular Age*, 299, 377, 412.

<sup>286</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 26; Abbey, “Turning or Spinning,” 172.



one that does not sit comfortably with Baker's depiction of Taylor's theistic views throughout *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*. Unfortunately, none of White's multiple works that discuss Taylor's religious thought as weak ontology can be found in Baker's bibliography.

However, though the weak ontological structure and the pluralist trajectories of Taylor's philosophy are largely ignored throughout most of Baker's book, its conclusion does acknowledge that Taylor is advocating a pluralistic account, which makes the final "crucial" claim of his four-part argument—that Christian theism is what Taylor is arguing for, or that it is the upshot of his moral ontology, that it alone best allows us to talk about what it is to be human—even more puzzling. We find in the final pages of *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, for example, that Baker is highly attuned to the polarized views of Plantinga and Taylor on the question of diversity: "Plantinga...is an unrelenting exclusivist—he believes that Christianity is true, and other religions are not. Taylor, on the other hand, seems to want to affirm a multiplicity of faiths."<sup>287</sup> Baker also makes reference to Taylor's essay on Iris Murdoch, in which the latter alludes to "that puzzling multiplicity of paths which seems to be a perennial feature of the human condition. Many faiths, not least the one I share in, have spent centuries trying to deny this multiplicity. It is now time to discover, in humility and puzzlement, how we on different paths are fellow travelers."<sup>288</sup> So Baker certainly acknowledges that Taylor's commitment to diversity and pluralism is deep. Indeed, Baker even defends Taylor's vision of theism against the charge of homogenization. Baker contends that Taylor's religious pluralism does not simply amount to a "leveling view" of religious traditions, according to which all traditions are "in some sense equally true". Baker directs us to Taylor's formulation in "The Politics of Recognition" that pluralism demands that we begin with the "presumption of equal worth" when encountering foreign traditions. As Taylor puts it in that influential essay, "As a presumption the claim is that all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings."<sup>289</sup> It is worth noting that for Taylor, this is simply a starting point for inter-religious (or inter-cultural) dialogue, a starting point that makes possible a hermeneutic of generosity as we engage the other in processes of recognition. Baker highlights these textures in Taylor's

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<sup>287</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 207.

<sup>288</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 207; Taylor source is "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy," in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*. M. Antonaccio and W. Schweiker (eds.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 19.

<sup>289</sup> Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," 66. Cited in Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 207.

multicultural theory, and states that though his own view is closer to Plantinga's, we need not choose between them. Interestingly, as he makes the case for why this is so, Baker articulates the importance of Taylor in this section in a way that is more in line with the interpretation given in this dissertation. He notes that Plantinga's arguments against the *de jure* objection "can be co-opted by adherents of many different belief systems," and thus such a "model gives no reason why the truth claims of Christianity in particular ought to be taken seriously." But, Baker continues, Taylor's moral philosophy adds a necessary complement, because it seeks to show that Christian theism is a "very good account, *possibly* the best, of the nature of our moral phenomenology, [and] provides exactly the sort of reason needed to show that the [*de jure*] objector cannot honestly consider the truth claims to be irrelevant, *even if it is a form of Christianity that is open* (in the Taylorian sense, rather than the *a priori* sense) to what is good in other belief systems."<sup>290</sup> Baker portrays Taylor in a much less exclusivist and more tentative light than he does throughout most of *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*. Baker notes that he "personally thinks there are significant problems" with Taylor's view that stem from his deep pluralism, and that Plantinga's perspective avoids any such tension. But regardless of the problems that Baker implies (but does not articulate), he maintains that Taylor's philosophical programme still undercuts the *de jure* objection.<sup>291</sup> I agree with Baker that Taylor's account does function in such a way against those of Skinner's anti-theistic ilk. But this simply raises the question: why does Baker give a much more exclusivist formulation throughout the rest of his book? It seems that in his discussion of Taylor's pluralism that closes *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, Baker is fully aware that Taylor is not giving a case for an exclusivist Christianity. But insofar as this is the case, there is a significant tension between Baker's final formulation of Taylor's religious thinking as fundamentally pluralist and the more exclusivist formulation that is repeated throughout the work. Indeed, one is compelled to choose between Taylor and Plantinga here, as one cannot have it both ways.

A second point of critique of Baker's construal of Taylor's theism centers on the structure of agapeic/karunic transcendence, and more specifically how Baker's construal ignores the kenotic configuration of *agapê* /karuna. Baker highlights how Taylor's programme strives to recapture transcendence, the third major thread of Taylor's moral philosophy. Baker may be correct to add a fourth claim to Lane's depiction, but the "claim of Christian theism" is perhaps too unnuanced and, consequently, too exclusivist. Taylor is absolutely willing to take a stand on the kind of "best

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<sup>290</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 208-209, emphasis added.

<sup>291</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 207-208.

account” of transcendence that represents a moral and epistemic gain. As was suggested in chapter two, it is those conceptions of transcendence that are agapeic, kenotic, and “karunic”, rather than those founded on will to power (for example), that for Taylor are fundamental for ethics as benevolence. Moreover, I have also suggested that the form of Taylor’s moral and political vision is fundamentally cruciform, and takes on an analogous form to its animating moral source, and thus is resistant to the pull of power. Correspondingly, my claim here is that Taylor’s conception of transcendence steers away from exclusivist formulations, such as the one Baker ascribes to him throughout *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*. If we were to add a fourth claim in lieu of the claim of Christian theism,” a suitable option could be something like “the claim of agape/karuna”. This suggested fourth claim, building upon the one of transcendence, would underscore that certain articulations of transcendence (such as *agapê* and *karuna*) because of their dispossessive structure are powerful moral sources for enlivening ethics as benevolence.

One obviously significant strength of Baker’s book is that it draws from Taylor’s most recent work before the publication of *A Secular Age*. Articles like “Closed-World Structures” flesh out some key theses of *A Secular Age*, such as Taylor’s notion of “subtraction theses,” and Baker provides insightful commentary on many such themes.<sup>292</sup> However, one work that Baker does not discuss is Taylor’s foreword in David Cayley’s volume on Ivan Illich. In those prefatory remarks, Taylor mentions the surprising number of ‘parallels’ between Illich’s account of modernity and his own.<sup>293</sup> Obviously, as a foreword it is much less expansive than the lengthy *A Secular Age*, but there are intimations in the foreword about what is to come in the section on Illich in Taylor’s recent book, a section that discusses the intuitive nature of transcendence as Taylor understands it. As was discussed very briefly in the previous chapter, and as will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, Taylor follows Illich through a shared emphasis on the role of moral intuition in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Unlike the engagement with Illich in *A Secular Age*, Taylor’s foreword does not explicitly mention how pity’s locus is in the gut or bowels, but his analysis of Illich in the foreword does hint at the

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<sup>292</sup> In the closing paragraphs of the opening chapter of *A Secular Age*, Taylor defines subtraction stories as follows: “I mean by this stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. What emerges from this process—modernity or secularity—is to be understood in terms of underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside.”

<sup>293</sup> Taylor makes the same claim in *A Secular Age*, 737.

discussion of moral intuition in *Rivers North of the Future*. There, Taylor mentions how for Illich the parable presents us with a “new kind of fittingness”, in which the Samaritan and the injured Jew “are fitted together in a proportionality which comes from God, which is that of agape, and which became possible because God became flesh.” Taylor continues:

The enfleshment of God extends outward, through such new links as the Samaritan makes with the Jew, into a network which we call the Church. But this is a network, not a categorical grouping; that is, it is a skein of relations which link particular, unique, enfleshed people to each other, rather than a grouping of people together on the grounds of their sharing some important property. Corruption occurs when the Church begins to respond to the failure and inadequacy of a motivation grounded in a sense of mutual belonging by erecting a system.<sup>294</sup>

For Illich (and as we find in *A Secular Age*, for Taylor also) the very possibility of this fittingness requires a response to profound moral intuitions by embodied persons. When we attempt to systematize or institutionalize *agapê*, Illich (and the Taylor of *A Secular Age*) argues that the original motivation becomes corrupted through a fetishization of rules—or “nomolatriy”—that overshadows the fundamentality of the face-to-face encounter with the neighbor. Both Illich and Taylor emphasize enfleshment in this regard, especially because they both understand pity as something that proceeds “from the guts,” as exemplified in the Gospels language of *splanchnizesthai* (or “compassion”), which locates this moral motivation in the bowels. Compassion, pity, and *agapê* ramify outwards from our bowels, from the moral intuition that arises deep within us as we encounter the broken Jew on the roadside. And he is our neighbor, according to Illich, precisely because we choose to respond to the visceral motivation that the face-to-face encounter elicits in us. And as I argued in the last chapter, this intuitionist component of Taylor’s ethics is intimately related to his pluralism, because on his view (following Illich) the moral intuitions that make possible *agapê* cannot be limited to any one particular ethical system. These intuitions flow out of our embodiment, thus suggesting that they are an aspect of some sort of human normativity.

Though he does not discuss Taylor’s moral intuitionism vis-à-vis that of Illich, Baker does identify the intuitionist threads in *Sources of the Self*. He argues that Taylor’s moral programme in this regard has deep resonances with Plantinga’s notion of the *sensus divinitatis*, or “the resonance between

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<sup>294</sup> Charles Taylor, “Foreword,” in Ivan Illich and David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future* (Toronto: Anansi, 2005) xii. Cf. *A Secular Age*, 738.

our phenomenology, properly described, and the truest description of God and his greatness and glory.”<sup>295</sup> Baker describes how Taylor and Plantinga both employ such a concept in their moral epistemological theories. As Baker puts it,

Taylor speaks of a ‘sense of God’ that gives us ‘access’ to him, if only we can open our hearts/minds to him. Taylor, it seems, is also a proponent of the *sensus divinitatis*, and like Plantinga he is willing to deploy it as a counter to the *de jure* challenge. But where Plantinga’s use of the *sensus divinitatis* is, predominantly, part of a theoretical response to the *de jure* challenge, Taylor is here appealing to our deep-seated intuitions, those strong evaluations that are for us inescapable.<sup>296</sup>

It is interesting that Baker connects Taylor and Plantinga on this point, but it is infelicitous that he does not pick up on the way that for Taylor the intuitive nature of the “sense of God” means that it cannot be possessed by one particular system of thought. Indeed, we can guess that this is part of what Taylor has in mind when he claims that religionists of various sorts are fellow travelers; that is, that religious life is a response to the kinds of intuitions of transcendence that figure centrally in the way we experience the human condition. Of course, the discussion of moral intuition in *Sources of the Self* does not explore the relationship between the visceral nature of the “sense of God” and its implications for moral pluralism. And perhaps it is unrealistic to expect that Baker might “connect the dots” between Taylor’s prefatory comments in *Rivers North of the Future* and Illich’s own formulations—but once again, the absence of a highly relevant text in the bibliography of *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology* makes any such analysis an impossibility.

This chapter’s central focus was on a shared misconstrual of Taylor’s theism in *Dialectics of the Self* and *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*. The multitude of problems highlighted in Fraser’s argument demonstrate that his claim of restrictiveness in regards to Taylorian theism is unwarranted. He proved to be a helpful foil, insofar as his somewhat careless reading of Taylor’s Catholicism demands a response based on an attentiveness to the relevant formulations of transcendence as they are presented in *Sources of the Self* and “A Catholic Modernity?”. Through a closer reading of Taylor, we have been able to explore his accounts of agapeic/karunic exemplarity and unconditionality. The engagement with Fraser also allows for a more refined discussion of the place of Buddhism, as well as a more refined account of the

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<sup>295</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 13.

<sup>296</sup> Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology*, 158.

different authorities of best accounts, in Taylor's ethics. My rejoinder to Fraser shows not only that the charge of restrictiveness is baseless, but also that the reading offered in the preceding chapters is more in accord with Taylor's actual formulations of transcendence as a moral source. Unlike Fraser's misconstrual, Baker's does not stem primarily from misreadings or a simple inattentiveness to Taylor's well-established positions, but rather from a lack of emphasis on the pluralist trajectories of Taylor's moral and political programme. I suggested above that even without Baker's more exclusivist rendering Taylor's theism is a helpful resource contra the *de jure* objection to Christian articulations of the good. As was noted briefly above, Baker holds that Plantinga's arguments against the *de jure* objection can be co-opted by non-theists and non-Christians, so that in the end his epistemology "gives no reason why the truth claims of Christianity in particular ought to be taken seriously." Arguably, Taylor's account of the transcendent, while it does counter the *de jure* objection, does not proceed along the lines anticipated by Baker. Rather, Taylor's moral philosophy responds to the *de jure* objection by attempting to make the case for how dispossessive notions of transcendence—Christian and non-Christian—are vital sources for the modern commitment to ethics as benevolence. Taylor challenges exclusive humanism to articulate a best account that incorporates unconditionality, a challenge to which exclusive humanism fails to respond (according to Taylor). Thus, Taylor parries the *de jure* objection by showing that a wide range of moral sources are necessary to underwrite philanthropy, and that one such powerful type of source is *agapē* /karuna. His discussion of transcendence, then, does not set out to show the relevance of only Christianity, but of articulations of transcendent sources that open up a comportment to the other without reference to her particularities. A powerful articulation of this kind of transcendence is found in the Christian gospels, but also, on Taylor's view, in other traditions such as Buddhism. I have pointed to Taylor's discussion of moral intuitionism as yet another piece of evidence that suggests that his religious thought steers away from exclusivist formulations. I have alluded to the discussion in *A Secular Age* in which Taylor explores how the body, as the locus for visceral moral motivations (those that arise in the gut), should figure into a modern ethics. In the next chapter, I will explore further the theme of the body (or enfleshment) in Taylor, in order to develop in more detail the textures of his anthropology as they relate to his religious thought.

## **Chapter 5: From Cartesian Turn to Christian Excarnation: Taylor’s “Augustinian” Recovery of the Body**

In the preceding chapters, I have suggested some important ways in which Taylor’s moral and political philosophy turns on theistic or transcendent formulations. A comparative reading of his work alongside Nietzsche’s helped to illuminate how the basic monotheistic imperative of obedience—thy will be done—begins for Taylor from a kenotic repose initiated through an encounter with some transcendent power. It was highlighted how this dispossession of the self provides the primary point of departure for Taylor’s religious ethics, especially for enactments of *agapê*. As discussed in the second chapter, Taylor’s theistic formulation illuminates how for Christianity the encounter with Incarnation opens up the possibility for an understanding of both how Jesus’ abasement on the cross calls the fullness of life into question, and how through that calling into question Incarnation actually affirms the fullness of life through cruciform love. I argued that this conception of transcendence provides the basic form of Taylor’s weak moral ontology, which in turn enlivens his expressivist anthropology and his pluralism. It was also suggested that Taylor’s moral philosophy has a discernible agapeic/karunic bias, thus leading him to focus on facets of religious—especially Christian and Buddhist—thought that also emphasize agape/karuna. In the present chapter, we shall turn to another theistic component of Taylor’s programme, namely his efforts to rehabilitate the primacy of the body in moral life. A helpful way to engage this facet of Taylor’s programme is to frame it in terms of his “Augustinianism.”

### **5.1 Why “Augustinianism”?**

The use of quotation marks when speaking about Taylor’s Augustinianism is appropriate because his position cannot be easily aligned with what one might consider to be “conventionally” Augustinian. For example, we find little evidence in Taylor’s own programme of a thorough consideration of original sin, or the utter depravity of the will—two important Augustinian themes that tend to be given attention in more conventional Augustinianisms. Indeed, Taylor himself is quite critical at points of what he calls “hyper-Augustinianism,” a theological position comprised of a range of views from which Taylor seemingly wants to distance himself. Hyper-Augustinianism as Taylor describes it incorporates a number of deeply interconnected theological views, three of which are central and thus merit mention. These include the views that: 1) salvation is

the destiny of only a small minority; 2) our post-lapsarian condition is one of utter depravity, a condition that is inescapable except through “efficacious grace”; and 3) our sin “deserved punishment and hence [we] were lost to God,” but through Jesus’ atonement on the cross the debt has been cancelled so that some may return to God (what Taylor refers to as the “juridical-penal model”).<sup>297</sup> Though the two Augustinianisms may not be fundamentally incompatible, the central thrust of the perspective I want to ascribe to Taylor does seem to diverge—at the very least in its emphases—from the hyper variant. Perhaps the most notable divergence concerns the primacy of sin. The nature and consequences of sin, which form the core of the juridical-penal model, lamentably receive little focused attention in Taylor’s work. The manner in which sin functions in different iterations of Christianity is discussed throughout *A Secular Age*, and Taylor is subtly critical of some of the ways that sin has been conceptualized historically. But Taylor refrains from offering us an extensive theological discussion of the role of sin in Christian ethics and politics. Nevertheless, though Taylor’s own perspective gives a wide berth to the sorts of Augustinian themes that he ascribes to the “hyper” tradition, I would argue that there are very important, though perhaps sometimes subtle, Augustinian textures throughout his work. For example, consider two facets of Taylor’s philosophy discussed in previous chapters that can be described as “Augustinian”.

