

Towards a Transcendent Good
Charles Taylor and the Challenge of Articulating a Postmodern Moral Identity

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ABSTRACT**Towards a Transcendent Good: Charles Taylor and the Challenge of Articulating a Postmodern Moral Identity.**

Andrew Renahan

The theory presented by Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self*, his tome on modern identity, constitutes what I consider to be an original and necessary contribution to the field of moral philosophy. I contend that Taylorian theory usurps the dominant paradigm of post-Enlightenment, modern “naturalist” philosophy wherein meaning is limited to subjectivity. In Taylorian theory moral agency depends upon making contact with the plurality of “moral sources” that populate reality, influencing the development of substantive moral identities through “engaged” rational reflection and “articulation” of these “goods”.

My thesis argues that in going beyond the modern paradigm of “disengaged” reason and “radical subjectivity” Taylor enters the context of postmodern philosophy identified most strongly by the work of French philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Taylor’s theory shares core postmodern concerns for difference, pluralism and the experience of non-subjective reality. Further, I assert that Taylor presents a framework wherein the idea of a postmodern identity does not intuit a post-moral identity and that religious agents, those who orient their sense of the “good” towards a transcendent, completely other “moral source”, are uniquely well equipped to illustrate what a postmodern moral identity can consist of, and finally that Taylor himself “articulates” just such a radical account.

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For Mom & Da.

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Introduction

Charles Taylor's treatment of the problematic of modern moral "malaises" (Taylor 1992a, 1) is uncommonly lucid. The holistic scope of his inquiry gathers in myriad features from historical experience and speculative thought. The overarching project he executes in his tome on moral philosophy *Sources of the Self* takes account of the historical, political, religious and philosophical forces which have exercised influence over understandings of morality. However, for the purposes of my thesis I have focused exclusively on the first part of *Sources*, "Identity and the Good". In this section Taylor writes at the avant garde of moral theory, advancing a vital philosophical treatment of engaged moral agency. Taylor sets up his discussion by framing the normative moral theory of modern philosophy as incapable of meeting the emotional need for developing an authentic and meaningful "moral ontology". Taylor's exposure of the failure of the modern epistemological conception of morality lays bare the inconsistencies which permeate the instrumental considerations forming the foundation of modern moral systems. Central to Taylor's critique is his elucidation of the devastating impact which the radical Enlightenment ideal of "disengaged reason" has inflicted on the possibility for subjects to conceive of an integrated sense of moral agency. Thus he illustrates the marginalization felt by individuals, produced by the modern demand that subjects maintain a detachment between their feelings about what is "good" and their ethical calculations concerning what is "right". The effect is to enforce a mode of thought which segregates emotion from reason as untrustworthy and misleading.

I, like Taylor, consider this dichotomy between reason and feeling untenable, and ultimately, injurious to the potential for developing a strong moral identity. In response to the modern opposition of reason and feeling Taylor argues for the reconciliation between the rational and emotional into an integrated model of moral identity. Taylor's theory liberates moral agents from the isolation and loneliness of the modern "non realist" epistemology in which each agent is considered a self contained producer of exclusive meaning; an individual set apart from all other individuals. Taylor overcomes this "atomistic" notion of individuality through the development of what he terms the "moral intuition". The "moral intuition" is the emotive sense that allows subjects to engage with the moral sources that impress them as communicating a substantive "good", such as love, compassion, dignity, etc. Further, while he casts subjects as capable of forming deep and substantive connections with these sources, Taylor vigilantly maintains the difference between these sources and the self. The result is a theory in which agents draw the raw materials (ideas/ideals) to continually mold meaningful and integrated identities from "moral sources" in reality. Further, Taylor maintains that this collaboration is governed by a dynamic of change which acknowledges that one's moral perspective develops over time and through the experience, influence and attraction of different "moral sources". Crucially, Taylor lays out his model without abandoning the principles of reasoned, critical thought. His theory revolves around a tandem of an emotive "moral intuition" at the incipient stage and an engaged rational reflection at the "ontological" stage, which cooperate in the production of a "best account" (moral worldview) expressed at the "articulation" stage. Significantly, Taylor acknowledges the dynamic character of the moral process and the plurality of "goods" available to agents.

This is important to note as it resonates strongly with the postmodern understanding of difference central to the work of Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida whom I juxtapose with Taylor as evidence of the possibility for a distinctly postmodern conception of moral identity.

The methodology I employed in the execution of my project centered on an initially broad survey of Taylor's primary works and the secondary sources most relevant to his moral philosophy. The extent of Taylor's research interests encompass a multitude of fields most often construed as exclusive to particular academic disciplines. Taylor disdains the modern propensity for the specialization of study. Instead, he employs a comprehensive approach based on the obvious connectivity and influence which history, politics, philosophy, religion etc. effect across human experience and thought. Faced with such polymathic breadth it was imperative that I determine which of Taylor's works afforded the greatest insights into the development of the moral theory he presents in "Identity and the Good". Through the course of much reading and discussion it became clear that to grasp what motivated Taylor's argument in "Identity and the Good" necessitated an understanding of Taylor's examination of the schism between Enlightenment and Romantic thought in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century undertaken in his work *Hegel*. Aspects of *Hegel* anticipate the concerns Taylor addresses in *Sources of the Self*. In particular, the first chapter of Taylor's *Hegel* provides a clear presentation of the problematic which "Identity and the Good" confronts, namely the unresolved character of moral experience and the dilemma of "what appear to be the demands of reason and disengaged freedom...and the demands of nature, or fulfillment, or expressive integrity" cast at odds to one another in the "great intramural debate of the

last two centuries, pitting the philosophy of the Enlightenment against the various forms of Romantic opposition.” (Taylor 1989, 101). The first chapter of my thesis is occupied predominantly towards providing a focused examination of the first chapter of *Hegel*, setting the stage for Taylor’s subsequent attempt to resolve this schism in *Sources*.

In *Hegel* Taylor provides an excellent exegesis of the ramifications of Enlightenment philosophy on contemporary instrumental understandings of subjectivity, morality and meaning and the commensurate influence of the Romantic protest which destabilizes that understanding. Having established the background of significance which moral concerns have for Taylor both historically and philosophically, I set out in the second chapter to examine the argument and underlying critique contained in “Identity and the Good” proper. To elucidate the underlying ideas which animate Taylor’s theory I employed a critical/deconstructive reading of the text aided by the insights provided in secondary sources. Unfortunately, the commentary directly addressing the theory advanced in “Identity and the Good” is limited. Nevertheless, I benefited from several key responses from Taylor’s contemporaries that provided a fuller measure of Taylor’s ideas in relation to the current climate of western philosophy. In particular the dedicated analysis of Taylorian moral philosophy undertaken, separately, by Ruth Abbey in *Philosophy Now: Charles Taylor* and Nicholas H. Smith in *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals, and Modernity* proved exceptionally helpful in elucidating the implications of Taylor’s theory for modern philosophy. Their works present a clear picture of the extant of the challenge Taylorian moral theory poses to modern analytic philosophy. Abbey also serves as editor of *Charles Taylor* an important volume of essays responding to Taylor’s philosophical project. Of particular note from this compendium is Fergus Kerr’s essay

“The Self and the Good: Taylor's Moral Ontology” which provides an astute reckoning of what is at stake in Taylor’s re-interpretation of the capacity, content and intent of ontological theory.

Commensurate with these largely admiring reviews of Taylorian theory I also encountered strong, critical voices, presenting well constructed counter-arguments. The most significant and lucid critiques focused on Taylor’s stance as a “moral realist”. As “moral realism” forms a central plank of his overarching philosophy the critique of modern philosophical heavyweights like Richard Rorty and Isaiah Berlin, presented in James Tully’s *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism : The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, demanded a keen assessment of the potential weaknesses they may expose in Taylor’s theory. Further, these opposing voices helped me to view the conflict between the moral theory advanced by Taylor and that esteemed as normative by the greater part of modern western philosophy in a more three dimensional fashion. My study of the incipient crisis born of the clash between the radical subjectivism of the Enlightenment and the Romantic experientialist rebuff helped to elucidate Taylor’s construal of a modern “malaise”, born of the division between “naturalist” idealism and emotional longing. However, the contemporary response of modern “non-realists” like Rorty and Berlin made salient the potential repercussions of the clash between Taylorian “moral realism” and the opposition “non-realists”. The contest between the characterization of moral experience as either substantive or subjective portends lasting consequences for what notions of responsibility or duty are attached to moral agency and the resources legitimately available to agents for fulfilling them.

The intent of the first and second chapters of my thesis is primarily exegetical, presenting the impetus for, and most important aspects of, Taylor's moral theory. The goal of this first section is to prepare the reader for the subsequent comparative analysis, and possible integration with, postmodern philosophy. This forms the main theme of my third chapter. Towards this end I have sought to demonstrate the contextualization of Taylorian moral theory as postmodern through a comparison with the theoretical concepts prevalent in the work of acknowledged postmodern philosophers Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida. I have specifically chosen these figures because they present ideas concerning the emotional experience of substantive reality that acutely resonate with Taylorian "moral realism". Their construal of difference, transcendence and the role of feeling exemplify what I contend to be postmodern traits dominant in Taylor's own work. Admittedly, the designation postmodern is highly contentious. Often, it is haphazardly employed as a catchall for concepts in the arts, philosophy and architecture that do not readily fit into established modern or classical categories. In the case of philosophy the meaning of postmodern is perhaps most opaque. One definition offered for postmodern philosophy has it as "the critical engagement with the fundamental values of modernity" (Protevi 2005, 460) My selection of Derrida and Lyotard as postmodern points of contact and contrast with Taylor is based on their common "critical engagement" with aspects of modern thought and society, and the contention that all three are motivated by moral concerns. In Taylor the moral concern is explicit, in Derrida and Lyotard much less so. Nonetheless, their shared critical, lucid and precise presentation of difference and transcendence as fundamental elements of lived experience places them beyond the limits imposed on philosophy in the modern period by dominant

“naturalism”. Although Taylor expresses skepticism concerning the substance of postmodern philosophy, I argue that through the integration of “moral realism” his doubts can be largely assuaged.

I contend that locating Taylorian theory in the postmodern context allows for a greater range of possible interpretive applications of its content through the postmodern embrace of pluralism and interconnectivity. Pluralism is vital to Taylorian theory and postmodernism is uniquely equipped to encompass the heterogeneity of different moral accounts. This accords with another definition of postmodernism as a “Theory of cultural and political variety. The account of the world given by MODERNISM no longer works...Instead of single sets of values or political loyalties, there is a wide variety of groups and classes, aims and ideologies.” (Bothamley 1993, 424) Equally, I assert that Taylorian theory can extract and help to articulate the moral prerogative implied in much of postmodern philosophy. These sublimated “moral attitudes” remain entombed in a desire to avoid being perceived as explicitly ideological. The inclusion of Taylorian theory in postmodern philosophy could relieve this anxiety by demonstrating that the exercise of “moral ontology” can be authentic and integral without necessarily becoming dogmatic and hegemonic. This can alleviate the fears of thinkers such as Derrida and Lyotard and render the moral arguments contained in postmodern philosophy less ambiguous, and more accessible to a wider audience. Ultimately, my reading of Taylor, Derrida and Lyotard is hermeneutical, the goal being to produce a coherent and convincing body of evidence to back up my argument for Taylor as postmodern, and commensurately postmodern philosophy as grounded in “moral realism”.