First, in a deeply Augustinian manner, Taylor frames his discussion of morality in *Sources of the Self* and elsewhere in terms of the erotic nature of moral motivation and desire—in other words, he focuses on how and what we love.<sup>298</sup> Though she does not describe him as an Augustinian, Ruth Abbey underscores the central role of eroticism in Taylor’s moral theory, and refers to the pivotal role that love plays in the ways that Augustinians and Platonists account for moral motivation. As Abbey correctly points out, a primary goal of Taylor’s work is to rehabilitate the erotic aspect of moral philosophy, which has tended to be sidelined in most modern ethics.<sup>299</sup> This is an explicit objective of *Sources of the Self*—we need only consider Taylor’s claim that “[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

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<sup>297</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, especially 105, 511. Taylor also discusses the juridical-penal model as it relates to the “hermeneutic of divine violence” as well as the view of “suffering as punishment or pedagogy.” See especially 651-654.

<sup>298</sup> In a paper entitled “Remembering Augustine: Toward a Democratic Civic Liberalism” delivered at McMaster University (Jan 23, 2009), Augustine scholar Eric Gregory correctly described Taylor as a “good Augustinian” precisely because of Taylor’s emphasis on the role of desire in his moral ontology.

<sup>299</sup> Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 49.



love.”<sup>300</sup> And this attention to love remains a persistent concern of Taylor’s philosophy beyond *Sources* as well. So, for example, Taylor’s essay “A Most Peculiar Institution” offers the following (critical) judgment regarding the ways that moderns approach moral thinking: “Morality is narrowly concerned with what we ought to *do*, and not with what is valuable in itself, or what we should admire or love.”<sup>301</sup> Just as moral agency is constituted by love for Augustine—leading one Augustinian scholar to claim that for Augustine humans are essentially bundles of loves—so also for Taylor does moral agency proceed through love.<sup>302</sup>

A second place where we find Augustinian textures is in Taylor’s discussion of the possible theological underpinnings for human diversity. This takes shape in terms of a discussion of Christian Trinitarianism and monotheistic creationism, both of which were discussed above in chapter three. To restate briefly, Taylor posits that human plurality exemplifies how we are created in the image of God—just as the Christian Godhead is a (Trinitarian) multiplicity, so also are humans created in *imago dei* a multiplicity. In terms of the second thread, Taylor highlights how the affirmation of creation (“God saw that it was good”) is simultaneously an affirmation of creation’s diversity—and this includes the plural modes of human sociality. Though Taylor’s formulations are directly concerned with exploring possible theistic underpinnings for *modern* commitments to pluralism, Jean Bethke Elshtain suggests that they have resonances with Augustinian thought. Elshtain takes up both the Trinitarian and creationist arguments, though (as I will suggest in a moment) the second seems more straightforwardly Augustinian. Taylor himself does not acknowledge a debt to Augustine in his pluralist treatment of the *imago Dei*, but in her response to “A Catholic Modernity?” Elshtain asserts that her argument draws on Augustine in order to “deepen Taylor’s claim that a recognition of human diversity is what you derive if you ponder what it means to be made in the image of God.” Elshtain discusses how Augustine, through both dialogical and analogical approaches, “helps us see the way in which the *imago Dei* maps onto mind, body and self with profound implications for our thinking about human diversity and social life.”<sup>303</sup> Elshtain claims that her formulation comes through a reading of Augustine’s *On the Trinity*—and presumably

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<sup>300</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 74.

<sup>301</sup> Charles Taylor, “A Most Peculiar Institution,” in *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*. J.E.J. Altham and R. Harrison (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 145.

<sup>302</sup> See Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008) 21.

<sup>303</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Augustine and Diversity,” in *A Catholic Modernity?* 95-97.

from the highly nuanced anthropology in Books IX-XIV, which explores the correlation between the soul and the Trinity.<sup>304</sup> However, it is regrettable that in her reply to Taylor Elshtain does not cite specific passages from *On the Trinity* that support her reading. In a footnote, she directs readers to the third chapter of her *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, which does engage more explicitly with *On the Trinity*. However, her discussion in that chapter is not directly concerned with political diversity, and she does not explicitly use Augustine's Trinitarianism to make a case for a commitment to pluralism. In the preface of *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, Elshtain confesses that she is not an Augustinian scholar (xi), and later in the book, Elshtain directs her readers to read *On the Trinity* for themselves because she does not "feel terribly sure-footed" in her reading (65). While Elshtain should be commended for her modesty, there is no doubt that her work on Augustine has been highly influential in the area of political theology. Thus we should be unsurprised that she is cautious about making *direct* connections between socio-political diversity and Augustinian Trinitarianism, and that she does not attempt to outline a causal relationship between the *imago Dei* and political plurality. A central goal of Augustine's exploration of the *imago Dei* is to seek out the best analogy for the Trinity, and he locates this best analogy in the mind of the individual person—and not in socio-political relations. And thus in Book XII.5-6, Augustine examines and rejects the family unit as a potential Trinitarian analogy—a rejection that could be seen to apply to a conception of the *imago dei* as an interpersonal phenomenon. Elshtain's phrasing appears careful enough and may be reconcilable, ultimately, with Augustine's rejection of the *imago Dei* as a social phenomenon. As she puts it, the *imago Dei* has "profound implications for our thinking about human diversity and social life."<sup>305</sup> Elshtain does not argue that the *imago Dei* should

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<sup>304</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising that Elshtain wants to explore such connections, given the many attempts by contemporary thinkers to explore the relationship between Trinity and human pluralism. For example, see Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997); Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2004); Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000); Mark Heim, "A Trinitarian View of Religions Plurality," *The Christian Century* January 17 (2001), 14-19.

<sup>305</sup> Emphasis added. Elshtain does offer a nice description of how love, as it folds out of Trinity and the *imago Dei*, has positive social implications: "Love may not be all that we need. But love opens up the possibility of coming to know and to appreciate the other. Mind is embodied; body is thought. That form called Trinity is accessible to us in part because it can be represented and experienced immanently—we all have the experience of distinct parts that constitute a

be understood as an interpersonal, socio-political *phenomenon*. However, all of this is not to say that Augustine's treatment of the *imago Dei* cannot be helpful for the kind of theistic argument for pluralism that Taylor sets out to make, nor is it to say that Elshtain's attempts to use Augustine to deepen Taylor's theistic claims about diversity are infelicitous. The present point is simply that the connections between the *imago Dei* (as understood by Augustine) and socio-political diversity can never be straightforward, and one must take into account relevant facets of Augustine's work (such as *On the Trinity* XII.5-6) that would make such direct connections potentially problematic.<sup>306</sup>

The second thread of Taylor's theistic argument for pluralism, the argument that he develops out of Abrahamic creationism, is more easily connected with Augustine. Augustine, like Taylor, underscores how God takes pleasure in creation, a creation characterized by diversity. Augustine's approach to this subject emphasizes the connection between diversity and unity. In Book XII of *City of God*, Augustine writes that God "knew that this people would profit from the reflection that God had caused the human race to be derived from one man, in order to show mankind how highly He prizes unity in a multitude."<sup>307</sup> Elshtain applies this Augustinian insight to Taylor's pluralist perspective, and while Taylor does not explicitly discuss unity *per se*, I would argue that he is interested in the same goal as Augustine—establishing an account of how creation, characterized by diversity, implies peace rather than conflict. Taylor's discussion in "A Catholic Modernity?" seeks to show how the Constantinian movements (that have historically been a part of the project of Christendom) result in inevitable conflict, as triumphalistic believers seek to make over the world in their own image. Taylor's work helps us to understand how, rather than acknowledging how God's affirmation of creation encourages his people to celebrate the diversity

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whole—in and through our ensouled bodies. Trinity provides food for thought; it occasions a kind of epistemic urgency. This form helps us to seek, to know, to find, by generating the seeking that culminates in community and companionship, a search that must first acknowledge the reality of some other, anticipate the commonalities that draw us together, and engage the differences that separate us yet goad us to friendship and dialogue. Charity—*caritas*—unlocks our hearts to this possibility." "Augustine and Diversity," 97.

<sup>306</sup> At the very least, given Augustine's Platonism, and because Plato in the *Republic* uses a socio-political image to portray the soul, it requires no real stretch of the imagination to see how, for Augustine, the makeup of the soul or self—created in God's image—would illuminate, or have some correlation with, social reality.

<sup>307</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, XII.22. Translation is from the Dyson Cambridge edition.

of the created world, triumphalist Christianity “is in constant danger of turning into a parodic denial of itself,”<sup>308</sup> undermining the peace that should instead be its hope—a peace that does not overcome difference, but that instead emphasizes the diversity that God affirms as good in Genesis. Elshtain traces out corresponding themes in Augustine, focusing on the “unity in a multitude” formulation. She explains how the American mantra *e pluribus unum* is inverted in Augustine, resulting in a very different configuration: “out of the one many”. She rightly points out how for Augustine, being descended from a single ancestor means that humans are not bound by mere likeness—like the rest of the species in the animal kingdom—but also by a feeling of kinship in their Adamic ancestry. Thus, regardless of the wide range of cultural, ethnic or political particularities that seem to set us apart from each other, Augustine suggests that our shared kinship establishes the *possibility* for the “bonds of peace.” As Elshtain puts it,

*From one* creates a fragile but real ontology of peace, or relative peacefulness. Bonds of affection tied human beings from the start. Bonds of kinship and affection bound them further. The more these relationships are dispersed, finally encompassing the entire globe, and in light of the confusion and confounding of human languages, the more difficult it is to repair to this fundamental kinship or sociality in order to strike a blow for peace and against war. Yet that’s when it becomes especially important.<sup>309</sup>

So can we see how Taylor’s consideration of creation as it pertains to human diversity dovetails nicely with Augustine’s pluralist perspective. Both look to the Genesis account of creation, and see in it a reason for optimism, a hope for peace—a peace that, though not easily attainable, does not demand the overcoming of human plurality.

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<sup>308</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” 17. In this particular passage, Taylor is talking specifically about the Constantinian drive of the church to reshape the political order, to “marry the faith with a form of culture and a mode of society.” But it is not difficult to see how the project of Christendom, as much as it may have been motivated by what Taylor refers to as the “logic of Incarnation,” has also historically been concerned with eliminating religious plurality, a movement that is commonly driven by a form of triumphalism. I will return to this briefly in the final chapter, where I will draw from Elshtain’s discussion of the Augustinian notion of the “selfsame” as it relates to Taylor’s work.

<sup>309</sup> Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, 101-105; “Augustine and Diversity”, 98-99. Cf. Augustine, *City of God*, XII.22-23; XIV.1. For a discussion that examines this common ancestry, but with a focus on gender differences, see Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, 42-44.

Now, it would take us too far away from the purposes of this chapter to assess *how* Augustinian Taylor actually is, or whether the elements I have pointed to above would satisfy the requirements for a rigorous Augustinianism. I have already very briefly suggested why Taylor's Trinitarian argument for pluralism is not straightforwardly Augustinian, and, admittedly, Augustine is rarely cited as a source for Taylor's positions. Still, regardless of Taylor's criticism of hyper-Augustinianism, it seems that the suggestion that there are perceivable Augustinian textures in Taylor is not highly controversial.<sup>310</sup> Indeed, it is perhaps because of such textures that the influential Augustine scholar Robert Markus incorporates so comfortably pivotal elements of Taylorian philosophy in his recent *Christianity and the Secular*.<sup>311</sup> But this not insignificant influence on Markus aside, the aspect of Taylor's philosophical programme that has garnered the most (largely critical) attention amongst Augustinian scholars is surely his discussion of inwardness in *Sources of the Self*. Taylor spends a significant part of *Sources* tracing the ways in which "inwardness" has become a formative constituent of the modern self. And the roots of that inward-looking self, Taylor argues, are to be found in Augustine. Taylor describes how Augustine distills theologically a radically new way of relating to the good that departs from the previously dominant Greek modalities derived from Plato and Aristotle. While Greek thought contains a form of reflexivity—consider the commonly invoked Greek introspective injunction to "know thyself"—the philosopher's access to the good is external, through a perspectival shift in gaze (Taylor

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<sup>310</sup> The influence of Augustine on *Sources of the Self* has also been mentioned by Judith Shklar and E.J. Hundert, amongst others. According to Shklar, "The hero of Taylor's genealogy is St. Augustine, and he hovers over every one of [Sources of the Self's] pages." Hundert claims that it is Augustine who "presides over Taylor's discussion of the making of modern identity because in it expressions of selfhood in the Western traditions of philosophy and high literary art ultimately rest on a tacit acceptance of that inward eros the bishop of Hippo posited at the spiritual center of all human lives." See Shklar, Review of Sources, *Political Theory* 19/1 (1991), 105; and Hundert, "Augustine and the Divided Self," *Political Theory* 20/1 (1992), 87.

<sup>311</sup> Robert Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). In his recent important book on Augustine and democracy, Eric Gregory—himself an Augustinian heavily influenced by Taylor—notes Taylor's (as well as Michael Walzer's) influence on *Christianity and the Secular*, resulting in an "Augustine more attentive to the importance of shared moral vocabularies that bind a society together." See *Politics and the Order of Love*, 83.

obviously has Plato's allegory of the cave in mind here).<sup>312</sup> According to Taylor, such a view is quite at odds with the Augustinian conception of reflexivity because in the latter the individual must proceed *inward* to ascend upward. Through this radically self-reflexive turn, on Taylor's account, Augustine sets the stage for the Enlightenment movement towards disengagement with externality that finds its most influential iteration in Descartes. According to the story told in *Sources of the Self*, it is the Cartesian turn that represents a powerful first strike against the body in western modernity, and thus a significant move away from anthropologies anchored in incarnation.<sup>313</sup>

But before proceeding further into the details of Taylor's genealogy of self-reflexivity, a bit more needs to be said about the goals of this chapter, as well as its approach. By framing the present chapter in terms of Taylor's Augustinianism, the primary objective is not to defend any Taylorian interpretation of Augustine. As insightful as Taylor's portrayal of Augustinian inwardness may be, it is telling that he relies heavily on secondary sources (especially the work of Etienne Gilson) in his depiction of Augustine. Thus we should be unsurprised that in his response to Elshtain's discussion of Augustine (and the Trinitarian foundations for a pluralist philosophical anthropology), Taylor confesses that he is unfamiliar with "the relevant literature, especially on the theological side."<sup>314</sup> But Taylor's contribution is not primarily that he gives a new reading of Augustine, but that he situates Augustine at the very center of the making of the modern self. To be more specific, what is more at stake for Taylor's project, I would argue, is that he shows how religion in general, and perhaps especially agapeic/karunic transcendence, provides us with some of the necessary resources to overcome the worst excesses of Cartesianism. The claim that will be made below is that Taylor is thoroughly Augustinian in the way that he understands revelation to be socially and physically—that is, *externally*—mediated. Though his attunement to the importance of the sensible world as the locus for revelation is perhaps not as apparent in *Sources*, we find an emphasis on the role of the body in Taylor's later work that reflects such an attunement. As we shall see, the emphasis placed on the primacy of the body for moral living in *A Secular Age* is one that sets itself against the mind-body dualism of the Enlightenment, but also one which sets itself against what might be best described as a degeneracy of Christian orthodoxy as it concerns the body. And insofar as Taylor's incarnational viewpoint has deep

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<sup>312</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 113. Plato's cave myth is found in Book VII of *The Republic*.

<sup>313</sup> As will be discussed below, *A Secular Age* supplements this story by adding the work of Reform as a necessary middle step between Augustine and Descartes.

<sup>314</sup> Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?" 110.

resonances with Augustinian thought, the suggestion will be made that the efforts by Augustine scholars to defend the church father from the Cartesian destinations mapped out by Taylor are unnecessary given the formulations in *A Secular Age*. Or to put it somewhat bluntly, Augustine does not require saving from Taylor, since the latter's own rejoinder to Cartesian disenfranchisement is consistent with Augustinian thought.

As already mentioned above, much has been written about the location of Augustine en route to Descartes in Taylor's genealogy of the self. While some Augustine scholars agree with Taylor's assessment that the Bishop of Hippo endowed western modernity with an anthropological focus on interiority, many commentators set out to save Augustine from the Cartesian destinies that are sketched out famously by Taylor in *Sources*. Notably, as Michael Hanby points out, Taylor is not alone in giving such a reading of Augustine, but he is nevertheless the "most visible spokesperson" of the view. Hanby describes how Taylor's "story has gained currency in recent years":

Stephen Menn, for instance, has reinterpreted Descartes' *Meditations* as a "spiritual exercise" that mimics the "ascent" of *Confessions* VII, a judgment with which Wayne Hankey concurs. Zbigniew Janowski's great task of demonstrating a definitive Augustinian influence on Descartes catalogues parallel texts *and* situates the *Meditations* within the concerns of seventeenth century Augustinian "theodicy". Despite significant differences, Taylor's basic plot remains, which is all the more remarkable for the fact that it is held in common not only by many who share his humanistic optimism, but by many who oppose it.<sup>315</sup>

Like many others, Hanby sets out to "complicate" this Taylorian story. Hanby agrees that Descartes was surely influenced by Augustine, but also adds that "[no] seventeenth century thinker could have failed to come under Augustine's influence." His defence of Augustine underscores how much of what is generally understood to be "Augustinian" in Cartesian philosophy actually derives from Stoicism and its view of volition—a perspective that, as Hanby points out, Augustine rejected.<sup>316</sup> E.J. Hundert, like Hanby, acknowledges Taylor's influence upon discourses that seek to connect Augustine with Descartes. He argues that the extent to which Taylor accurately captures Augustine's influence cannot be properly gauged unless one attends "to Augustine's strategies for the portrayal of evil, pride, and self-

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<sup>315</sup> Michael Hanby, "Augustine and Descartes: An Overlooked Chapter in the Story of Modern Origins" *Modern Theology* 19:4 (October 2003), 455.