The significance of Taylor's work to religious philosophy forms the main subject of my fourth and final chapter. I assert that Taylor's overarching concern with the relationship between feeling and reason, considered hopelessly at cross purposes by modern "naturalist" philosophy, relies on concepts with distinctly religious intonations. These concepts are represented by the importance of belief and transcendence to his concept of an integrated and dynamic moral identity. The religious connotation carried by these ideas implies that one can access meaning in reality distinct from that wholly conditioned by subjectivity. The character of such meaningful experiences can allude to an experience of an other, a "moral source" or God. In this fashion religious ideas provide the grounds for a deep and expansive elucidation of the relationship between feeling and reason, and reflection and expression. I must be clear that this does not intuit a theological component to Taylorian theory but rather a concern for the broader category of spiritual ideas. More specifically, it is language used to describe transcendent or affecting experiences of the "good" that are irreconcilable to models of rationalism in the modern context.

I contend that the place of religious/spiritual ideas and language are crucial to the coherency of Taylor's theory. The unique content of broadly spiritual ideas helps to propel Taylor's theory over the hurdles of modern "naturalism" and collapses the artificial barriers separating feeling and experience from thought and reason. Through a postmodern re-interpretation of religious/spiritual ideas of transcendent experience as evincing a "moral reality" the rendering of emotion and reason into non-communicative categories can be undone without imposing one over the other. It is imperative that a concept as essential to Taylorian theory as love that transcends subjectivity be

acknowledged for their religious significance. Commensurately, I assert that Taylor's path to a new understanding of moral thought depends on his retrieval of a "moral vocabulary" reflecting a religious/spiritual heritage. This "moral vocabulary" was deemed illegitimate in the modern period because it failed to meet empirical standards of rational proof transposed from the natural sciences and esteemed by "naturalists" as capable of objectifying experience. This empirical attitude provides Taylor with a constant foil.

Taylor contends that in the moral realm this attitude is expressed by the instrumental consideration for "what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be" (Taylor 1989, 3), pitting modern subjects at odds with their own "moral intuitions". Further, this instrumental bent has convinced subjects in the modern west that the purity of reason depends upon a vigilantly maintained "disengaged" stance relative to one's own experiences. This parochial and disconnected sense of rational thought is what "naturalists" contend saves us from pursuing emotional ends which could threaten well calculated "procedural" approaches to moral questions. What modern "naturalists" consider imperiled by "moral realism" is the guarantee of "right" outcomes for the practical and peaceable conduct of civil society. By according legitimacy to our "intuitive" moral feelings and a salient "moral vocabulary" capable of expressing an engagement with "moral sources" Taylor usurps the modern "naturalist" paradigm". It is, however, important that Taylor's development of a "moral vocabulary" is understood as oriented towards "moral reality" and occurs in a new context, a postmodern context. This contextualization establishes that Taylor is not engaged in the resuscitation of an archaic, superstitious, pre-modern moralism. He is going beyond modern "naturalism" partly

through a re-interpretation of ideas capable of describing moral feelings through religious/spiritual language, while refiguring distinctly modern concepts such as the autonomy of the self to accord with more diverse and inclusive understandings.

I feel a note concerning the transparency of Taylor's writing is required as it directly relates to one of his primary aims, clarity through "articulation". Taylor is consistent and unambiguous in his acknowledgement of the particular concerns underlying his argument for the necessity of a "moral realist" perspective. This transparency contributes to the coherency of his argument and guards against a descent into a tautological abstraction of theory from experience. Taylor works to fit his concepts to the world of experience. Consequently, tensions arise surrounding some of his claims, such as the notion that a subject is capable of simultaneously occupying rival positions towards competing "goods" (Taylor 1989, 105). Assertions like this however, only serve to reflect the muddled reality of agents confronting the doubt and uncertainty of moral life, wherein some *aporia* always remain unresolved. Such ease dealing with ambiguity further evinces Taylor's break with the modern analytic tradition's insistence on the definitiveness of homogeneity, even at the cost of denying subjects actual feelings. His embrace of difference and pluralism as integral to moral agency demonstrates his commitment to write from within human experience. Thus providing further contrast with the dominant assumption of modern philosophy, which claims to occupy a detached analytical position "disengaged" from experience.

Taylor's treatment of meaning is crucial to my work. Taylor accepts the normative understanding in western philosophy that humans are capable of producing

meaningful accounts. However, Taylor does not restrict this capacity solely to the auspices of subjectivity. Rather, he is interested in how subjects engage with "moral sources" to develop the meaningful accounts that underlie individual's moral identities, orienting agents through an "intuitive" sense of what a good life consists of. Evincing the concern in Taylorian theory for plurality and difference, as well as reflection and change, each agent constructs their own "best account" of the good life and remains free to change that "account" based on new feelings and insights. This could be described as the hermeneutic of "moral realism". One which seeks the substance of moral accounts not in unconditional, "radical subjectivity", but rather in the connection and interplay between subjects and "moral sources", a relationship vital for the fulfillment of both the subject's and the source's potential. Thus, establishing the interdependent character of the subject and the "moral source" while maintaining their inimitability.

The argument at stake in my thesis is that the moral theory advanced by Charles Taylor shares integral features with postmodern philosophy, and is thus best understood in the postmodern context. Furthermore, once contextualized as postmodern I contend that both Taylorian theory and postmodern philosophy stand to benefit immensely. This is based on the fluency which the postmodern conception of difference and interconnectivity can contribute to Taylor's moral theory. Conversely, Taylorian "moral realism" makes accessible an explicit moral dimension to postmodern arguments. I contend that the consequences of accepting or rejecting the Taylorian/postmodern understanding of reality as substantive, inclusive and heterogeneous, are immediate and profound. The ramifications encompass notions of duty, responsibility, power, control, authenticity and possibility. The scope entails what Taylor implies is the wholeness of

being human. It is essential that we find a way to speak genuinely about the “good” across what Taylor describes as the “boundaries of difference” (Taylor 1999, 14) in a substantive way. Only through a collaboration of Taylorian concepts and postmodern situating can agents effectively deploy their “best accounts” into the breach of discourse, while simultaneously affording critical consideration to the rival accounts of others. Agents are imbedded in moral experience and ignore the reality of the “moral sources” at the risk of depriving themselves of the material to construct a strong and engaged “moral ontology”. The threat of such a cavalier disregard for the existence of substantive meaning, meaning that is not reducible to the caprices of subjectivity alone, is that individuals will become increasingly isolated. Thus, a denial of “moral realism” amounts to a denial of difference and ultimately a denial of others.

As Taylor asserts, and postmodern philosophy implies, such a denial poses unique dangers for the self and others, dangers which the twentieth century has seen played out with catastrophic consequences. I believe that through the collaboration and integration of Taylorian moral theory and postmodern philosophy such catastrophes can be averted. Acknowledging the influence of strongly felt “goods” on one’s own “moral ontology” is a necessary prerequisite to recognizing the authenticity and validity of the moral accounts of others. To cultivate this “attitude” requires agents to engage without unjustifiably compromising the integrity of their own moral identity, or seeking to express their “best account” at the expense of others. To “articulate” one’s beliefs without capitulation or subjugation, this is the promise of the emergent postmodern moral identity rooted in Taylorian “moral realism” and postmodern pluralism.

Chapter One

Taylor's "Sources"

Prior to embarking upon an in depth analysis of Charles Taylor's moral theory it is imperative to establish a firm foundation for understanding his work. Toward this end I will endeavor to provide a brief genealogy of his academic background and interests, as well as a more thorough examination of the themes and problems which characterize his work and presaged his magnum opus, *Sources of the Self*. Surveying the breadth of Taylor's writing rapidly moves one beyond the formal boundaries of strict philosophical inquiry. Taylor's methodology has been described as "philosophical anthropology" (Smith 2002, 8) communicating his concern for arriving at a wholistic view of human life, taking account of both intellectual and emotional experience. This has led Taylor to engage in the various fields of inquiry which he has brought to bear in his overarching philosophical project, notably political theory, psychology and history. As a result, much of Taylor's material delves into seemingly disparate, yet connected realms such as participatory democracy, human behavioral science, religion and the history of ideas. Thus,

None of [his] works is easy to classify. They are all 'philosophical', yet none of them is pure 'philosophy', as that term is used by bureaucrats of knowledge at least in the English-speaking world. (Smith 2002, 11)

This diversity is equally reflected in his academic background. Having been trained in the rigorous and spartan style of analytic philosophy at Oxford, Taylor was well equipped with the tools of reasoned analysis, pragmatic interpretation and concise language prized by that tradition. This has enabled him to address fairly abstract epistemological problems in an uncomplicated way, and to elucidate the underlying

issues and potential solutions in a coherent and accessible fashion. Nicholas Smith sums up the Oxford style of the period as consisting of “precisely defined terms and transparently sequenced arguments.”(Smith 2002, 10) These traits are evident throughout the body of Taylor’s work and allow for a flowing and lucid treatment of otherwise thorny questions regarding morality, subjectivity and meaning in human experience. While his method can be attributed to the analytic tradition, Taylor’s choice of subject matter, mentioned above, hails from a decidedly different locus of philosophical concern. Commensurate with his embrace of multi-disciplinary research methods, Taylor was drawn beyond the limited confines of what were considered appropriate topics of analysis in the Anglo-Saxon scholarly sphere.

This intellectual *wanderlust* led Taylor to a deep and persistent engagement with ideas and figures from the continental stream of philosophy. Thus, Taylor’s own philosophical voice developed under a unique hybrid influence of the seemingly opposed thought of figures such as Locke and Hobbes on one hand, and Herder and Hegel on the other. His openness to a plurality of epistemological world views placed Taylor in a unique position, heralded as “the leading analytic exponent of Continental philosophy.”(Smith 2002, 10) Added to this mix is his keen awareness of the continuing relevance of foundational Western thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine to the development of the contemporary western perspective.

In straddling these two streams of thought Taylor advances, what I contend, has come to form the central problematic of his collective philosophical project. Bringing to bear the critical reason of analytic philosophy and the intuitive sense of idealist thought,

his examination of modern western thought has exposed a schism in contemporary intellectual life. Taylor traces the roots of this division to the Enlightenment, an era which saw a revolution in philosophical thought which usurped traditional understandings of the world based on religious, teleological systems. What replaced the *ancien régime* of scholastic theology was the “naturalist” philosophical system which embraced the “disengaged” method of the natural sciences, establishing reason as the ultimate arbiter of intellectual inquiry. This epoch in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe constitutes a salient point for Taylor in the life of western understanding of the natural world, and humanity’s place and purpose in it. This transformational event is perceived in the west, by and large, as a progressive development in scientific knowledge and social understanding. It was thought to liberate individuals from the cruel hegemony of superstitious views of the natural world and fixed visions of pre-determined social roles and intellectual potential. As such, the Enlightenment has traditionally been celebrated as a great step forward. Taylor, however, found in the continental tradition a legacy of critique aimed at the impact of Enlightenment conceptions of subjectivity and nature depicting the effects not as progressive, but rather as traumatic and de-humanizing. This evinces the tension born of the schism between the pre-modern and modern world views. What for naturalists constituted a deliverance of human thought through reason from the stunting limits of enchanted traditions represented for its critics a new orthodoxy denying emotion as an integral facet of human experience. The delineation between these two positions on the Enlightenment is at points rather ambiguous, as critiques of certain doctrines such as “radical subjectivity” or “disengaged” analysis employ arguments rooted in the principles of dialectical reasoning equally attributable to Enlightenment

thought. Taylor's sensitivity to the vagaries of this debate has spurred him to explore the tension pervading this division in his work.