<sup>316</sup> Hanby, 455.

suspicion, subjects which Taylor virtually ignores.”<sup>317</sup> One cannot simply disentangle Augustinian inwardness from the hyper-Augustinian components, as Taylor attempts to do. Hundert, like Hanby, thus seeks to give a closer reading of Augustine than what is offered in *Sources*.

Wayne Hankey affirms Taylor’s portrayal of the self and applauds Taylor for reaching as far back as classical sources. Hankey’s endorsement of the Augustine-Descartes connection is much less reserved than Taylor’s own depiction of the relationship. As Hankey puts it, Taylor’s placement of “Augustine at the foundation of Cartesian modernity its account of the self” is *required* of Taylor—in other words, it is not only uncontroversial but trivially true that Augustine blazes the trail towards Descartes. For Hankey, Taylor’s claim that that Augustine stands en route from Plato to Descartes is not a mere “chronological fact”, but is more fully a “true and necessary statement about our construction of ourselves.”<sup>318</sup> Alongside this general agreement with Taylor’s genealogy of the self, Hankey does still offer a critique of Taylor’s genealogy. But unlike Hanby and Hundert, who set out to offer closer readings of Augustine and thus problematize Taylor’s account, Hankey places his focus elsewhere.<sup>319</sup> He criticizes Taylor not for what he includes in his genealogy but for whom he omits—namely, Plotinus, and his influence on the modern self.

Obviously it is important to examine Taylor’s interpretation of Augustine (and the disregarding of Plotinus, in Hankey’s case) as it pertains to the discussion of inwardness in *Sources*. Nevertheless, it is not my intention to add to this already crowded area of research. It is worth pointing out that in their “re-sourcing” (to use David Peddle’s term) of Taylor classical sources, none of these commentators—at least in the texts cited, which engage Taylor’s portrayal of Augustine—are primarily concerned with Taylor’s treatment of modernity per se, or his polemic against what he perceives to be problematic or even dangerous modern trajectories. Taylor’s exploration of the Cartesian turn is undertaken in an attempt to understand more fully the impact of Descartes’ influence on the modern self. Or, to put it another way, Taylor explores the disembodiment consequences of Cartesian thought for the moral life of modern selves. How, for example, does Descartes

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<sup>317</sup> E.J. Hundert, “Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self,” *Political Theory* 20/1 (1992), 86-87.

<sup>318</sup> Wayne J. Hankey, “Between and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self,” *Augustinian Studies* 32/1 (2001), 65-66.

<sup>319</sup> See also David Peddle, “Re-Sourcing Charles Taylor’s Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies* 32/2 (2001), 207-217. Peddle’s approach to Taylor, like Hundert and Hanby, is to show how where Taylor misinterprets Augustine—thus he states at the opening of his paper that, unlike Hankey, he “[finds] problematic not only what Taylor neglects but also what he includes.”



make possible the radical disengagement of what Taylor calls the buffered self (or what Stephen White calls the Teflon subject)? And how does Augustine, or Augustinian thought, figure into this Cartesian drama, either as a precursor or as a remedy to disengagement?

In the section that follows, I shall present the central movements of Taylor's discussion of inwardness. Though I will occasionally suggest ways in which Taylor's treatment of Augustine in *Sources* demands more nuance, that is not my primary goal. It is worth repeating that Taylor relies heavily on Gilson's work, and that Taylor's contribution is not primarily as an interpreter of Augustine. Rather, Taylor's work is important because he suggests ways that Augustine is highly relevant for any portrayal of modern selfhood.

Related to this, a central question that will be explored in the present chapter is whether or not Taylor's response to the Cartesian turn, to disembodiment, can be described as Augustinian. Because if Taylor's response is in fact Augustinian—whether it draws explicitly from Augustine or not—then it seems less necessary to attempt to save Augustine from Taylor, and from the Cartesian destinies that the Taylorian genealogy suggests awaited the inward self. In order to explore this question, the chapter will examine Taylor's insightful work on inwardness and the Cartesian turn described in *Sources of the Self* alongside his formulations in *A Secular Age*—the latter of which, in addition to offering a new perspective on secularization, criticizes “disenfleshment” in Christian ethics and seeks to rehabilitate the body for modern moral life. In order to explore some of the connections, it is necessary to consider first the path as described by Taylor that runs from Plato to Augustine, and ultimately to Descartes.

## 5.2 From Augustine to Descartes

Taylor's genealogy begins with a discussion of the basic Platonic position that has been a dominant formative force throughout the history of western moral philosophy: the view that it is through the supremacy of thought and reason that the passions are reined in, and through which self-mastery is achieved. According to Plato, Taylor suggests, reason makes one “stronger than oneself”, and thus the “good man is ‘master of himself’...To be master of oneself is to have the higher part of the soul rule over the lower, which means reason over the desires (*‘to logistikon’* over *‘to epithumetikon’*).”<sup>320</sup> Taylor sets this Platonic vision against the backdrop of

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<sup>320</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 115-116. Taylor also mentions that there have been challenges to this view, not least from within certain corners of Christian thought, such as those that would stress the need for a “radical conversion of the will”, a

Homeric anthropology and describes, following the work of Bruno Snell, how Homeric man's subjectivity is highly fragmentary or polyphonic. As Taylor puts it, for Homer's characters "some things happen in the '*thumos*', others in the '*phrenes*', others again in the '*kradiê*', '*êtor*', or '*ker*', still others in the '*noos*'."<sup>321</sup> The polyphony of Homeric man is also seen in the way that heroic enactments, when powered by the great force of a god, do not subtract away from the heroic nature of the subject (and the converse is the same for those plagued by a god). The intercession of a god does not undermine agency by adding to or subtracting from the merit of any heroic (or non-heroic) enactments: "A great hero remains great, though his impressive deeds are powered by the god's infusion of energy. Indeed, there is no concession here; it is not that the hero remains great *despite* the divine help. It is an inseparable part of his greatness that he is a locus of such divine action."<sup>322</sup> Taylor describes how against this Homeric anthropological landscape, Plato relocates subjectivity primarily in the mind, which is conceived not as a polyphonic set of structures but instead as a more "unitary space".<sup>323</sup>

Taylor describes how Plato, rather than employing a more straightforward dichotomy of inner/outer, instead frames his philosophy in terms of a set of dualisms more suitable to his purposes: soul/body, immaterial/bodily, and eternal/mutable. Taylor suggests that ascribing the inner/outer distinction to Plato would only distort the Platonic view. In Taylor's words,

the order with which reason is thus criterially connected is not just one we might be tempted to call 'internal', that between different goals, appetites, and elements in the soul. More fundamental is the connection with the order of things in the cosmos. This is related to the right order of the soul as whole is to the part, as englobing to the

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conversion that is not simply a matter of emphasizing processes of intellection. Taylor also mentions Luther, who "speaks graphically of reason as 'that whore.'"

<sup>321</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 118.

<sup>322</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 118.

<sup>323</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 119. It is worth adding to Taylor's reading of the Platonic shift in self-understanding that even Socrates does not escape the motivating force of his "daemon"—"a sort of voice" that would warn the Platonic protagonist against poor choices, such as the entrance into political life (*Apology* 31d). The recurrence of daemonic elements in the dialogues would seem to suggest that Socrates is still operating (at least partially) within the polyphonic view of agency that Taylor delineates in Homer. This is worth keeping in mind, because this factor separates Augustine even further from Plato in terms of the inner/outer distinction, since it would suggest at least some level of polyphony in Socratic agency.

englobed. But it is not more important just for this reason. The real point is that it is only on the level of the whole order that one can see that everything is ordered for the good.”<sup>324</sup>

So for Plato, the Good is external to the agent, but that external order provides a referent for the soul’s own ordering. Through reason, we conform ourselves to the Good, to the ultimate moral source that we encounter instantiated in the world. Furthermore, the soul only comes to know that what it encounters in the world are mere simulacra, “shadows” of the forms through which one intimates what is Real, when it sees properly—and this proper vision only occurs when one accedes to the Good through reason, through a shift in *attention*. Illumination is preceded by a shift in one’s gaze, and Taylor argues that this is not an internal process: “[Our] becoming rational ought not most perspicuously be described as something that takes place in us, but rather better as our connecting up to the larger order in which we are placed.”<sup>325</sup> For Plato, as illustrated in the myth of the cave, the philosopher’s accessing the Good depends on a shift in attention, a change in the direction of his gaze. Of course, Platonic philosophy, as a “love of wisdom”, also rests on *love*, on an erotic attunement to the larger order and especially to the Good. But the critical point for Taylor is that Platonic love is the product not of an inward turn, but a directional shift in external gaze vis-à-vis the world of instantiated forms. Taylor argues that if we reduce the various Platonic dichotomies (soul/body, immaterial/bodily, and eternal/mutable) to the single one of inner/outer, the consequence is that we “obscure the fact that the crucial issue is what objects the soul attends to and feeds on.” For Plato, Taylor continues, “[the] soul as immaterial and eternal ought to turn to what is immaterial and eternal. Not what happens within it but where it is facing in the metaphysical landscape is what matters.”<sup>326</sup>

The influence of Platonism on Augustinian thought is well established, and Taylor identifies some of the continuities between Plato and Augustine, including how the latter appropriates the basic Platonic distinction between bodily and non-bodily, while nevertheless giving the dichotomy a uniquely Christian iteration of spirit and flesh. But what is arguably most crucial for the inner/outer distinction is Augustine’s synthesis of Platonist and Christian views on order—especially how one’s comportment to that larger order provides the subject with his ultimate ontological, epistemological, and moral grounds. It is worth quoting Taylor at length here:

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<sup>324</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 122. Taylor elaborates further: “Thus the good life is to be ruled by reason not just as the vision of correct order in our souls but also and more fundamentally as the vision of the good order of the whole.”

<sup>325</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 123.

<sup>326</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 124.

[For Augustine] the created world exhibits a meaningful order; it participates in God's Ideas. God's eternal law enjoins order. It calls on humans to see and respect this order. For Augustine as for Plato, the vision of cosmic order is the vision of reason, and for both the good for humans involves their seeing and loving this order. And similarly, for both what stands in the way is the human absorption with the sensible, with the mere external manifestations of the higher reality. The soul must be swiveled around; it has to change the direction of its attention/desire.<sup>327</sup>

But it is precisely here that Augustine's perspective subtly, but nevertheless consequentially, diverges from that of Plato. Augustine reconfigures this comportment to God's order, moving in his description away from the primacy of *attention* in favor of the primacy of *desire* or *love*.<sup>328</sup>

The prominence of love in Augustine has interiorizing anthropological consequences. Most importantly, Taylor asserts, the various dichotomies we find in Plato ("spirit/matter, higher/lower, eternal/temporal, immutable/changing") are transmuted by Augustine into inner/outer dualities. He suggests that the inner/outer distinction for Augustine is not merely "occasional and peripheral," but rather "central and essential." Taylor points to Book XII of *On the Trinity* as a demonstration of the centrality of the inner/outer distinction for Augustinian anthropology, as exemplified in the distinction between the outer and inner man in XII.1. Taylor's interpretation of the thrust of the chapter is as follows:

The outer is the bodily, what we have in common with the beasts, including even our senses, and the memory storage of our images of outer things. The inner is the soul. And this is not just one way of describing the difference for Augustine. It is in a sense the most important one for our spiritual purposes, because the road from the lower to the higher, the crucial shift in direction, passes through our attending to ourselves as *inner*...Let one very famous line stand for many: 'Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat

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<sup>327</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 128

<sup>328</sup> As Taylor puts it, "Augustine alters the balance between [attention and desire] in what turns out to be a decisive way. It is love and not attention which is the ultimately deciding factor. And that is why the Augustinian doctrine of the two directions is usually expressed in terms of the two loves, which can ultimately be identified as charity and concupiscence." *Sources of the Self*, 128.

veritas' ('Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.')

<sup>329</sup>

So for Taylor, Augustine's focus is on inwardness—and in this he departs from the Platonic line—because through the "inward lies the road to God." To be properly oriented to God, for Augustine, one must have one's loves properly ordered. Taylor's point here would seem to be that, for Augustine, a properly ordered love proceeds inward and then upward. This stands in contrast to the Platonic philosopher who does not turn inward, but instead shifts his gaze—to use Taylor's formulation, it is not what happens within the soul but where it is facing in the metaphysical landscape that matters for the Platonist.

Now, to be sure, Taylor's argument cannot be that the created order has some kind of reduced authority for Augustine compared with the Platonic account of the order of being. The inward turn is not simply a turning away from the sensible world. This is a central point of the present chapter: Christianity, as the religion of Incarnation *par excellence*, and as an Abrahamic tradition that conceives of creation as a divine expression or communication, cannot be easily reconciled with claims that seek to relocate all import into the self or the mind.<sup>330</sup> That would be to reduce Christianity to Cartesianism—and since the sensible world has such an authority for most (orthodox) Christian thinking, it is presumably closer on this point to Plato than Descartes.<sup>331</sup> Instead, Taylor's point of emphasis is on the Augustinian

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<sup>329</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 128-129.

<sup>330</sup> As Taylor himself puts it in *A Secular Age*: "The Bible sees the universe as made by God. It also tells a story of God's dealings with humans. This divine-human history is incompatible with the idea that there are ever-repeating cycles. It also means that what happens in time matters. God enters into drama in time. The Incarnation, the Crucifixion happened in time, and so what occurs here can no longer be seen as less than fully real." *A Secular Age*, 56.

<sup>331</sup> These similarities aside, there are undeniable differences between Plato and Augustine, and Taylor nicely frames a major difference in terms of inwardness: "[There are parallels] between God and the Idea of the Good, in that both provide the ultimate principle of being and knowledge... For Augustine, too, God can be known more easily through his created order and in a sense can never be known directly, except perhaps in rare conditions of mystical rapture (such as Paul experienced, for instance, on the road to Damascus). But our principal route to God is not through the object domain but 'in' ourselves." Taylor continues: "[The] light of God is not just 'out there', illuminating the order of being, as it is for Plato; it is also an 'inner' light. It is the light of the soul... ('There is one light which we perceive through the eye, another by which the eye itself is enabled to perceive; this light by which [outer things] become manifest is certainly within

influence on the nature of epistemological activity. The inward turn “shifts the focus from the field of objects known to the activity of knowing itself; God is to be found here...For in contrast to the domain of objects, which is public and common, the activity of knowing is particularized; each of us is engaged in ours. To look towards this activity is to look to the self, to take up a reflective stance.”<sup>332</sup>

Another related factor that creates distance between Augustinian inwardness and Platonic thought is their divergent notions of memory. To be more specific, Augustine’s conception of *memoria* does not adopt the Platonic notion of a recollection of an innate “vision of the Ideas.” The absence of this preexistent knowledge of the forms in Augustinian conceptions of memory results in different trajectories in Platonic and Augustinian maieutics—a difference that Taylor suggests is best understood in terms of the Augustinian inward turn. For Plato, the Socratic midwife awakens within her interlocutor pre-existing knowledge of the ideas. Taylor argues that this is fundamentally *temporal*—a looking backwards, to a time “before”. The Platonic notion of recollection is a recurring theme in the dialogues; we find it in Plato’s *Phaedo*, *Philebus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Meno*—the last of which portrays Socrates demonstrating for his interlocutor how there is no learning, only recollection.<sup>333</sup> Thus the task of philosophical midwifery is to facilitate this kind of remembering by *turning* the interlocutor’s gaze, a turning that enables him to remember the eternal world of the Forms. But for Augustine, Taylor underscores, what is awakened is not simply *temporally* prior. Instead, what is awakened is knowledge of a “path to an ‘above’...As Gilson put it, Augustine’s path is one ‘leading from the exterior to the interior and from the interior to the superior.’”<sup>334</sup>

Another factor that Taylor suggests sets the Augustinian account apart from the Platonic is the doctrine of the will. Two components of Augustine’s conception of volition merit mentioning. First, Augustine conceptualizes the will largely in terms of its power of choice or assent. Whereas Plato holds that “our desire for the good is a function of how much we see it,” knowledge alone for Augustine is not sufficient to assure our moral quality—moral choice is also necessary. And second, Augustine conceives of the will as the “basic disposition of our being.” Taylor directs us to Augustine’s “doctrine of the two loves,” which describes how our will can

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the soul’).” Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 129-130. Taylor is quoting Etienne Gilson’s translation. See *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, L.E.M. Lynch (trans.) (London: Victor Gollancz, 1961) 65.

<sup>332</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 130.

<sup>333</sup> *Meno* 81b-85b. Cf. *Phaedo* 73-76; *Philebus* 34c; *Theaetetus* 198d.