His analysis of modernity tries to persuade both the champions and the critics of modernity that they are wrong by presenting modernity as a more subtle and complex achievement than either side permits. (Abbey 2000, 5)

Taylor examines how concepts of disengaged reason, radical subjectivity, integral expression etc. come into conflict, while also functioning together in the forging of modern western identities. Central to his analysis is the reaction to the Enlightenment which took shape in German intellectual circles in the immediate aftermath of the French revolution, given the moniker of Romanticism. This counter ideology prized creativity over objectivity and positioned themselves against the more radical conclusions of Enlightenment theory, such as the divorce between humans and nature. However, indicative of the aforementioned ambiguity surrounding the divide between these pro and anti Enlightenment camps are the many ways in which Romanticism was itself a product of Enlightenment thought. This rival epistemological framework which challenged the assumptions of the Enlightenment could not have been developed without certain crucial concepts derived there from. Of particular importance were concepts of reason and subjectivity which the Romantics employed to counter naturalist theories regarding the difference of humans from nature. The romantics used the same concepts to make the case for an integral relationship between the two. The confluence of such intertwined and conflicting ideals and their influence on modern Western perspectives towards the world and the self have caused what Taylor identifies as a "*malaise*" (Taylor 1992a, 1) to develop amongst modern subjects. The nature of this condition is evidenced by the internal struggle in modern subjects opposing rational, instrumental calculative thought

against emotive, “intuitive” feeling. The result being that modern subjects think and act in “procedural” fashions to efficiently achieve specific goals which are achieved in the absence of any substantive underlying meaning. Hence, while moderns possess a wealth of material goods, they are collected at the cost of a paucity of the “moral sources” which impart existential meaning to agents sense of self and identity. In many ways Taylor is seeking to redress this condition by exposing the roots of this malaise while presenting a new model for orienting one’s self both in, and towards the world.

Although aspects of the malaise are addressed throughout Taylor’s works, none preceding *Sources of the Self* so clearly encompasses this issue as his seminal volume on *Hegel*. It is in *Hegel* that the scaffolding is erected for the development of Taylor’s moral theory in “Identity and the Good”, which comprises the first part of *Sources*. Hence, in an effort to elucidate the concepts and ideas which are central to my own analysis of the theory expounded in “Identity and the Good”, we must set the stage by exploring the climate in which this thought took shape. Specifically, the intellectual environment of Enlightenment and Romantic European thought as construed by Taylor in the first chapter of *Hegel*, in which the themes of naturalist and Romantic thought which would come to dominate modernity and his future examination in *Sources* are laid out in detail.

Taylor positions the Enlightenment as the demarcation between pre-modern and modern humanist thought in the west. This transformation is, of course, not analogous to the flipping of a switch, but rather took shape over the course of centuries in European intellectual circles. A major source of influence over this project was the parallel development of increasingly more complex theories concerning the natural sciences. Of

particular note was the mounting importance of an empirical/objective examination of physical evidence in arriving at rational explanations for natural processes. The cause and effect methodology which sought out predictable patterns in the physical realm struck a major blow to the reigning Aristotelian notion of the natural world as constituting a meaningful order. This pre-modern ontology rested on a vision of the world as containing readable signs which communicated substantive content and imposed a definite vision of how society was to be organized. (Taylor 1975, 4) This vision was often rigidly hierarchical and reinforced a static model of social roles and sense of predetermination with regard to the future. Taylor credits the seventeenth and eighteenth century innovators in the empirical sciences with usurping this anthropomorphic projection of human ideals which was

inseparably bound up with final causes since it posits that the furniture of the universe is as it is and develops as it does in order to embody these ideas; the order is the ultimate explanation. (Taylor 1975, 5)

In contrast, and fundamental to the establishment of a rational view of the world, was the concept of distance or disengaged observation. By ostensibly removing oneself from the immediacy of nature and assuming an observational perspective, those involved obtained a measure of control over their object of study. This methodology was translated into philosophical thought via the speculative examination of being undertaken by progenitors of the Enlightenment such as Descartes. In the hands of philosophers the ethos of disengaged, reasoned observation, would reach its abstract zenith. The basic premise of the Cartesian formula which asserted that “the existence of the self is demonstrated while that of everything outside, even God, is in doubt.”(Taylor 1975, 6) contributed to a new sense of individual freedom. The rise of this disengaged perspective

liberated individuals from the absolutism of any imposed natural order. The notion of control initially applied over the natural world could now be employed over one's self. Thus, a whole realm of possibilities were now opened to individuals based not on the lottery of birth, but rather on their ability to develop and exercise their faculties of rational thought and analysis. Taylor delineates the differentiation between the pre modern and modern sense of self around this empowerment. Casting the pre modern identity as one attuned to a supposed "cosmic order", while the modern exercises rational control and is "self defining". (Taylor 1975, 6)

The consequence of this shift in subjectivity was the emergence of a new, profound empowerment of individuals over both their own destiny as well as their immediate physical and social environment. This understanding of being and space, stripped of any *a priori* order, did not, however, remove humans in an organic sense from the natural world. On the contrary, much of Enlightenment thought stressed the requirement of conceiving of humans as natural objects and thus, as essential parts of the "interlocking system of objective reality".(Taylor 1975, 10) Thus humans do not leave nature, and nature indeed is not entirely devoid of any semblance of order. Rather, human subjects are now binary in that they are divided as both biological entities inextricably bound to the forces of physical laws and natural desires, while simultaneously existing as disengaged, rational, subjective minds. Further, the pre-modern vision of nature as possessing a meaningful order is subsumed by a modern sense of nature as conveying an observable pattern of contingent processes. Taylor describes this empirical model as "atomistic" in that it reduces all physical objects to a basic mechanical relationship to one another. (Taylor 1975, 10) However, he also points out

that the parallel ideal which holds human subjectivity as enjoying the freedom of “self-definition” and rational control, contradicts the premise of connectivity upon which the “atomistic” view is based. This paradoxical view of humans as both natural objects (susceptible to brutish physical forces) as well as free knowing subjects (who have the capacity to manipulate objective reality) was never satisfactorily reconciled in Enlightenment thought. Nonetheless, it came to form the backbone of its ontological discourse.

In spite of tensions the amalgam held, and these two perspectives, partly converging partly conflicting, combined in different ways to generate a wide gamut of views, from the mildest deism which stressed the spiritual nature and destiny of man to the most radical materialism... (Taylor 1975, 10)

In highlighting the inherently fragmented quality at the core of modern perspectives of self and nature, Taylor locates in the advent of the Enlightenment the seeds of a plethora of ideological worldviews which have steered the course of western modernity. In acknowledging the plurality of influence which this era spawned, Taylor shows that the lineage of Enlightenment concepts of disengaged reason, objectivity and freedom *qua* natural rights, is not reducible to a monolithic narrative. The shift in consciousness effected during this period allowed for a wealth of new insights on human life to be developed which precipitated advancements in the physical health and social equality of western societies. However, it also irrevocably displaced humans from a long entrenched existential orientation within a teleological, ordered universe of moral and social meaning. Positing subjectivity as the sole source of meaningful content in life and casting the physical realm, including humans as inert, effectively condemns humans to an estrangement from their own existence. The sole legitimate avenues for orienting oneself

in the Enlightened world were constrained to either the “materialism” of science, or a cult of ego. Further, humans are set against themselves in a contest between the desire tied to their animal nature and the demands of a rational will. It is these points of contention which Taylor identifies as the “point of attack, or perhaps recoil would be a better term, of two major tendencies in German thought...” (Taylor 1975, 11)

Taylor contrasts the situation in Germany, where the intelligentsia seemingly had one foot in the pre-modern era and one tentatively in the modern, with that of France which was violently bearing into the modern period and embracing a “radical, mechanistic, materialist Enlightenment.”(Taylor 1975, 11) Taylor observes that a potential source of German apprehensiveness towards a full embrace of Enlightenment thought was the influence over German society of the popular religious movement dubbed “Pietism”. This largely anti-dogmatic form of worship presents itself as somewhat enigmatic. It shares certain central interests with Enlightenment ideologies while concomitantly being steadfastly opposed to the ultimately anthropocentric theory of “radical subjectivity”. Taylor draws important parallels between “pietism” and Enlightenment philosophy as sharing an emphasis on individualism, freedom of conscience and crucially, a resistance to the hegemonic power of imposed authority. In the case of the Enlightenment the resistance was towards any undue influence over citizens by the state apparatus, and for the “Pietists” the opposition was aimed at the rigid formalism of the church. “It turned to a religion of the heart, one of enthusiastic devotion, of a renewal in which men are filled with the fire of the spirit.”(Taylor 1975, 11)

It is this last point which is most interesting in that it displays a spiritual disposition which would color the overall German reaction to the most severe abstractions of the Enlightenment. This emphasis upon spiritual experience and feeling fuelled the clash between “Pietist” and materialist ideologies. The main divergence revolved around rival understandings of ultimate meaning. Enlightenment “naturalists” contended that all meaning was projected from human subjectivity. “Pietists” saw the world as filled with transcendent meaning, testifying to the hand of a creator God. On the surface these perspectives break down neatly along the lines of the modern (represented by the former) versus the pre-modern (as the latter). However, Taylor emphasizes the importance which the concern for a substantive understanding of reality as meaningful will come to have in German post-Enlightenment thought. While appreciating the profound shift in consciousness precipitated by the innovation of conceiving of the human subject as rational and free, German thinkers were deeply disturbed by the stark division which was struck between humans as thinking beings and the natural world as a blank canvas. The first generation of German intellectuals and artists to emerge in the shadow of the Enlightenment channeled both the idea of free subjectivity and the “fiery spirit” of Pietism into a cultural upheaval evidenced in the realm of poetry, prose and music. This period was dubbed the “*Sturm und Drang*”, roughly “storm and stress”, and it was indeed a tumultuous time in continental thought. (Taylor 1975, 13) Underlying this movement was the complicated relationship of those involved, with the undeniable advancements contained in certain aspects of Enlightenment epistemology, and their firm insistence on maintaining a vital link between humans and the natural world. Taylor presents the philosophical thought of J.G. Herder as the definitive voice of this moment,

and his system of philosophy as the well from which all subsequent anti-Enlightenment thinkers would draw inspiration.