<sup>334</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 135-136. See also Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, 20.

be so perverse, our loves so disordered, that the basic disposition of the will “[drives] us to turn our backs even on the good we see.”<sup>335</sup> Taylor argues that Augustine’s doctrine of the will thus “complicates” the Platonic view, according to which “we always act for the good we see.” The Augustinian perspective discloses the complexity of moral motivation, especially how our loves or desires can pull us in different directions from the good we see—so a possible tension is introduced between desire and moral vision. This is all the product of Adam’s sin for Augustine. In our post-lapsarian condition, only *grace* reopens the possibility for us “to function fully on the Socratic model,” to always act for the good we see. Through grace, Taylor continues, we are healed of the blinding powers of sin: “what grace does is to open the inward man to God, which makes us able to see that the eye’s vaunted power is really God’s.”<sup>336</sup>

Taylor expands on this last point, describing in a bit more detail the relationship between the will, sin, and inwardness for Augustine. Taylor writes,

In Augustine’s Christian outlook...the perversity of the will can never be sufficiently explained by our lack of insight into the good; on the contrary, it makes us act below and against our insight, and prevents this from becoming fuller and purer. This perversity can be described as a drive to make ourselves the centre of our world, to relate everything to ourselves, to dominate and possess the things which surround us.<sup>337</sup>

Taylor surely has in mind here Augustine’s notion of the *libido dominandi*—the lust for domination that characterizes the ethos of the earthly city—and the principle of the “selfsame”—the pride-driven perspective according to which we form ourselves into an “absolute principle”.<sup>338</sup> Still, Taylor is clear that the desire to remake the world over in one’s own image cannot be attributed to the inward turn per se. It is not inwardness, or self-reflexivity that leads to disobedience, to sin; instead the opposite is true: “we show most clearly the image of God in our fullest self-presence.” Taylor argues that reflexivity only becomes evil, and the will disordered, when “reflexivity is enclosed on itself.” It is grace that irrupts, breaks open the evil will, shifts it away from its deluded sense of independence, and allows the will “to acknowledge its dependence on God.” A mere shift in gaze is insufficient to

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<sup>335</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 137-138.

<sup>336</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 138-139.

<sup>337</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 138-139.

<sup>338</sup> For a nice description of the “selfsame,” see Elshtain, “Augustine and Diversity,” 101.

breach the self-enclosed will. Instead, Taylor writes, “the discovery which dissipates the perversity of the will, and which the rectifying of this perversity makes possible, is that of our dependence on God in the very intimacy of our own presence to ourselves, at the roots of those powers which are most our own.”<sup>339</sup>

So we find in *Sources of the Self* an extensive case for how Augustine contributes a conception of self-reflexivity that is absent in Plato. While this is a helpful account, I would suggest that Taylor’s presentation of Augustine’s position requires a bit of refinement, insofar as his discussion of inwardness obscures or, at the very least, does not sufficiently emphasize the role of externality in Augustine. We see this, for example, in the following passage:

The reasons Augustine took this path seem to me to be rather that his concern was to show that God is to be found not just in the world but also and *more importantly* at the very foundations of the person (to use modern language); God is to be found in the mystery of self-presence.<sup>340</sup>

The “more importantly” here is representative of Taylor’s interpretation in general, and my suggestion is that such a reading unfortuitously shifts the emphasis away from the central role of the sensible world in Augustinian thought. In terms of the present discussion, this shift of emphasis is unfortuitous because it ignores a fundamental aspect of Augustinian thought that represents a potential obstruction to the Cartesian turn. Let me briefly mention three facets of Augustine’s work in which his emphasis on causal, sensible reality is evident. First, and this point is fairly straightforward, Augustine is a Christian thinker who believes in revelation—and revelation is revealed in space and time to sensible agents, and not to minds disengaged from space and time (a la Descartes). As the recent interesting work of Transformation theologians Oliver Davies, Paul Janz, and Clemens Sedmak emphasizes, Christian thinking has at its very center the belief that “God took on flesh for us in Jesus Christ and entered into our world of space and time.”<sup>341</sup> Janz argues quite forcefully how the conception of revelation in Christian theology implies two things. On the one hand, to identify something as revelation means that a truth has been divinely disclosed that humans could not otherwise come to on their own, “either through natural empirical discovery, or through anything that the generative spontaneity of human

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<sup>339</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 139.

<sup>340</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 134. Emphasis added.

<sup>341</sup> Oliver Davies, Paul D. Janz and Clemens Sedmak, *Transformation Theology: Church in the World* (London: Continuum, 2007) 1.



imagination or creative insight could engender from out of itself.”<sup>342</sup> On the other hand, as was mentioned above in chapter two, Janz argues that divine communication should not be understood to be revealed to minds, but rather to “*whole* sensibly embodied and rationally self-aware human beings in the real world of space and time.” Both of these basic views regarding Christian revelation illuminate how Christian theology (including Augustinian thought) demands an attunement to the sensible world, to externality—a factor that necessarily sets it apart from the excesses of Cartesian disengagement.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Paul D. Janz, “Revelation as Divine Causality,” in *Transformation Theology*, 63.

<sup>343</sup> While the line of argument here may say little particularly distinctive about Augustine, it does place Augustinianism amongst pre-modern non-idealist theologies that emphasize the importance of externality. A central goal of Transformation theology is to highlight how there are tendencies in many corners of modern theology that can tend to obscure the importance of the sensible world as it relates to revelation. As Janz argues, 19<sup>th</sup> century idealism contributes to a “shift [in theology] away from the world of sensible embodiment and onto mentally abstract and non-empirical domains.” He continues: “what idealism was most crucially able to provide was a set of powerful epistemological mechanisms which opened a path for theology to account for the intelligibility of its own claims about the continuing reality of Jesus Christ today in ways that no longer needed to locate this continuing ‘reality’ within the world of sensible human embodiment in space and time at all. Or more exactly, at precisely the time when theology was beginning to struggle perhaps most deeply with the intelligibility and meaning of its own central confessions in light of the new demands of cosmology and natural science after Newton, Kant, Hume and others: at just this time the spirit of idealism was offering ways of by-passing the new empirical challenges of modern science and cosmology altogether. And it did this most basically through demonstrations of what it claimed was a fundamental supremacy of mind over body, and by extension, a basic supremacy also of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (the human or mental sciences) over the *Naturwissenschaften* (the natural or physical sciences) within the academic disciplines.” Janz asserts further that “nowhere does the idealistic spirit still linger with greater prominence and influence today than in the theology of Karl Barth... Barth’s own words on this could not be clearer: ‘the encounter of God and man takes place primarily, pre-eminently and characteristically in this sphere of ratio’; ‘it is the divine reason communicating with human reason’; ‘revelation in itself and as such... is talk, speech.’” Through the influence of Barth, Janz suggests that the spirit of idealism has permeated much modern theology, with the consequence being that the importance of sensibility for how Christian theology understands revelation is often obscured. An assumption in the preceding pages is that Augustinian thought makes no such error and is attuned to the importance of the

A second element of Augustinian thought that exemplifies the prominence of externality is found in Augustine's ethics and, specifically, his commitment to life in this world, in this time. As Eric Gregory argues,

Augustine sought not to bury but to redeem the moral and emotional dimension of life 'in this time.' In particular, by highlighting the summary and the fulfillment of the law in terms of the twofold love commandments (Matt 22:37-40), he would try to *open the cultural space for emotional investment with those who suffer injustice* and to accentuate the practical responsibility this entails. The figure of Jesus presented Augustine with flesh and blood compassion.<sup>344</sup>

So for Augustinian ethics, *agapê* is preceded by the encounter with an Other, who is, of course, external. This encounter with the Other also demands an outward response: to feed, to clothe, to heal, etc. This facet of Augustine's ethics—indeed, a facet of any ethics that would call itself “Christian”—again moves in a different trajectory from Cartesianism: *agapê* does not disengage, but instead moves outward from the self in its encounter with the other. This point is highly relevant to the purposes of this chapter, since as will be shown in the final section, a corresponding notion of charity is found in *A Secular Age*. In Taylor's engagement with Illich's reading of the parable of the good Samaritan, a reading which Taylor endorses, the broken Jew on the roadside, encountered as an external Other, discloses, or even reveals, something incarnationally (and here there is overlap with the previous point about revelation as something disclosed in the world to sensible, embodied selves). This encounter produces a physical response—a pity that moves outward from the gut—in the Samaritan, and this pity gives rise to an enactment of love in space and time. I will return to this below, but the present point is simply that this conception of ethical life is not fully captured by an over-emphasis on inwardness.

The third element, which I can mention only very briefly, is Augustine's new iteration of the Platonic maxim that being is good. In Book VII of his *Confessions*, Augustine posits that all things that are created by a benevolent God are, like their creator, very good: “everything that exists is very good...all [things] exist because they are severally good but collectively very good, for our God has made all things exceedingly good.”<sup>345</sup> Indeed, what is important for Augustine is not that we do not desire earthly things (since

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sensible world, and as such offers a bulwark against Cartesian disengagement. See Janz, “Divine Causality and the Nature of Theological Questioning.”

<sup>344</sup> Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 38.

<sup>345</sup> See Chapter 12. Augustine, *Confessions*. M. Boulding (trans.) (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997).

the things themselves are good in their very essence), but rather that we should desire them in the right way, with the right love. As he says in the closing paragraphs of Sermon 335C (“On the Feast of the Martyrs”),

I am not saying that you should have no loves; I simply want your loves to be properly ordered. Put heavenly things before earthly, immortal things before mortal, everlasting things before transitory ones. And put the Lord before everything, and not just by praising him, but also by loving him.<sup>346</sup>

Augustine often employs the language of “use” when discussing the well-ordered comportment to earthly goods. He claims that “[to] use something is to apply whatever it may be to the purpose of obtaining what you love—if indeed it is something to be loved.”<sup>347</sup> Thus we use something properly in our pursuit of the one true object of enjoyment and love: God. We can also anticipate that goods employed in charity, in our enactments of love for the neighbour, would qualify as proper use for Augustine. A related example of good use is found in Book Nineteen of *City of God*, where Augustine asserts that even the heavenly city during its pilgrimage “[makes] use of the peace of Babylon” in order to serve God. The earthly city, on the other hand, will not enjoy eternal peace “because it did not make good use of [earthly peace] before the end” (CG 19.26). Unlike the pilgrim city, which uses the earthly peace to pursue the only true object of enjoyment, the earthly city “misuses/abuses” the earthly peace by using it to secure earthly, temporal, and transitory goods rather than the one true eternal Good. So in these examples, we see central moral and political themes that cannot be explained primarily in terms of inwardness, but that require a thoroughgoing engagement with the role of externality in Augustine. Objects of use are good because they are created by a benevolent God, and, on Augustine’s account,

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<sup>346</sup> “Sermon 335C: On the Feast of the Martyrs,” *Political Writings*. R.J. Dodaro and E.M. Atkins (trans. and eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>347</sup> See 1.4.4 of *On Christian Teaching*. R.P.H. Green (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For an examination of the language of “use” and “enjoyment” in Augustine, see Perry Cahall, “The Proper Order of Conjugal Love: The Relevance of St. Augustine’s Insights,” *Logos* 8:1 (2005) 117-128; Raymond Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbor in St. Augustine* (Heverless-Leuven: Augustine Historical Institute, 1993) 79-115; and Oliver O’Donovan, “Usus and fructus in Augustine, De doctrina Christiana I,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1982): 361- 397. I also discuss use and enjoyment as they pertain to Augustine’s treatment of lust and sexuality. See “George Grant and Augustine of Hippo on Human Will and Technological Mastery,” *Studies in Religion* 38/1 (2009) (forthcoming).

the good will uses them in the right way with the right love. As such, these goods have a form of authority in Augustinian thought that they cannot have in a Cartesian perspective—or, for that matter, for Platonism, according to which objects of use are mere simulacra.

We should bear in mind that Taylor does not exclude externality from his discussion of Augustinian inwardness. Instead, it is a matter of emphasis, the “more importantly” found in the passage above that is infelicitous: according to Taylor, it is *mostly* through inwardness for Augustine that one finds the path to God—indeed, Taylor’s narrative in *Sources of the Self* rarely engages with Augustinian externality. My critique of this emphasis is that the formulation of “inward to go upward” obscures the importance of externality. So, perhaps a more accurate formulation, in light of the external features of Augustinianism outlined in the preceding pages, would be something more like this: “outward then inward to go upward.” I would also add the proviso that the relationship between the “inner” and “outer” must be understood to be a dynamic, non-linear, one. The agent does not simply encounter revelation, go inward and remain there in the divine presence. Instead, for example, the inward turn may give rise to external enactments of *agapê*, and this encounter with the Other may then send the agent inward once again. This return to inwardness may be initiated if an agent recognizes that something about the nature of the crucified Christ is revealed through the broken neighbor. So: the agent encounters revelation externally, then moves *inward* to the divine presence, which compels the agent *outward* in *agapê*, and then *back in again* after the encounter with Other discloses something about Incarnation, and so on. I will discuss this kind of movement further below, since this is precisely what Ivan Illich underscores in the parable of the good Samaritan. But the present point is simply that the foregoing discussion demonstrates some of the ways in which Augustine is fundamentally concerned with externality. This unavoidably puts a particular emphasis on the body—it is through the body that we engage sensually with the world, and through the senses that we encounter revelation in the world. And it is the needs of the body—though, of course, also the spirit—of the other that demand a response in love (to clothe, to feed, to heal). My suggestion is that Taylor’s discussion in *Sources of the Self* underemphasizes the way in which the human relationship with divine life is mediated externally, physically or even socially, for Augustine. I have only touched on the primacy of the body in Augustinian ethics and Christology, and much more could be said about the relationship between externality, embodiment and inwardness.<sup>348</sup> But what I have demonstrated is that Taylor’s reading of

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<sup>348</sup> One other important Augustinian argument that involves embodiment is found in *City of God* IX.15. In that chapter, Augustine argues that only Jesus can be the mediator between humans and God. This is the case, he argues, because Jesus

Augustine's inward turn requires a bit more subtlety as it relates to externality and the body. This is pivotal as it pertains to the relationship between Augustinian and Cartesian thought, because the emphasis on externality and the body helps us distinguish Augustinian inwardness from Cartesian inwardness even more dramatically. And as will be shown below, one of Taylor's own main responses to the disengaging, disembodiment forces of western thought is to underscore the normative force of enfleshment for moral life—a move which arguably aligns him *with* Augustine *against* Descartes (as well as against the disenfleshing movements of Christian thought).

But before moving forward, a bit more needs to be said about Taylor's discussion in *Sources* about the relationship between Augustine and Descartes, and specifically his treatment of *Cartesian* inwardness. Taylor identifies some notable Augustinian themes in the philosophy of Descartes. According to Taylor,

Descartes is in many ways profoundly Augustinian: the emphasis on radical reflexivity, the importance of the cogito, the central role of the proof of God's existence which starts from 'within', from features of my own idea, instead of starting from external being, as we see in the Thomistic proofs, all put him in the stream of revived Augustinian piety which dominated the late Renaissance on both sides of the great confessional divide.<sup>349</sup>

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alone assumed the "infirmity of the flesh. But He did not remain mortal even in that flesh, for He raised it from the dead. For that is indeed the fruit of His mediation: that those for the sake of whose redemption He became the Mediator should no longer remain subject to eternal death even of the flesh. It was, therefore, fitting for the Mediator between us and God to have both transient mortality and everlasting blessedness, so that, in His transient condition, he might resemble those destined to die, and might translate them from their mortality into His everlasting condition." So Jesus as mediator took on the corruptible body in order to transform it—and it is because of their inability to do this, Augustine argues, that demons cannot act as intermediaries.

<sup>349</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 143. Taylor's reference to the cogito stems from what has been referred to as the Augustinian proto-cogito. In Book II of *On Free Will*, Augustine tells his interlocutor that "he cannot doubt his existence, since 'if you did not exist it would be impossible for you to be deceived.'" But whereas Descartes takes the cogito as a point of departure for a radically dualistic anthropology, Taylor suggests that the presence of the proto-cogito in Augustine moves along a different trajectory, that of self-reflexivity: "[the proto-cogito establishes] us in the first-person standpoint. It is a feature of this certainty, that it is a certainty for me; I am certain of my existence: the certainty is contingent on

So there are number of points of correspondence between Cartesian and Augustinian thought. But as it relates to inwardness, Taylor argues that Descartes takes a radical departure from the many Augustinian roots of his thought. To be more specific, the epoch-changing Cartesian twist that is added to Augustinian inwardness moves *the good* inside of the subject, *interiorizes* it. The subject's moral sources are relocated internally.<sup>350</sup> To flesh out the nature and extent of this Cartesian twist, Taylor outlines some of the ways in which Augustine and Descartes move in different directions from Platonism.

We saw above that Augustine preserves, in modified form, the Platonic view that being is good. And again following Plato, Augustine portrays the created world as an *ordered* world, as a cosmos. But as Taylor underscores, for Augustine humans do not always act upon the good they see. Because of the depravity of the will, because of sin and disobedience, the fallen subject requires God's grace to love fully the Good. And as Taylor's reading of Augustine highlights, the restoration that occurs through grace happens *within*, "[but] it does not come from a power which is ours. On the contrary, we turn to the path within only to accede beyond, to God."<sup>351</sup> In contradistinction to Augustine, Descartes, instead of beginning from a notion of cosmos and a theory of ontic logos à la Plato—that is, around the world of Ideas—conceives of the universe in mechanistic terms. Descartes follows Galileo, leaving behind a cosmos that is good in favor of a universe that

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the fact that knower and known are the same. It is the certainty of self-presence. Augustine was the inventor of the argument we know as the 'cogito', because Augustine was the first to make the first-person standpoint fundamental to our search for the truth." See *Sources of the Self*, 133.

<sup>350</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 143. As Taylor writes a little later in the chapter, "The new definition of the mastery of reason brings about an internalization of sources. When the hegemony of reason comes to be understood as rational control, the power to objectify the body, world, and passions, that is, to assume a thoroughly instrumental stance towards them, then the sources of moral strength can no longer be seen as outside us in the traditional mode... Of course, Augustine's theism remains, which finds our most important source in God... But on the human, natural level, a great shift has taken place. If rational control is a matter of mind dominating a disenchanted world of matter, then the sense of the superiority of the good life, and the inspiration to attain it, must come from the agent's sense of his own dignity as a rational being." See *Sources of the Self*, 151-152.

<sup>351</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 143.

simply is.<sup>352</sup> Taylor describes how this Galilean perspective is “representational”: “To know reality is to have a correct representation of things—a correct picture within of outer reality, as it came to be conceived.”<sup>353</sup> The representational model, then, reconfigures the way that one relates to “ideas”. Unlike the Platonic ontic view, the Cartesian perspective understands the ideas to exist “intra-psychically”, “in the mind”, so the order of ideas ceases to be something we *find* and becomes something we *build*. According to such a view, the Platonic ontic conception, which is founded on a belief in eternal, immutable Ideas writ large, as well as a “supersensible” spirit, “is precisely a paradigm example of the confusion between the soul and the material we must free ourselves from.”<sup>354</sup>

Taylor outlines how Descartes’ move away from a view of ontic logos towards a mechanistic one equips him to cultivate a new dualism—one that sets a disengaging course for the self vis-à-vis the world, including the body:

Coming to a full realization of one’s being as immaterial involves perceiving the ontological cleft between the two, and this involves grasping the material world as mere extension. The material world here includes the body, and coming to see the real distinction requires that we disengage from our usual embodied perspective, within which the ordinary person tends to see the objects around him as really qualified by colour or sweetness or heat, tends to think of the pain or tickle as in his tooth or foot. We have to objectify the world, including our own bodies, and that means to come to see them mechanistically and functionally, in the same way that an uninvolved external observer would.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Whereas for Augustine, “the fullness of perfection is...described in terms of insight into the good,” Descartes’ conception of insight moves in a different direction. In Taylor’s words, insight for Descartes “is not into an order of the good; rather it is into something which entails the emptiness of all ancient conceptions of such order: the utter separation of mind from a mechanistic universe of matter which is most emphatically not a medium of thought or meaning, which is expressively dead.” By adopting the Cartesian stance, “We demystify the cosmos as a setter of ends by grasping it mechanistically and functionally as a domain of possible means. Gaining insight into the world as mechanism is inseparable from seeing it as a domain of potential instrumental control.” See *Sources of the Self*, 148-149

<sup>353</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 144.

<sup>354</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 144.

<sup>355</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 145.

Taylor's claim is that this Cartesian move is not simply a rejection of traditional ontologies, like Plato's, but that it also fundamentally undermines the way that subjects had previously conceived of themselves as enfleshed, and the way that the enfleshment mediates one's experience of the world. He observes that there is something paradoxical in this Cartesian transposition of traditional notions of embodiment. To quote Taylor once again at length:

In one way, the Cartesian dualism seems more austere and severe than Plato's, since it no longer admits that the bodily can be some sort of medium in which the spiritual can appear...Yet in another way, Cartesian dualism *needs* the bodily as the Platonic did not. Not that Descartes doesn't conceive our entering into a disembodied condition after death, but rather that in our present condition, the way to realize our immaterial essence is by taking a certain stance to the body. Where the Platonic soul realizes its eternal nature by becoming absorbed in the supersensible, the Cartesian discovers and affirms his immaterial nature by objectifying the bodily.<sup>356</sup>

So the body is not only inescapable, but also the mind's proper comportment to the body through disengagement presents the self with the possibility of true self-knowledge. In other words, a stance of disengagement towards the body carries with it a large degree of moral import, because it is through such disengagement that the agent comes to know the full extent of the ontological primacy of the mind ("I think therefore I am").<sup>357</sup> This Cartesian move reduces the ontological status of the body to that of all objects, which moves Descartes and Augustine even further apart. If one follows Descartes in his rejection of the ontological primacy of the body for moral life, if the body is like any other object, it is unclear how one could simultaneously uphold a deep commitment to Incarnation—and all its moral, political, epistemological, and theological ramifications. As I have shown above, though admittedly rather introductorily, Augustinianism is deeply incarnational in its acknowledgement of the primal role of the body in the self's engagement with the divine.<sup>358</sup> Arguably, his incarnationality resists Cartesian disengagement from the body.

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<sup>356</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 146.

<sup>357</sup> Taylor writes: "The Cartesian soul frees itself not by turning away but by objectifying embodied experience. The body is an inescapable object of attention to it." *Sources of the Self*, 146.

<sup>358</sup> One final point made in *Sources of the Self* that adds to the rift between Augustinianism and Cartesianism concerns the nature of volition. Like Augustine, Descartes' ethics revolve around the centrality of the will, though the Cartesian "libre arbitre" is at odds with the Augustinian will. Whereas the good will in



So, we can see that Taylor is explicit that through the effects of Cartesian thought inwardness is transformed into something that is no longer recognizably Augustinian. The new modality of inwardness, though it exists alongside an acknowledgement of *Theos*, is a constitutive element of a Cartesian agent that understands itself to be fundamentally self-legislating. Taylor sums up the fundamental difference between the Augustinian and Cartesian inward turns like this: “Following Augustine’s path, the thinker comes to see more and more his lack of self-sufficiency, comes to see more and more that God acts within him. In contrast, for Descartes the whole point of the reflexive turn is to achieve a quite self-sufficient certainty.”<sup>359</sup> Taylor’s juxtaposition of what we might call Augustinian dependency or obedience with Cartesian self-sufficiency is very illuminating, as it does create some space between the two divergent conceptions of inwardness. But even here, in his discussion of dependency versus self-sufficiency, it seems to be the case that Taylor does not succeed in making the strongest case for what sets Augustine and Descartes apart because he does not attend properly to the role of externality and the body in Augustinianism. After all, for Augustine any thoughts of self-sufficiency, of self-law (*auto-nomos*) are radically interrupted by a range of sensible authorities, including revelation as received in the world, as well as the broken neighbor (once again encountered sensibly, outside the self) who demands a response in love. Indeed, for Augustine, the good will responds in love to what is given in the created world, and our experience of what is given (including Incarnation and revelation) cannot simply be reduced to the raw, noetic material of our ratiocinative faculties.

### 5.3 Reform, Discipline and Disenfleshment

As we saw in the previous section, the genealogy given in *Sources of the Self*, though it does not fully emphasize the authority of externality in Augustine, nevertheless describes some of the ways that Cartesian self-reflexivity departs from Augustinian inwardness. At the very least, Taylor’s

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Augustine is one that has its loves properly ordered in obedience to the divine will, the Cartesian will is conceptualized as radically autonomous from divine sanction. As Descartes writes rather explicitly in his Letters, “Now freewill is in itself the noblest thing we have because it makes us in a certain manner equal to God and exempts us from being his subjects; and so its rightful use is the greatest of all the goods we possess, and further there is nothing that is more our own or that matters more to us. From all this it follows that nothing but free will can produce our greatest contentments.” Quoted in *Sources of the Self*, 147.

<sup>359</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 156.

genealogy does not allow for any straightforward line from Augustine to Descartes. The Galilean perspective that contributes significantly to the shifting understanding of the causal world, from cosmos to universe, represents but one necessary precursor before Cartesian disengagement could even be conceivable. There are other important shifts between Augustine and Descartes. One important one, which I will discuss here, is what Taylor describes as the work of Reform, a central movement in his analysis of the secularization of post-Christendom. *A Secular Age* expatiates on the sources that give rise to secularity and disenchantment, and, relevant to the current discussion, its narrative includes a continued investigation into the foundations for the disembodiment trends in western thought as they contribute to secularity. Taylor observes that we moderns are now in “a world in which the only locus of thoughts, feelings, spiritual élan is what we call minds; the only minds in the cosmos are those of humans (grosso modo, with apologies to possible Martians or extra-terrestrials); and minds are bounded, so that these thoughts, feelings, etc., are situated ‘within’ them.”<sup>360</sup> So we see here an explicit connection to the analysis of Cartesian reflexivity in *Sources*. But in *A Secular Age*, the focus in his discussion of mind-centeredness is much less on the influence of Descartes on modern anthropological imaginaries, but more on the preconditions that allowed a philosophy like Descartes even to gain traction.<sup>361</sup> According to Taylor’s account, the best view of these preconditions comes from a consideration of what has changed through disenchantment.

One fundamental shift concerns the internalization of the locus of meaning that occurs as the cosmos is disenchanted. In the post-enchanted world, Taylor claims, meaning is situated exclusively within the human mind, “in the sense that things only have the meaning they do in that they awaken a certain response in us, and this has to do with our nature as creatures who are thus capable of such responses, which means creatures with feelings, with desires, aversions, i.e., beings endowed with minds, in the broadest sense.”<sup>362</sup> This stands in stark contrast to conceptions of meaning in an enchanted cosmos. For example, people living in the enchanted world experienced the cosmos as one filled with “extra-human agencies,” such as demons and spirits. These were understood to have power independent of the minds of humans. Another extra-human locus for “power and meaning”

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<sup>360</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 29-30.

<sup>361</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 30.

<sup>362</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 31. Regarding his terminology, Taylor writes, “I want to use for these the generic term ‘meaning’, even though there is in principle a danger of confusion with linguistic meaning. Here I’m using it in the sense in which we talk about “the meaning of life”, or of a relationship as having great “meaning” for us.

could be found in certain objects and places. Relics or holy places of pilgrimage and healing were commonly understood to be sites of ontological significance independent of the human experience of those objects and places.<sup>363</sup>

In light of the way these external forces impinged on the human subject of the enchanted world, Taylor describes it as a “porous self”—a conception of subjectivity that is open to the causal powers of extra-human agencies or enchanted (or “charged”) objects. The porousness of the self refers to the absence of “sharp boundaries” between the subject and the cosmos. Taylor contrasts the porous self with what he terms the “buffered self,” the modern self that is englobed by sharp boundaries. Unlike the porous self, “the buffered self can form the ambition of disengaging from whatever is beyond the boundary, and of giving its own autonomous order to its life. The absence of fear (from demons, etc) can be not just enjoyed, but seen as an opportunity for self-control or self-direction.”<sup>364</sup> Clearly, the Cartesian disengaged subject described in the previous section has a strong filiation with the buffered self that arises post-enchantment.

So Taylor’s claim is that the possibility for the buffered self resides in the slide to disenchantment. But what gives rise to this slide? He observes that disenchantment has traditionally been understood as a reality that emerges from a range of historical shifts and movements: “Renaissance humanism, the scientific revolution, the rise of the ‘police state,’ [and] the Reformation.”<sup>365</sup> But according to Taylor’s account, in order to understand properly all of these disenchanting forces, we must frame them within the matrix of what he calls “Reform.” Taylor argues that Reform arises from “a profound dissatisfaction with the hierarchical equilibrium between lay life and the renunciative vocations.” According to the perspective of Reform, these interdependent multiple “speeds” of belief and practice are problematic because such an “equilibrium involved accepting that masses of people were not going to live up to the demands of perfection. They were being ‘carried,’ in a sense, by the perfect.”<sup>366</sup> Taylor emphasizes that this movement of Reform is quite different from “small ‘r’” reform, through which the higher speeds work through proselytism and renewal movements “to convert more people from these [slower speeds] to the higher ‘speeds.’” But whereas small-r reformers sought to spread their “forms of practice and devotion, by preaching, encouragement, example,” Reformers sought to *delegitimize* the slower speeds. Taylor identifies motivating factors that

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<sup>363</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 32.

<sup>364</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38-39.

<sup>365</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 61.

<sup>366</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 61-62. Taylor suggests that there is something in this notion of Reform that “runs against the very spirit of Christian faith.”

underlie the attempts by both reformers and Reformers to restore and revitalize lives of the faithful, including a new form of highly devotional piety, as well as a suspicion of “magic.” But unlike groups like the Brethren of the Common Life, a confraternity that strove to cultivate a strong meditative and devotional life, but allowed followers to retain their secular vocations—thus remaining at the stratum of “small ‘r’ reform”—“large ‘R’” Reformers felt compelled to “smash the old dispensation” of multi-speed, hierarchical religious life.<sup>367</sup>

The second motivator for renewal mentioned above—the suspicion of magic—plays a central role in the work of Reform, contributing to disenchantment in general, but also to disenfranchisement. While the reining in of corrupt practices pertaining to various aspects of sacramental life was a positive consequence of this suspicion—the rooting out of the selling of indulgences being one obvious example—Taylor notes that the demagification of society, alongside the suspicion of hierarchy, was the most powerful factor that confronted and undermined medieval mass piety. The masses were now pulled by a “[gravitation] towards a quite different form of liturgy and church life, in which the sacraments tend to become purely symbolic, authority slides away from a hierarchy, and is placed back in Scripture, and the visible church is more sharply distinguished from the true community of the saved.”<sup>368</sup> Taylor notes that, though these historical shifts have been referred to as a series of “Proto-Reformations,” a fundamental element of the Reformation is absent: Luther’s doctrine of *sola fide*. Taylor contends that justification by faith found fertile ground in the field of fear that characterized the pre-Reformation period, as believers were inundated by the hyper-dread of damnation that went hand in hand with the corrupt system of the sale of indulgences (which added to the already significant fears of demonic extra-human agencies that impinged on the porous selves of that “enchanted” era). By articulating a doctrine that could assuage these

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<sup>367</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 76. Taylor points out that this “smashing” was enacted quite literally in the iconoclastic practices of Reformers. Taylor quotes an account of such iconoclasm from Preserved Smith’s *Erasmus*: “The mass has been abolished, but what more holy has been put in its place? ... I have never entered your churches, but now and then I have seen the hearers of your sermons come out like men possessed, with anger and rage on their faces ... They came out like warriors, animated by the oration of the general to some mighty attack. When did your sermons ever produce penitence and remorse? Are they not more concerned with suppression of the clergy and the sacerdotal life? Do they not make more for sedition than for piety? Are not riots common among this evangelical people? Do they not for small causes betake themselves to force?” *Erasmus* (New York: Ungar, 1962) 391-392.

<sup>368</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 74.

fears, Taylor argues that “Luther was touching on *the* nevralgic issue of his day... In raising his standard on this issue, Luther was on to something which could move masses of people, unlike the humanist critique of mass piety, or the rejection of the sacred.”<sup>369</sup> So in addition to the two already mentioned motivators for both small-r reform and Reform (the movement towards a highly devotional piety and the suspicion of magic) Luther contributes his doctrine of *sola fide*.

Unsurprisingly, the Reformation is described in Taylor’s account in *A Secular Age* as one of the central mechanisms of Reform, with its contribution being twofold. First, the Reformation had a massive role in the disenchanting of the cosmos. And second, primarily through Calvinist streams, the Reformation gave rise to a new order of discipline that sought to make over the world. Beginning with the first of these, Taylor notes how disenchantment contributes to a change in the “center of gravity of religious life,” with an increased internalization:

The power of God doesn’t operate through various ‘sacramentals,’ or locations of sacred power which we can draw on. These are seen to be something we can control, and hence blasphemous. In one way, we can see that the sacred/profane distinction breaks down, insofar as it can be placed in person, space, time, gesture. This means that the sacred is suddenly broadened: for the saved, God is sanctifying us everywhere, hence also in ordinary life, our work, in marriage, and so on. But in another way, the channels are radically narrowed, because this sanctification depends entirely now on our inner transformation, our throwing ourselves on God’s mercy in faith.<sup>370</sup>

So once again Taylor highlights a new mode of inwardness in western thought, but he is adamant that we have not yet reached the level of disengagement that is achieved through Descartes’ anthropological turn. The subject is not yet a mind-centered one, as we find demonstrated in Calvin’s emphasis “that God really acts, he communicates grace and sanctification to us. We are fed by God through Christ; and in a sense by his body and blood, because it is his bodily existence which gave satisfaction, culminating in the shedding of blood. So the Eucharist is the sign of something real.”<sup>371</sup> So we

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<sup>369</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 75.

<sup>370</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 79.

<sup>371</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 79. Taylor argues that what “Calvin can’t admit is that God could have released something of his saving efficacy out there into the world, at the mercy of human action, because that is the cost of really sanctifying creatures like us which are bodily, social, historical. The whole efficacy of the sacrament is contingent on the connection between God and my faith, a speech act

can see that Calvinism shares some important continuities with Augustine in terms of externality.

However, the Reformation deepened its disenchantment of Christendom, eventually reaching a point where the sacraments themselves are repudiated as yet another modality of the magic that characterized the corrupt hierarchical church. When disenchantment reaches this level, Taylor notes that the sacraments are not understood to be “useless,” but rather are experienced as objects of blasphemy, “because they are arrogating power to us, and hence ‘plucking’ it away ‘from the glory of God’s righteousness.’”<sup>372</sup> But it does set a course for a mode of religious life that can conceive of the Eucharist, for example, as a mere symbol, a tool for anamnesis. With this rejection of the traditional notion of sacramentality, the Reformation can be understood to be renouncing a mode of Incarnationality, as present in the Eucharist (for example), thus taking a dramatic step away from what might be described as a more enfleshed Christianity—such as was identified above in Augustine.