Herder reacts against the anthropology of the Enlightenment, against what [Taylor labels] the ‘objectification’ of human nature, against the analysis of the human mind into different faculties, of man into body and soul, against a calculative notion of reason, divorced from feeling and will...developing instead an alternative anthropology centered on categories of expression. (Taylor 1975, 13)

This notion of “expressivism” becomes, for Taylor, a crucial feature in the tension between free/disengaged subjectivity made manifest by reason on the one hand, and the deep seated spiritual need for a sense of connection with the world afflicting modern western subjects on the other. Herder rejected the reification of being produced by “materialist” thought. He also rejected the dualism between mind and body, which not only divided humans against themselves, but also isolated them from one another. His theory of “expressivism” advances a concept in which humans are capable of manifesting the content of their thoughts within reality. Thus, ideas which originate in an agent’s mind and apprehended by them as meaningful, can be actualized in the world through their expression. Through this process an integral connection is established between subjectivity and reality, or humans and nature. Herder also posits that through the expressive process agents are able to transform their idea/ideal of self into a representative identity. These “expressivist” concepts, pertaining to meaning and identity, intuit that subjects’ thoughts, ideas and perspectives can be channeled into reality in a substantive fashion. This differentiates the “expressivist” theory from that of “radical subjectivity” which contends that any meaning an agent identifies in reality is a projection of their own subjective thought and thus reducible to their own subjectivity.

The notion of projection restricts the understanding of meaning in the natural world to the individual agent who is projecting it, thus locking them into an insular, non-communicative life of the mind. Herder in contrast presents a theory in which meaning and identity are developed and then expressed in reality, so that what emanates from subjectivity is let loose in the world and made accessible to others. In Herder's vision ideas become points of contact between subjects, commensurately once expressed the content of these ideas and representations can be engaged with and changed by others. This testifies to the importance of dynamism and creativity to "expressivist" theory.

Herder's notion of the exteriorization of self usurps both the isolation of the "atomistic" view of subjectivity as well as "materialist" claims to a neutral world. Herder is thus attempting to return meaning to the life of subjects, and the world, in a substantive fashion. This does not, however, constitute a retreat into the pre-modern view of the world as possessing an imposed *a priori* order of meaning. What makes Herder's system modern is the central role which human subjects play in their production of meaning. The creative capacity allowing for the realization of purposeful ideas in exterior life enables humans to make contact with ideas and perspectives foreign to their own subjective experience. What is unique in this is the insistence that ideas are intricately connected to both the individuals and communities which produce them, as well as with those who choose to engage with them. According to Taylor this differs from the pre modern Platonic ideal in which meaning existed independent of, and indifferent towards, human expression. Herder's system places a great onus on subjects, requiring them to subscribe to dedicated ethos of awareness, clarity and action on in the struggle to realize their unique vision of themselves (via expression) in the world. (Taylor 1975, 15) Taylor sees

this aspect of Herder's theory as particularly innovative in that it defies both the pre-modern abandonment to the fates as well as the modern disavowal of emotive reality.

It was Herder and the expressivist anthropology...which 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. (Taylor 1975, 15)

Thus, for Herder and those whom he influenced, there is an overwhelming emphasis placed on the struggle towards an ultimate expression of one's authentic self. Taylor calls this view of identity creation, "the self unfolding subject". (Taylor 1975, 15)

This intuitively suggests that subjects must work to develop a clearer sense of what ideas possess meaning for them and how to express these ideas so as to incorporate their content into one's sense of authenticity and representative identity. Herder's emphasis on standards of authenticity and integrity regarding the expression of identity implies that the agents involved are in fact facing a moral test. The moral agent must exercise rational reflection to elucidate their ontological perspective on meaning and then express their perspective in a clear and intelligible manner so that it can be engaged with by others. Hence, for Herder humans must become self aware in both a rational, subjective sense, and a communicative, meaningful and purpose oriented sense. The essence of this argument is that for one to fully develop their humanity they must work to meet standards of reason and expression. The nature of these standards must be deduced by the subjects involved in the "expressivist" process, and thus resound with aspects of the Enlightenment theory of subjectivity. However, parts of these standards are equally established in response to something outside of the self, evincing shades of pre-modern teleology. The notion of meaning as both distinct from, yet dependent upon, individuals exercises a great deal of

influence over Taylor's own theory. The notion of authentic self expression becomes crucial to how Taylor views the making of modern identities, and the threat of "mutilation" will re-appear in his own theory.

The impact of Herder's "expressivist" system on German thought was immediate and profound. One particularly popular aspect of his theory was its celebration of art as the most powerful and complete outlet for the act of realization. Commensurately, artists were singled out as those most endowed with the genius for authentic self realization. This attitude, which Taylor points out persists today, reflects the momentous change from an understanding of art as representational, to one of "art as expressive, as expressing the profound feelings of the artist, and in the process completing him, expanding his existence." (Taylor 1975, 20) This archetype also includes an exteriorized orientation to a source of inspiration in the form of a muse, which enjoys a mystical connection to the artist. Taylor uses the obvious affinity which Herder, and later Romantic thought, displayed for this celebration of art and artist to elucidate the ideal at the core of the anti-Enlightenment perspective. Mainly, that to come closer to a "full" expression of one's authentic self is to move towards a more complete state of being. To fulfill one's promise, as it were, is akin to completing a work of art. This also intuitively risks failure. In Romantic thought this connotes failing to live a genuine life, which is deeply unsettling in that the path to either outcome is uncertain and shrouded in ambiguity.