The increased disenchantment also provided the fertile ground for the Calvinist drive to make over the world through discipline and instrumentalization. The world extricated from enchantment is no longer understood or experienced as a cosmos saturated with the sacred. Accompanying the loss of the sacral element was the loss of a sense of a limit for our activity as it pertained to the world. Post-enchantment subjects enjoyed a newfound freedom “to re-order” the world as they saw fit. Taylor describes this new instrumentalist perspective as follows:

We take the crucial stance, for faith and glory of God. Acting out of this, we order things for the best. We are not deterred by the older tabus, or supposedly sacred orderings. So we can rationalize the world, expel the mystery from it (because it is all now consummated in the will of God). A great energy is released to re-order affairs in secular time.<sup>373</sup>

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made and uptaken. And we have to see and accept the full meaning for uptake to happen.” See Calvin’s *Institutions*, IV.xv.305.

<sup>372</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 79.

<sup>373</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 80. Taylor argues that this stance of instrumentality further entrenched the buffered self: “Now both their action in expelling the sacred from worship and social life, and the instrumental stance they take to things and to society in the course of building their order, tends to drive out enchantment from the world. This becomes progressively voided of its spirits and meaningful forces, and more and more the disenchanted world we are familiar with. In consequence the understanding of the subject as porous fades more and more away.” *A Secular Age*, 83.

The world is now encountered as means and supply to be reconfigured for the glory of God, and for the betterment of the neighbor—though this often was carried out in a paternalistic manner, as we will see in a moment. But importantly for Taylor’s narrative, this remaking of the world by those influenced by Calvin’s teaching was implemented in the modality of Reform. Taylor asserts,

Calvinists shared with many people of the day, particularly élites, a strong sense of the scandal of social disorder, that the general behavior was sinful ...and that society as a whole was given over to disorder, vice, injustice, blasphemy, etc. It was an important goal to remedy this, on the social and not only the personal level.”

In so doing, Taylor argues that Protestantism falls within the matrix of Reform—aiming as it did “to raise general standards...[and] to make certain pious principles absolutely general.”<sup>374</sup> So this movement of Reform takes shape as a non-hierarchical, rigorous moralism. But it does not simply eliminate the hierarchical structure—it accelerates the lower speeds up to the standard of the so-called “higher vocations”. Through this shift, Taylor argues, Calvinist Reform introduced “renunciation into ordinary life.” This renunciative ideal represented a means by which to overcome the perceived heresy of a hierarchy of believers, but in so doing “radical Protestantism” opened itself up to a new danger: “loading ordinary flourishing with a burden of renunciation it cannot carry. It in fact fills out the picture of what the properly sanctified life would be with a severe set of moral demands.”<sup>375</sup> So what did this look like on the ground, and what did it mean for the topic at hand, the slide to disenfranchisement?

Taylor refers to a number of political, ecclesial and legal programmes that were driven by the motivational forces of religious Reform, all of which contributed to increases in instrumentalism and disenfranchisement. These include: 1) the establishment of poor laws designed to sift out those who could work from those who could not, a legislative move which Taylor suggests resulted in a “profound shift in attitude; one might say, in the whole register in which poverty is understood”; 2) the agenda of political ecclesial authorities to stamp out aspects of popular culture, such as carnival or charivaris, that were newly branded as licentious (though hitherto sanctioned by these same authorities); 3) a new politics of effectiveness, consisting especially of the “development of effective governing structures

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<sup>374</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 82.

<sup>375</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 82.

imbued with the right spirit and discipline.”<sup>376</sup> Regarding the establishment of new forms of poor laws, Taylor argues that the legislative shift is representative of a complete reversal in the way that society’s destitute were viewed in many corners of Christendom. Though many may have had a “healthy contempt” for the poor, Taylor underscores how the marginalized, the broken, the powerless also “offered an occasion of sanctification” for those of higher socio-economic rank—a perspective that was understood to issue forth from the Gospel teaching of Matthew 25 (“just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me”). This moral sensibility regarding the destitute gives rise to a historical practice according to which the wealthy would bequeath alms to the poor in exchange for their praying for the souls of the benefactor. It was recognized that those in need had sanctifying power. But the new poor laws change the ways that the destitute were viewed. Taylor notes Bronislaw Geremek’s observation that largely as a result of these new laws, it was now only “voluntary poverty which was the path to holiness.”<sup>377</sup> The enforcement of the poor laws meant that those capable of working were either expelled from towns or forced to work for low wages and in harsh conditions, while those unable to work were given aid, but in what Taylor describes as prison-like conditions. So, unlike in the older model, according to which the indigent were seen as “[occasions] of sanctification,” the new model

set that aside and looked at the pauper in a radically different register, which was double: on the one hand he was tested for desert; did he merit, warrant aid, or should he be working for himself? And secondly, the dealings with him were assessed instrumental-rationally. Great attention was paid to getting the most bang for their buck.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 107-112. Regarding the new poor laws, Taylor lists other factors that contributed to their establishment: a spike in population, crop failures, and the consequent movement of significant numbers of the poor to urban areas. But we can see how the poor laws can be helpfully contextualized within the drive to Reform, and the culture of civility. Taylor also notes that Reform’s goals were further entrenched by the practices of civility. He claims that though “the goals of civility and religious reform...can be clearly distinguished in definition, they were frequently seamlessly combined in practice.” *A Secular Age*, 103.

<sup>377</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 108-109. Cf. Bronislaw Geremek. *La potence et la pitié: l’Europe et les pauvres du Moyen Age à nu jours*, Joanna Arnold-Moricet (trans.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) 32.

<sup>378</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 109. He notes how aid was distributed in “highly controlled conditions, which often ended up involving confinement in institutions which in some way resembled prisons. Efforts were made to rehabilitate the



We see how the new poor laws and the politics of effectiveness dovetail here. Taylor also notes how the “extreme Puritan view” was even more severe in its judgment of the poor, as exemplified in the assertion from the seventeenth-century Puritan William Perkins, according to whom beggars “are as rotten legs and arms that drop from the body.” So, according to Taylor’s account, the well-ordered society of Reform was an undesirable environment for the poor (at least this was the position of the elites who sought to eradicate them by Reforming them). The broken other was no longer encountered as an opportunity for sanctification (to use Taylor’s formulation). The broken other’s resemblance to the Crucified Christ was obscured by the new Reformed stance towards the poor and the weak: the other was now an opportunity to act efficiently, an object to be made over.<sup>379</sup>

The preceding discussion of Taylor’s narrative describes how the world of Reform already had in place a view of humans as raw material that could be made over—and this included a notion of self-disengagement. And this was further entrenched by the culture of civility, since its goals correspond nicely with the work of Reform. As he puts it,

The ideal of civility, with its core image of taming raw nature, already involves what we might call a stance of reconstruction towards ourselves...We treat our own baser nature as raw matter to be controlled, reshaped, and in certain cases eliminated, in order to impose a higher form on our lives. Of course, there are affinities to traditional ethical outlooks, Christian and ancient. All these involve in some way controlling or eliminating the base in the name of the higher. But what is special about this new outlook is the emphasis on will, and on the imposition of form on an inert or refractory matter.<sup>380</sup>

So disengagement and instrumentalism exist before Descartes enters the fray. But all of this receives *amplification* through secular sources, particularly through Descartes. As was discussed above, Descartes, building on the Galilean conception of a mechanistic universe, contributes a mind-centered perspective that strives to disengage from the body. Cartesian thought portrays this disentangling of mind from body as an ethical

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children of beggars, to teach them a trade, to make them useful and industrious members of society.”

<sup>379</sup> Taylor adds that, at least as it concerned Calvinists, what gave elites the confidence that they could in fact make over the world was a sense of election: “there was the belief [that] God’s providence would give them rulership, at least in the societies which had been elected as God’s chosen.” *A Secular Age*, 125.

<sup>380</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 112.

activity—mind must develop a proper comportment to body, one characterized by disengagement and control. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor also refers to Cartesian views on desire, noting that the combination of the fertile ground of Reformed Christendom and the culture of civility with Cartesian attitudes towards desire—according to which the agent seeks not to extinguish the passions, “but to bring them under the instrumental control of reason”—culminates in a “super-buffered” agent. This super-buffered agent

is not only not “got at” by demons and spirits; he is also utterly unmoved by the aura of desire. In a mechanistic universe, and in a field of functionally understood passions, there is no more ontological room for such an aura. There is nothing it could correspond to. It is just a disturbing, supercharged feeling, which somehow grips us until we can come to our senses, and take on our full, buffered identity.<sup>381</sup>

So Descartes takes the disengagement and the buffered self further than Reform could. But what should also be emphasized here is how the historical narrative provided by Taylor in *A Secular Age* identifies numerous intellectual, moral and theological developments that needed to occur before Augustinian inwardness could be transposed into the Cartesian self-reflexive, disengaged stance to the world (and to the body).

We can begin to get a sense of the moral ramifications of all of this. One specific example of the consequences of Reform was seen above with establishment of poor laws. But the ethical goals that gave rise to the poor laws can be understood to be representative of a shift in ethics more generally. To be more specific, there is something fundamentally anti-kenotic in the disengaged and disciplined stance. Taylor observes that the “[objectification] of the world gives a sense of power, and control, which is intensified by every victory of instrumental reason.”<sup>382</sup> The very fact that the disciplined, instrumental, buffered self is deeply implicated in the pursuit of *power* and *control* means that it is fundamentally at odds with any kenotic ethics. And equally important for ethics, the buffering of the self does not just insulate the agent from demonic agents, from objects of power that would threaten a porous subject—it *also insulates the self against the other*. The disengaged, buffered self can degenerate morally to the point where other selves are encountered as objects amongst a field of objects (animate and inanimate) that have no independent or autonomous moral import. These others become “like mushrooms [grown] out of the earth.”<sup>383</sup> The disengaged, buffered self is no longer confronted by an enfleshed other in a

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<sup>381</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 136.

<sup>382</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 540.

<sup>383</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 142.

way analogous to the Samaritan's encounter with the wounded Jew on the roadside.

To sum up, Taylor's account in *A Secular Age* describes how Reform sought to establish "a new form of religious life, more personal, committed, devoted."<sup>384</sup> But he also argues rather forcefully that Reform, in its pursuit of disenchantment, and an ordered and disciplined society, contributed to disengagement and a marginalization of embodiment. In addition to all of this, Taylor also claims that the result of Reform is not only that we have moved into a world that is more disembodied, but also that religious life—particularly Christian religious life—is more excarnated than it was pre-Reform. Taylor argues,

We have moved from an era in which religious life was more "embodied", where the presence of the sacred could be enacted in ritual, or seen, felt, touched, walked towards (in pilgrimage); into one which is more "in the mind", where the link with God passes more through our endorsing contested interpretations—for instance, of our political identity as religiously defined, or of God as the authority and moral source underpinning our ethical life.<sup>385</sup>

His position is that "mainstream Christianity" has undergone an "excarnation," moving away from enfleshed forms of religious life, including physical practices such as "creeping to the Cross", Candelmas, practices that accompany the liturgy as well as the sacraments, and of course (among some Protestants) the celebration of the mass itself. The slide to excarnation is also accompanied by, and contributes to, a different conception of moral life. In more incarnated Christian ethics, loving the other is irreducible to calculation or the following of rigid moralistic rules—which Taylor claims can degrade into a code fetishism or "nomolatriy"—and includes more enfleshed

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<sup>384</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 541.

<sup>385</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 554. Taylor notes that the excarnation of Christianity is not only rooted in Reform, but also has secular roots. These secular influences are found, for example, in the presuppositions that arise from the enlightenment: "Modern enlightened culture is very theory-oriented. We tend to live in our heads, trusting our disengaged understandings: of experience, of beauty (we can't really accept that it's telling us anything, unless about our own feelings); even the ethical: we think that the only valid form of ethical self-direction is through rational maxims or understanding. We can't accept that part of being good is opening ourselves to certain feelings; either the horror at infanticide, or agapê as a gut feeling." So there are secular influences that move towards disenfleshment. But Reform exacerbates the secular influence, so that in the end "much of modern Western Christianity has been following the same path." *A Secular Age*, 555.

encounters with the other, as exemplified by the pity felt in the bowels of the fully enfleshed Samaritan. But, largely as a consequence of Reform, western Christianity has tended to move to a form of faith that is “more ‘in the head.’”

Against this mind-centeredness, Taylor correctly notes that “there is something in Christian civilization which resists excarnation.”<sup>386</sup> We need only think of the few elements of Augustinian thought described above that show this to be the case. Nevertheless, in spite of these incarnational currents within the medieval church, Taylor claims that the movement of Reform has pushed “excarnation farther than ever before in human history.” Though many of the disenfleshing movements that arose from Reform and rigid moralism are concerned with semi-pagan practices of magic, issues to do with deviant sexuality, or violence, and thus ostensibly brought some gain, they have also brought vital losses. He argues that these movements have “also...steadily tended to exclude bodily desire as an expression of the higher, of fullness. There has been both ethical suppression, and disenchanting reduction.”<sup>387</sup>

Now that we have a sense of Taylor’s views on disenfleshment and Reform, we are better equipped to consider his efforts to rehabilitate the body. To frame this final section of the chapter, we should recall Taylor’s description in *Sources of the Self* of the inward turn that begins with Augustine, a self-reflexivity that sets the stage for Cartesian disembodiment dualism, and eventually for the excarnation of Reform. As was intimated above, a fundamental reason that Augustinian thought offers resources with which to resist the disenfleshing destinies of Cartesian philosophy is that Augustine emphasizes the authority of the sensible, created world. It is in the world of sensibility that we encounter revelation, and for Christianity it is within creation that Incarnation happens: God became flesh.<sup>388</sup> In what follows I will explore how Taylor analogously seeks to rehabilitate the body and sensibility as criterial for ethics. Through his appropriation of Illich’s work on the body in response to the excarnation of Christianity and fullness, Taylor puts forward a moral theory that resonates deeply with that of Augustine. As we will see, the points of convergence between Augustine and Taylor are precisely the points that I have argued set Augustinian thought against Cartesian philosophy—namely, the fundamental role of the body, of

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<sup>386</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 615.

<sup>387</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 615.

<sup>388</sup> This is a claim that not only Augustinians, but also Calvinists, would affirm. But what Taylor’s narrative in *A Secular Age* suggests is that it is largely through Calvinism, and other mechanisms of Reform, that code fetishism undermines the full normative force of the body as it pertains to agapeic ethics. As I will claim below, Augustine’s doctrine of the will, unlike Reform ethics, cannot be easily aligned with the nomolatriy of which Taylor and Illich are highly critical.

sensibility, and the authority of the created order. Or to put it in other terms, Taylor's rehabilitation of the body follows an Augustinian path by offering a robustly incarnational ethics.

#### 5.4 Recovering the Flesh

Other than perhaps "A Catholic Modernity?", the concluding sections of *A Secular Age* contain Taylor's most explicitly theological—and, I would argue, Augustinian—formulations. Many of these arguments—both the constructive and the critical—tend to revolve around the primacy of the body. We find this, for example, in Taylor's discussion of Martha Nussbaum's critique of the varied attempts, especially by religious thinkers and philosophers, to "transcend humanity." He points out that the primary "enemy" for Nussbaum is Christianity, especially Augustinianism. Taylor sympathizes at some level with Nussbaum's critique of what she perceives to be a deep hatred of the body in Christian thought and practice. However, though he does not defend Augustinian views *per se*, he does offer something of a response to Nussbaum. He points to Peter Brown's work in *The Body and Society* and, most specifically, the argument that monastic renunciation arose largely out of an "attempt to find a fuller response to the agapê of God as seen in Christ, to take part in a fuller, more all-embracing love."<sup>389</sup> The earthly goods to which the lives of lay persons are committed—family, procreation, property, etc.—were recognized by some to be obstacles to this fuller love, which demanded the "wholesale giving of oneself to the love of God." So the monastic renunciation of earthly goods, of the many objects of desire (including bodily ones), is rooted in *agapê*. However, Taylor warns that Christians must be cautious in any over-commitment to renunciation. He claims that a

religion of Incarnation cannot simply sideline the body. The "pity" ascribed to Jesus in the Gospel is a gut feeling; the eschatological perspective is for bodily resurrection. The Reformation accent on ordinary life goes much farther than Aristotle, not only making the sphere of production and the family part of the good life, but giving it a dignity which Aristotle had not accorded it.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>389</sup>Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 631. Cf. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); and Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), especially her chapter on Beckett.

<sup>390</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 640. Taylor adds that "[it] is not surprising that a central tradition of Catholic philosophy from the Middle Ages grounded itself on

The multi-speed, hierarchical system, acknowledges that all cannot uphold the renunciative standard of monastic orders—so it sets different standards for the laity. And this is one of the ways it remains connected to the primacy of the body.<sup>391</sup> The single-speed system, on the other hand, set a high moral standard for the laity, and this was done through the erection of a rigid set of rules governing moral behavior. But this rules-based approach has problematic consequences, on Taylor's view.

Drawing upon Illich's work, Taylor explores the ways in which western post-Christendom has fetishized rules for disciplined behavior. This nomolatri—literally “worshipping of rules”—has contributed to the supplanting of the body in western moral life. Moreover, where Christianity is implicated in this code fetishism, Taylor (again following Illich) claims that something at the very heart of Christianity has been distorted (or, as Illich puts it, “*corruptio optimi quae est pessima*”—the corruption of the best is the worst). One reason that morality-cum-code of conduct is described as a distortion is that, according to the Christian perspective, our moral behavior, our enactments of love, or indeed any actions, are set within “two dimensions, one of right action, and also an eschatological dimension.” The latter of these, Taylor emphasizes, is “a dimension of reconciliation and trust, but it points beyond any merely intra-historical perspective of possible reconciliation.”<sup>392</sup> A purely rules-based morality obscures the basic fact of Christian belief that the extent of divine reconciliation will only be fully disclosed at the end of time—and this is one of the failings of Reform Christianity: it tries to make everybody over through discipline and rules, to reconstruct them as perfectly behaved moral beings, thus neglecting the inescapable reality of human sinfulness. Taylor argues that in the pre-Reform medieval world

it was generally understood that the full demands of Christian life would never be met, outside of isolated pockets of sanctity, in history, but only in the Parousia, at the end of time. It was recognized that there were structural features of our existence here, for instance, the existence of states, and of private property, which were inseparable from our fallen condition; these were necessary to mitigate some of the disastrous effects of the Fall, but just for this reason, they couldn't be projected forward into the eschaton. This meant that the two

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Aristotle's philosophy.” See also the section of *Sources of the Self* entitled “The Affirmation of Ordinary Life,” which explores how the quotidian life of individuals received a new moral emphasis as a result of the Reformation.

<sup>391</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 643.

<sup>392</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 706.

orders in which the Christian lived, the City of God and the earthly city, to use Augustine's expression, could never be totally in true with each other. There were strains. And this was reflected in differential rules of action, which may seem to us today to be hypocritical or inconsistent. So war was allowed in certain circumstances, but clergy should not take part in combat. The Church itself could not use force to fight heresy, but this was left to the "secular arm". And it is true that these arrangements easily pass over into mere expedients to protect the appearances of ecclesiastical innocence and non-involvement. But within the then regnant outlook there was no totally comfortable way of smoothly combining the demands of the two orders.<sup>393</sup>

Taylor's main point is that the "not yet" of the eschatological dimension is obscured with the drive to Reform. Reform strove to delegitimize and eliminate the slower speeds, to bring the masses up to the level of religious devotion of the elite. All were called on to commit their lives to bring into reality *here and now* the redemptive power of the Gospel for the world. Taylor argues that "this couldn't help but bring about a definition of the demands of Christian faith closer into line with what is attainable in this world, with what can be realized in history."<sup>394</sup> So through Reform, the "not yet" of the eschatological dimensions is displaced by a religion of the "already"—reconciliation is no longer disclosed *at the end of time*, at the *eschaton*, but *in time* through the work of God's elect Reforming the world. The "gap" between the already and the not yet "has narrowed, and the tensions [have been] lost sight of."<sup>395</sup> Taylor asks if this narrowing of the gap should be considered a loss, and suggests that this can answered affirmatively—which brings him to the work of Ivan Illich.

Taylor explores how Illich's thought evinces two ways that this can be viewed as a loss. First, by aligning the city of God so closely with the earthly

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<sup>393</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 735.

<sup>394</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 735. Taylor continues, "If one carries this rapprochement of the two orders to its ultimate end point, one falls into a kind of Deism, in which the Incarnation loses its significance, Jesus becomes a great teacher expounding the demands of God, and what these demands consist in is a morality which allows us to live here in peace and harmony, a version in other words of the modern moral order. The whole point of true religion is to propound this morality; this sets the limits of the transformation we are called to. The "next world" now has a different function, not to complete a path of "theiosis" begun here, but to provide rewards and punishments which fulfill the demands of justice on our actions in history. The tension between the two orders quite disappears." See 735-736.

<sup>395</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 737.

city in its *telos*, the transformative eschatological hope and faith of Christian life is lost sight of, obscured. And second, as alluded to above, a degeneration of a fundamental element of the Good News occurs when the spontaneous fleshly agapeic response is supplanted by a different moral stance, a disenfleshed agency that adheres to codified rules for behavior. Before digging deeper into Illich's critique of disenfleshed Christianity, it is worth emphasizing his influence on Taylor's own argument in *A Secular Age*. Taylor himself acknowledges both that Illich has influenced his own argument, and that the "story" about western modernity told in Illich's *Rivers North of the Future* resembles quite closely the one Taylor narrates in *A Secular Age*.<sup>396</sup> And there are various noteworthy points of correspondence: Taylor, like Illich, refers to the primacy of gut responses for moral life throughout his most recent work; both are critical of disembodiment/excarnation, the rise of code fetishism; and both can be described as anti-Christendom thinkers. In what follows, I rarely distinguish between the positions of Taylor and Illich, because at all points Taylor endorses Illich's story about the excarnation of Christianity and modern ethical life. Thus, I am in deep agreement with a statement made by John Milbank at a recent conference on Taylor's work on secularity, in which he claimed that one cannot understand *A Secular Age* without acknowledging how fundamental Illich is to the central argument of the monograph.<sup>397</sup>

Some brief mention of Illich's reading of the parable of the good Samaritan has already been made in previous chapters, but the details of his interpretation, especially as they are taken up by Taylor, require a bit closer attention. On Illich's view, Jesus' response to the question "who is my neighbor?" has been made less radical by a particular very common interpretation of the parable. According to the relatively standardized reading, what Jesus' answer signifies is that our moral responsibility is universal—we are not only responsible for those who share our particularities, such as our family, tribe, nation, etc., but for all people regardless of any particular socio-political affiliation or any familial association. And as Taylor notes, on such a reading the parable

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<sup>396</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 737. See also Taylor's prefatory comments in *Rivers North of the Future*.

<sup>397</sup> Milbank's paper, entitled "What is Ordinary Life? Taylor, Catholicism and Modernity," was delivered at Varieties Of Secularism in a Secular Age, a conference held at Yale University, April 4-5, 2008. A modified version of the paper appears as a review article entitled "A Closer Walk on the Wild Side: Some Comments on Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22/1 (2009), 89-104.



can be seen as one of original building blocks out of which our modern universalist moral consciousness has been built. So we take in the lesson, but we put it in a certain register, that of moral rules, how we ought to behave. The higher moral rules are the universal ones, those which apply across the whole human species. We concentrate on the move out of the parochial.<sup>398</sup>

So the universalization of responsibility (an ethic of which the philosopher Jacques Derrida is highly critical)<sup>399</sup> finds a powerful source in this reading of the parable of the good Samaritan. But according to Illich, to interpret the parable in such a way is to miss what is really crucial and utterly radical in Jesus' response. Instead, Illich suggests that what is essential in Jesus' answer to the question about what constitutes the neighbor is this: "What the story is opening for us is not a set of universal rules, applying anywhere and everywhere, but another way of being. This involves on one hand a new motivation, and on the other, a new kind of community."<sup>400</sup> Let me expand further on this.

What the parable articulates, or rather discloses, is a new mode of human *inter-relationality*. The Samaritan's response to the injured Jew on the roadside reveals what Illich refers to as a new fittingness, a new ("dysymmetrical") proportionality: the parable

makes me understand that I am "I" in the deepest and fullest sense in which it is given to me to be "I" precisely because you, by allowing me to love you, give me the possibility to be co-relative to you, to be dysymmetrically proportionate to you. I see, therefore, in love, hope and charity the crowning of the proportional nature of creation in the full, old sense of that term. Nothing is what it is except because *convenit*, it fits, it is in harmony with something else, and I am free to choose with whom, or better, to accept from whom I want, to whom I let myself be given, the possibility of loving.<sup>401</sup>

Illich's reading of the parable, like the more common "universalizing" one he describes, does identify how barriers between particularities are pulled down through this new proportionality. However, what is occluded in the merely universalist reading is the unique form of freedom that the parable

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<sup>398</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 738.

<sup>399</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>400</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 738.

<sup>401</sup> Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 197. Cf. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 739. Cf. Taylor's preface to *Rivers North of the Future*.

opens up. As Taylor correctly underscores, this new liberty is not self-generated, autonomous, disengaged willing. Instead, the very possibility of the Samaritan's freedom rests on the encounter with the other to whom he responds. It allows the Samaritan to break out of the strictures of divisive particularities, but it also affords him the opportunity to respond in love to *this particular enfleshed other*. Taylor sums up the magnitude of the new agapeic proportionality that "comes from God" through Incarnation:

The enfleshment of God extends outward, through such new links as the Samaritan makes with the Jew, into a network, which we call the Church. But this is a network, not a categorical grouping; that is, it is a skein of relations which link particular, unique, enfleshed people to each other, rather than a grouping of people together on the grounds of their sharing some important property.<sup>402</sup>

So what this account highlights is that the visible church is constituted by actual embodied persons who are "called out"—the literal meaning of "*ekklesia*"—to respond in love to other enfleshed persons.

But one source for the degeneracy of this network arises from the institutionalization of charity and the consequent displacement of the body. Taylor, following Illich, describes how the Church, for it to remain this network of *agapê*, "involves a kind of fidelity" to the new proportionality. Largely because of a recognition of the way that sin can draw us away from such a fidelity, rules are established to ensure "we keep the hungry fed, the homeless housed, the naked clothed." But through the institutionalization of charity, the enfleshed character of *agapê* is pushed aside and the philanthropic activities of the Church become "living caricatures of the network life." When charity is institutionalized, what is lost is the encounter between enfleshed beings—the call to love the neighbor becomes excarnated.<sup>403</sup>

This brings us back to the notion that our moral intuitions have an enfleshed component. In previous chapters, we encountered Illich's insight that one of the New Testament Greek terms for pity is *splangnizesthai*, a word

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<sup>402</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 738.

<sup>403</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 739. Taylor describes further how the bureaucratization of undermines the "skein of relations" as a living community: "Rules prescribe treatments for categories of people, so a tremendously important feature of our lives is that we fit into categories; our rights, entitlements, burdens, etc., depend on these. These shape our lives, make us see ourselves in new ways, in which category-belonging bulks large, and the idiosyncratically-enfleshed individual becomes less relevant, not to speak of the ways in which this enfleshed person flourishes through his/her network of friendships." 739-740.

that is cognate to “bowels”—so pity presents itself in part through a physical response in the agent. Or, to recall Taylor’s formulation of this: Agapê moves outward from the guts. However, by displacing the face-to-face enfleshed encounter in favor of a code of proper conduct, Illich and Taylor argue, something fundamental to moral life becomes lost. The “gut-driven” enactments of *agapê* cannot be legislated or captured by a set of rules, and it is only once the body is excluded as criterial for moral life that the slide to ethics as mind-centered calculation becomes more conceivable. Furthermore, as Taylor argues convincingly throughout his work, modern liberal societies fetishize these rules for right action. According to this modern perspective, the belief is that a good society must be centered around the best (or *right*) set of rules, and that the society must be uncompromising in its adherence to this best code. Correspondingly, the good person is the one that follows these inflexibly. It is precisely because of this narrow-sightedness of modern ethics that, in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor tries to revitalize modern ethics by moving away from the singular focus on what it is good to do, and to rehabilitate the notion that morality is also fundamentally concerned with what it is good to be. Taylor returns to code fetishism in *A Secular Age*, but there his argument models itself on Illich’s retrieval of the body. To cite Taylor at length, through the fetishization of rules

something crucial in the Samaritan story gets lost. A world ordered by this system of rules, disciplines, organizations can only see contingency as an obstacle, even an enemy and a threat. The ideal is to master it, to extend the web of control so that contingency is reduced to a minimum. By contrast, contingency is an essential feature of the story as an answer to the question that prompted it. Who is my neighbour? The one you happen across, stumble across, who is wounded there in the road. Sheer accident also has a hand in shaping the proportionate, the appropriate response. It is telling us something, answering our deepest questions: *this* is your neighbour. But to hear this, we have to escape from the monomaniacal perspective in which contingency can only be an adversary requiring control.<sup>404</sup>

This preceding argument from Illich and Taylor obviously has something to say about ethics in general. There is a loss that takes places when ethics are reduced to a rigid set of rules. If the experiences of the body contain something that is criterial for the good life, including the way that we relate to others, then mind-centered perspectives—like Descartes—will be utterly inadequate in their descriptions of the human. And when disembodied anthropological views are coupled with code fetishism, the morally

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<sup>404</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 742.

constructive potential of the body is even further subverted. Of course, the Illich-Taylor perspective also contributes something helpful regarding the way that Christians relate to the other, and the way that believers conceive of the ecclesia. The basic claim is that the “network of agape,” the Church, represents a way of being that “can only be created in enfleshment.”<sup>405</sup> The ecclesial body is an enfleshed body. Illich and Taylor’s ecclesiology thus warns against church practices that seek to convert the bodily practices of *agapê* into merely institutionalized ones, through which the neighbor is kept at arms length and the normative force of enfleshed moral intuitions like *splangnizesthai* becomes marginalized.

We can now return to my claim that Taylor’s response to excarnation is Augustinian. Though Taylor does not frame his discussion of love in terms of will, it is arguable that he and Augustine share much common ground in terms of the importance of the body for moral life, as well as how the world that is given—the sensible, created world—provides agents with the

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<sup>405</sup> Taylor alludes to a number of “new itineraries to the Faith” that reacted against this disenfleshing, objectifying perspective. One example is Charles Péguy. Taylor argues that Péguy was not “easily subsumable within the regnant Tridentine Catholicism [of his time], with its emphasis on rules, on obedience to authority, not to speak of its suspicion of the flesh and the people.” Péguy’s response to these objectifying socio-political and ecclesial forces emphasizes the fundamental place of the body in the communion of believers. On the one hand, according to Péguy, the Christian’s appropriate comportment to the ecclesia is enacted corporeally: “No-one is as knowledgeable as the sinner in matters of Christianity. No one if not the saint. And in principle, it’s the same person... The sinner extends his hand to the saint, since the saint reaches out to help him. And all together, the one through the other, the one pulling the other, they form a chain that rises up to Jesus, a chain of fingers that can’t be disconnected... The one who is not Christian is the one who does not offer his hand.” On the other hand, Péguy reasons, those who are called out, the ecclesia, have a fleshly commonality: “One is not Christian because one is at a certain moral, intellectual, or even spiritual level. One is Christian because one belongs to a race which is re-ascending, to a certain mystical race that is spiritual and carnal, temporal and eternal; in other words, because one is of a certain blood.” Taylor claims that though there has been much misunderstanding about Péguy’s “racial” terminology, what should be emphasized in Péguy’s formulation is “the carnal, the notion that the spiritual is always incarnate, and that in chains which cut across time. It reflects how for Péguy, his Christian faith is animated by his profound rejection of modern excarnation. This is, as it were the path by which he rejoins the faith of the Incarnation. And the crucial concept here is communion, the ‘joining of hands’, in other words, the communion of saints, to which we are all connected.” See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 751.

prerequisites for moral freedom. It was discussed above how, for Illich and Taylor, the freedom that comes from *agapê* is one that arises from the encounter with the other. Though it is a complex topic, and one that is much discussed, I will examine very briefly Augustine's doctrine of the will because I would argue that it aligns rather closely with Taylor's own response to excarnation. Theologian David Schindler's work will be helpful for this brief engagement with Augustine's work on the human will. According to Schindler, a common interpretation of free will sees it as "the autonomous power of choice, and thus ultimately only accountable to itself."<sup>406</sup> As has been mentioned at numerous junctures in this chapter, this understanding of volition resonates strongly with the Cartesian will that recognizes no external limits on its spontaneity. However, as Schindler rightly argues, such a conception of free will runs against the grain of Augustinian thought. Schindler claims that Augustine indeed understands the will to be self-determining, but also that the capacity for self-determination is inseparable from the fact that the will must also be ordered to the good. Schindler identifies the continuity between the Aristotelian and Augustinian conceptions of ends (*teloi*) as goods. For Aristotle as for Augustine, a good is only a good if it is an end. Schindler describes Augustine's teleological position as follows: "[To] say that something is a good is to say that it is an *end*, that wherein the will's activity comes to rest. For Augustine, we *enjoy* a good precisely because it presents itself as a good: "to enjoy something is to cling to it with love for its own sake."<sup>407</sup> Moreover, the will does not accidentally stumble upon these goods and then choose them. Instead, the goods that we enjoy—that is, goods that are enjoyed for themselves—have something of a claim on us: "[A] genuine end...must in some respect move me prior to my choosing it. Goodness or value presents itself phenomenologically as attraction...[and] as the intimate 'tugging' on me of something other than myself."<sup>408</sup>

Rather than being empty autonomous acts of choice, acts of will consist of a *reception of* and *consent to* what is given. In light of this basic claim, Schindler argues that the individual will cannot create *ex nihilo*, since the good will can only act spontaneously by consenting to those goods which move it prior to choice: consent "is in every case a *response*."<sup>409</sup> The will understood as such is dissimilar to the disengaged, autonomous, Cartesian will, since those goods which are given, and which elicit a response and

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<sup>406</sup> David Schindler, "Freedom beyond Our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and Its Objects," In John Doody, Kevin Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth (eds.), *Augustine and Politics* (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books, 2005) 68.

<sup>407</sup> Schindler, 73.

<sup>408</sup> Schindler, 75.

<sup>409</sup> Schindler, 80-81.

consent, *limit* the good will in its spontaneity. According to the Augustinian view, freedom is not boundless choice, then, but rather “the ability to consent with the whole of [one’s] being to the good that demands to lay hold of [one].”<sup>410</sup> When the will is sinful, when it ignores the good that demands consent, it is unfree. Unlike the disengaged autonomous will, which understands itself as free when it asserts itself without limit, the will as described by Schindler is reconcilable with Augustine’s claim that the will “is truly only free when it is not the slave of vices and sin” (CG 14.11).

So, according to this reading of Augustine’s doctrine of the will, the human will is able to be free and well-ordered through a response and consent to what is given. In other words, Incarnation, externality, revelation, and the world mediate our access to God. This basic fact of Augustinian thought not only corresponds closely with Taylor’s formulations, but also provides resources that can militate against the excess of Cartesianism and excarnation. For Augustinian inwardness to be co-opted by Descartes’ disengaged philosophy, the authority that Augustine ascribes to the sensible world and the body has to be set aside. While it was shown to be the case that Taylor does not pay sufficient attention to the role of Augustinian externality in *Sources of the Self*, his narrative of the rise of Reform goes a long way to help us understand what changed in the millennium between Augustine and Descartes that contributed to the occlusion of the body in moral life. The self undergoes significant disenfleshment—largely through *non-Augustinian* Christian Reform—before the Cartesian, disengaged, disembodied, reflexive self enters the anthropological fray. It is evident, then, that Augustine does not need saving from Taylor. At the very least, Taylor’s own moral philosophy (his critique of hyper-Augustinianism notwithstanding) appears to be closer to that of Augustine than the perspectives of Plato or Descartes.

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<sup>410</sup> Schindler, 85.

## Chapter 6: Towards an Enfleshed, Kenotic Pluralism

I claimed in the last chapter that though he is fairly critical of what he calls “hyper-Augustinianism,” there are fundamental parts of Taylor’s ethics—particularly his religious ethics—that have an Augustinian shape. These include his emphasis on desire and love as the center of moral motivation, his theistic arguments in favor of diversity and pluralism, and, finally, his rehabilitation of externality and the body. These facets of Taylor’s programme are at the core of his pluralist, enfleshed, kenotic ethics. And insofar as his ethics is fundamentally other-centered—as we observed in the interpretation of the Samaritan parable, in which a new kind of relationality is established through the encounter with *this* particular enfleshed, broken neighbor—it is evident that *A Secular Age* (as well as the other publications that are part of Taylor’s religious turn) take up the Nietzschean dilemma articulated in the conclusion of *Sources of the Self*. As Taylor asserts in *Sources*, if moderns are to overcome the Nietzschean dilemma they need to make a successful case for *agapê* or a secular iteration of it. This dissertation has illuminated many of the ways that *agapê* is a cornerstone of Taylor’s religious thought. How does Taylor’s story, his counter-genealogy, fare against the Nietzschean anti-agapeic story?

In order to engage this question, let us return to the parable of the good Samaritan. I would like to give this parable two very brief readings to compare with the Taylor-Illich one, because these alternate readings help bring to the surface the strengths and weaknesses of the Taylorian account. Let me begin with a Nietzschean analysis of the parable. One facet of the Taylor-Illich reading that is central to it is how the Samaritan’s fleshly response stands in stark contrast to modern code fetishism. The encounter breaks down divisive categories of us/them that govern behavior, including in the nomolatrous milieu. The Samaritan disabuses himself of the force of these codes when he encounters the broken other. This embodied encounter establishes a relationality that is constituted by an agapeic spontaneity, a freedom enacted in love for the neighbor. Interestingly, a somewhat similar drama is recounted in *Zarathustra*, in which Nietzsche’s protagonist responds to what is given in a way that enables him to disregard the “thou shalt”, the externally imposed code of conduct. In his encounter with and affirmation of the eternal recurrence, Zarathustra self-transcends via the overcoming of nomolatriy, a *nomos* that is externally imposed. Through the rejection of the thou shalt, made possible through the transformative power of the doctrine of eternal recurrence, Zarathustra becomes the creator, the spontaneous agent who can will creatively. So we observe the similarities between the Nietzschean parable and the one of the good Samaritan. Both Zarathustra and the Samaritan reject code fetishism, the externally imposed

laws that limit their spontaneity. And their spontaneity is founded by a transformative encounter with transcendence. But for Nietzsche, that spontaneity that is established is willing without any *external limit*—it is only such a self-creating limitless will that is deserving of *latreia*. There is no room in the Nietzschean account for the neighbor, especially not the broken one, who limits our willing. The broken other that gives rise to a new freedom in the Illich-Taylor reading is an imposition on true freedom on the Nietzschean view. We can be certain that Nietzsche would find nobody redeemable in the parable. The priest and the Levite are camels and carry the burden of the “thou shalt”, and thus lack the very possibility for the spontaneous “yes” of the child. The Samaritan, by the very fact that he rejects the political division that separates him from the injured Jew, may overcome the “thou shalt” momentarily—but the obedience to the call for help from the broken other would seem to be a capitulation to another kind of external authority. And, to worsen things from a Nietzschean perspective, this external authority is a *weak* authority. Indeed, the capitulation to the weakling may even earn the Samaritan a lower place in the Nietzschean hierarchy of being than the priest and the Levite—who, by passing by the injured man, at least seem to acknowledge the repellent nature of weakness.

The reading of the parable that Taylor endorses stands in stark contrast to the Nietzschean one. The moral intuition that Taylor emphasizes is a gut response experienced in its immediacy to the other—it is not a product of slave morality, nor does it underlie an ethics of *ressentiment*. The very fact that Nietzsche must undergo genealogical work suggests quite clearly that the rules that compose slave morality are codified over time. Indeed, for the weak to subdue the strong, it must be a collaborative effort over time—for if the “weak” can subdue the “strong” *spontaneously*, it is unclear how the former could in fact be *weak*. However, as we see in the Taylor-Illich interpretation, the *agapê* that is enacted by the Samaritan is in fact *spontaneous* and *cannot be codified or legislated*. So whereas Nietzsche’s critique of slave morality may gain traction when it is directed at a code-fetishist ethics that props up the weak, it appears to miss the mark of the spontaneous incarnational love that moves outward from the bowels of the freely acting agent—a freedom that is manifested in obedience to an external authority.

Surely, an Augustinian reading of the parable would be much more compatible with that of Taylor. However, while highlighting the points of correspondence may be interesting, what I would suggest is more significant is an important point of divergence. This brings us back to Taylor’s objection to the hyper-Augustinian. I argued above that Augustinian thought is attentive to the role of externality and the body, and suggested further that Taylor’s desire to rehabilitate the body in ethical life is consistent with Augustinian thought. However, while we as embodied beings may experience



revelation and Incarnation through our senses, for Augustine it is vitally important that the body is also a site for disobedience, ignoring what is given. This is seen most clearly in lustfulness. The Augustinian agent doesn't always act for the good she sees, and Augustine's exploration of lust attempts to convey how human sexuality is inescapably disordered, setting the flesh against the spirit. For Augustine, we can only come to grips with the extent and source of human disobedience through a consideration of sin and the depravity of the will—a basic component of hyper-Augustinianism. Though Taylor does occasionally speak of sin, his engagement with it is often peripheral, or consists mainly of summaries of the views of his cast of characters in *A Secular Age*.<sup>411</sup> Since, as was shown in chapter two, the category of *obedience* is one that fundamentally sets him apart from Nietzsche, it is a bit strange that he rarely talks about the nature of or source for human *disobedience*. Let us consider this gap as it relates to the good Samaritan parable. While Taylor endorses a highly illuminating account of the *Samaritan's* moral intuitions, what might he make of the *priest* and the *Levite* that pass by on the roadside? In his appropriation of Illich's reading of the parable, Taylor does not really talk about how or why moral agents are even able to ignore the embodied, broken other on the road. This is interesting, since one of his explicit goals is to talk about how the body (and its physical intuitions) can be criterial for morality. Furthermore, insofar as all humans are embodied, it would seem that enfleshed encounters with the other disclose something that is humanly normative—surely, because we are embodied, we are all capable of being “moved in the bowels.” This is part of the reason that *agapê* cannot be captured by a system of rules of obligation for Taylor. *Agapê* flows out of a receptivity to what the other discloses. But if these gut responses are universal and humanly normative, how then do the priest and the Levite ignore the visceral intuition that gives rise to the

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<sup>411</sup> In her review essay of *Sources of the Self*, Judith Shklar mentions how this represents a lacuna in Taylor's own Augustinianism. She writes, “In his emphasis on Augustine's celebration of our capacity to reach out toward perfection, Taylor seems to underestimate the overpowering sense of evil that makes The City of God so significant for contemporary readers. His Augustine is mild and hopeful, not the excoriating critic of Roman civic ideology, the lamenter of our inability to ever know enough to make last judgments, and the theological geographer who put original sin in all its pride and cupidity on the moral map of Europe.” However, she continues, “It would, however, be unfair to accuse Taylor of not being aware of these considerations. He calls them ‘hyper-Augustinianism’ and sees them as a recurrent feature in modern Europe, especially among Jansenists and Calvinists. He does not tell us why they were wrong, but he does think that Augustine's account of sin is not nearly as significant as his discovery of inwardness for the construction of the European self.” 106.

*Samaritan's* pity? There is no clear explanation in Taylor's efforts to rehabilitate the body regarding why the fleshly moral motivation of pity does not *always* result in an enactment of agape.<sup>412</sup> The hyper-Augustinian of course has no problem accounting for the inaction of the priest and the Levite: it is because of the depravity of the will, and the disorderedness of our loves, that we can disregard the good that we encounter, that is revealed to us—or, against the Platonic view, that we can turn away from the good we see. And interestingly, as Taylor himself points out, "There is something gratuitous in love as well as in the refusal to love; and this, of course, is at the heart of the Judeo-Christian outlook."<sup>413</sup> While Taylor may have his reasons for shunning the hyper-Augustinian, it is unclear how exactly his viewpoint fully captures the second side of this Judeo-Christian gratuity, the ability to *disobey*. Indeed, it is precisely because the fellow Jews in the parable exercise this option that the Samaritan's obedience is all the more remarkable.

Furthermore, for the Augustinian, the depravity of the will and inescapability of sin do not only have salvific and ethical consequences, but also have ramifications for our socio-political reality. Augustine's descriptive account of earthly politics in *City of God* exposes how the political animal is self-loving, loves glory, and is driven by the *libido dominandi*. And while governments may be extensions of these fallen impulses, the political regime is nevertheless required to mediate these competing wills, to wield the sword in order to maintain an earthly peace. An Augustinian politics assumes that sinners will disobey and ignore their moral intuitions—in other words, it anticipates the non-agapeic path of the priest and the Levite. Accordingly, an Augustinian politics is fundamentally realistic and practical.

John Milbank raises a related point as it relates to the institutions and rules that have been established to ensure that the other is protected and cared for when agents may choose not to love the other. More specifically, he wonders what the consequences are if we follow the Taylor-Illich critique of moral codes and institutions. He asks: "How do we acknowledge the truth of Illich's insights while still saluting the uniquely *practical* bent of Latin Christianity? How do we allow that some procedure and institutionalization is required, without destroying the interpersonal?"<sup>414</sup> Milbank's point is that

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<sup>412</sup> As a point of clarification, my claim here is not that, for Augustine, pity is always present in these kinds of encounters. Rather, the present point is a more general one: namely, that Augustine, unlike Taylor, is able to account for why a moral agent may not act on a moral motivation (such as, but not limited to, pity), why she may not love when love is what is demanded.

<sup>413</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. 139.

<sup>414</sup> John Milbank, "A Closer Walk on the Wild Side: Some Comments on Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22/1 (2009), 103. Milbank continues, "This is an especially relevant question today because arguably, as

these institutions and codes are *necessary*; it would be utterly impracticable for societies to operate purely at the face-to-face level, with citizens acting in accordance with their fleshly intuitions. Taylor in some way anticipates this potential criticism. He points out that Illich does not fully dismiss the importance of institutions or codified rules for behavior. Instead, he sums up Illich's position as follows:

We can't live without codes, legal ones which are essential to the rule of law, moral ones which we have to inculcate in each new generation. But even if we can't fully escape the nomocratic-judicialized-objectified world, it is terribly important to see that that is not all there is, that it is in many ways dehumanizing, alienating; that it often generates dilemmas that it cannot see, and in driving forward, acts with great ruthlessness and cruelty. The various modes of political correctness, from Left and Right, illustrate this every day.<sup>415</sup>

So, according to Taylor's portrayal of Illich here, what is crucial is that we recognize how limited the code-fetishist perspective is, how institutionalized charity stifles something fundamental to *agapê*—but the point is not that we must eliminate institutions and codes. But how for Taylor do we strike a balance between the primacy of the interpersonal and the necessity of the institutional? Or, to rephrase Milbank's question, how according to the Illich-Taylor model does one comport oneself in an enfleshed way to institutions or codified rules? If institutions and rules are inescapable for earthly politics and ethics, how does Incarnation reshape them agapeically? Or, alternatively, what does an "embodied" institution or law look like? I think these are important questions to ask of the Taylor-Illich perspective, not simply to point out the shortcomings of their view, but rather to identify possible points of departure for further political, moral or theological engagements. Of course, we should be unsurprised that Taylor offers no easy answers here given his correct observation that the eschatological character of Christianity implies that we live in the "not yet", in a time when the extent of God's reconciliation in the world remains not fully disclosed.<sup>416</sup>

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Taylor fails to mention, the age of religious 'authenticity' is mutating into a further era of newly imagined and constructed religious global networks which once again are playing a major social and political role in the face of the evident bankruptcy of quasi-religious secular ideologies—including neo-liberalism."

<sup>415</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 743.

<sup>416</sup> Two helpful accounts that complement Taylor's work and that engage theologically with the ethical-political tensions between the interpersonal and the institutional come from Catholic theologians Clemens Sedmak and William Cavanaugh. See Clemens Sedmak, "The Disruptive Power of World Hunger," in

Nevertheless, though Taylor may not provide any straightforward answers in this regard, we can anticipate the general character of any ethical or political programme that seeks to build on the foundations laid down by Taylor. If an ethical-political account is to be faithful to Taylor's project, it would have to center around a kenotic conception of transcendence. Consider the following portrayal from Taylor of the transformative power of cruciform transcendence, which captures once again the important role of kenosis in his thought:

Now Christ's reaction to the resistance [to God] was to offer *no counter-resistance*, but to continue loving and offering. This love can go to the very heart of things, and open a road even for the resisters...Through this *loving submission*, violence is turned around, and instead of breeding counter-violence in an endless spiral, can be transformed. A path is opened of *non-power*, limitless *self-giving*, full action, and infinite openness. On the basis of this initiative, the incomprehensible healing power of this suffering, it becomes possible for human suffering, even of the most meaningless type, to become associated with Christ's act, and to become a locus of renewed contact with God, an act which heals the world. The suffering is given a transformative effect, by being offered to God.<sup>417</sup>

Obviously this passage is Taylor's Christian iteration of the kenotic. But as Taylor explicitly asserts, and as I have suggested through the present work, his goal is to say something about transcendence that goes beyond the Christian.<sup>418</sup> His programme is *essentially*—and not *contingently*—*pluralist*. So once again, it seems to be the case that Taylor has followed Augustine at a critical turn in his philosophy. Elshtain describes how for Augustine kenosis—as captured in the doctrine of the selfsame—is directly connected to a commitment to difference, to diversity. And all of this for Augustine passes—as it does for Taylor—through the *imago dei*:

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Oliver Davies, Paul D. Janz, and Clemens Sedmak, *Transformation Theology: Church in the World* (London: T & T Clark, 2007); and William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

<sup>417</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 654. Emphasis added

<sup>418</sup> On this point, Taylor diverges from Augustine, since for the latter, any such emptying is limited to Christianity, and more specifically to the Incarnation and the atoning act of the cross. See *On the Trinity*, I.13, where Augustine explicitly connects kenosis with the crucifixion.

Being made in God's image requires, for Augustine, a brake on our own quest for mastery and appropriation. Absolute ownership, exploitation, and domination are forms of being that deny what it means to be formed in and through the Trinity. Such forms diminish and amputate rather than enrich, expand, or help to make whole. Making whole means honoring the integrity of each distinct being—distinct, not separate, and certainly not absolute unto itself. Like God, we must empty ourselves so that others might help to fill us. The central symbol of this process of humbling is, of course, the Cross.<sup>419</sup>

Elshtain connects this to the doctrine of the selfsame, and argues that for Augustine, "if we presume that we are the sole and only ground of our own being, we deny dependence on others, beginning with that Other who made us in his own image. [which] in turn, invites a refusal of authentic companionship; it spurns the premise and promise of Trinity, of one and many, distinct yet together." And this is where she claims that Augustine's view dovetails with Taylor's. She cites Taylor's formulation in "A Catholic Modernity?", according to which "the proliferation of varied forms helps us to 'compensate for our own narrowness,'" thus reminding us "that we need to complement our own partiality." By connecting the demands of kenosis to pluralism, Elshtain emphasizes that Taylor's programme (like Augustine's), through an attunement to the demands of the *imago dei*, takes a path that is ultimately "wary of 'triumphalism and self-sufficiency.'" <sup>420</sup> Thus, her reading of Taylor resonates strongly with the one I have offered here: Taylor's kenotic ethics and politics are attentive to the contemporary demands of pluralism *because of*, and not *in spite of*, his Catholicism.

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<sup>419</sup> Elshtain, "Augustine and Diversity," 98.

<sup>420</sup> Elshtain, "Augustine and Diversity," 99-100. All of Elshtain's quotes come from "A Catholic Modernity?"

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