Taylor makes the point that this new concept of art inherited certain features of religion, in particular the ability to communicate feeling and take participants "out of themselves". Taylor describes this expressivity as "a communion appropriate to

subjectivities.”(Taylor 1975, 23) This notion of communion entails an engagement with a greater, universal current of life/nature as well as a direct bond with other human beings. This celebration of “unity” confronts the Enlightenment paradigm of mind/body dualism and objectification head on. In contrast, the Romantics introduce a standard of “integral expressivism” which asserts that “our life is a unity, it cannot be artificially divided into distinct levels: life as against thought...Man is not an animal with reason added, but a totally new indivisible form.”(Taylor 1975, 21)

While Herder clearly occupies a seminal place in the reaction against the “materialist” strain of Enlightenment discourse, his theory fell short of offering a satisfactorily comprehensive alternative. According to Taylor, the key weakness in his theory was the lack of a convincingly universal element around which this new human unity could be constructed. In response the subsequent generation of German anti-Enlightenment intellectuals (the Romantics) made it their project to develop a unified theory of humanity and nature. The quest for a universal touchstone which possessed many of these thinkers reflected their deep feeling of loss in the wake of the Enlightenment’s fissure between the individual and community/nature. Taylor identifies the common trait of the Romantics and their contemporaries of appropriating the ancient Greek polis as an idyllic form of wholeness. This portrayed individuals as integrated within the greater stream of nature and communal life. To align this ideal with the modern sense of free subjectivity which the Romantics and Herder also prized, required a convenient overlooking of the ontological absolutism upon which classical Greek thought was founded. Nevertheless, this allowed for a clear protest against

The Enlightenment vision of society made up of atomistic, morally self-sufficient subjects who enter into external relations with each other, seeking either advantage or the defense of individual rights. [The Romantics] sought a deeper bond of felt unity...woven into community life rather than remaining the preserve of individuals...the ancient [Greek] polis united the fullest freedom with the deepest community life, and was thus an expressivist ideal. (Taylor 1975, 28)

Thus, unity and freedom became two key elements in the attempt to reconcile the modern subjective self, with a substantive vision of the world. This project faced several obstacles in achieving a plausible synthesis. On the surface the strong ideal of radical freedom, best articulated by Immanuel Kant, appeared opposed, in principle, to any notion of dependency inherent to the concept of unity. Taylor singles out Kant's theory of radical moral freedom as devised in his critical philosophy as the decisive model which has shaped all subsequent modern thought which takes morality, independence and the will as its subject. Kant, like Herder, rejected the objectification of humans carried out by "materialist" discourse. However, where Herder's objection was primarily based on an aesthetic argument, Kant roots his own "transcendental argument" in a unique rational reflection of human experience.

Kant's aim was to define the subject not as a given to inner attention, but as we must conclude it to be, granted the type of experience of objects we have. Transcendent argument tries to infer from experience back to the subject of that experience: what must we be like in order to have the kind of experience we do? (Taylor 1975, 30)

Kant's central critique of "atomism" is directed towards the system of causal relations upon which its worldview rests. In this system, humans, in an exclusively mechanistic sense, occupy a place in a chain of contingent variables which governs the natural world. As such, it intuits that all action, even moral, is determined by the vagaries of the system. This concept runs afoul of Kant's theory which argues that the "moral

will” enjoys absolute freedom and is proven to be so through human experience. Kant argues that the evidence of human sovereignty over moral action is deducible through a “transcendent” reflection of prior moral acts. Kant asserts that the ability of subjects to choose to follow a path of action judged as morally just, even when it contravenes their own desire, proves that humans do not exist at the mercy of objective forces. Further, as Taylor elucidates, Kant places reason at the core of his formula wherein humans have a universal responsibility to a moral “categorical imperative”. Thus, each individual must engage their moral will to act free “from all natural considerations and motives... [Conceiving of subjects as] free in a radical sense, self-determining not as a natural being, but as a pure, moral will.”(Taylor 1975, 31)

What Taylor derives from Kant is a rough basis for the development of what he terms the “moral intuition”, a concept I will examine in the following chapter. The Romantics embraced Kantian radical freedom due to his portrayal of humans as self aware and self determining. While Kant’s assignment of control to individuals over their own fate accords with Enlightenment sensibilities, the commensurate endowment of subjects to manifest moral ideas in reality through determined action bolsters the Romantic concept of an integral connection between subjects and the natural world. Thus for Kant, moral thought is manifested as moral substance. Ultimately however, as Taylor points out, Kant’s formula results in a paradox. While Kant’s radically free moral subject does have a connection to the natural world through which they exercise their moral will, they are simultaneously cut off from any profound sensual experience of nature. This is a consequence of Kant requirement that the radically free subject be immune from the influence of natural forces over their rational choices. This merely replicates the most

negative aspects of Enlightenment dualism, once more divorcing humans from the world. Hence, while the idea of radical freedom came to color much of modern thought, so too did the deep loneliness of a totally autonomous duty towards moral struggle and the finally unachievable standard of perfection Kant described as “Holiness”(Taylor 1975, 32).

For the Romantics the task then was to bring together the ideal of radical freedom from Kant with the “integral expressivism” of Herder, thereby arriving at a free, unified and engaged modern subject. Taylor believes that history provides the best field for grasping this endeavor as “a problem of uniting the greatest in ancient and modern life.”(Taylor 1975, 34) This theme, as we shall see, can also be quite appropriately applied to Taylor’s own project, but in a more nuanced fashion. What is important in the immediate context however, are the solutions which were proffered by the Romantic generation in response to the continuing divide between subjects and nature. Taylor presents the theory of J.G. Fichte as the pioneering attempt to resolve the impasse. His solution was to cast subjectivity as the totally encompassing quality of being. (Taylor 1975, 36) This uses Kant’s “I think” perspective as a universal, transcendent and unified condition of existence. Thus, any hard and fast boundaries between subjects and objects or individuals and others blur irreversibly. All become constant as parts of the greater, subjective universal.

Fichte employs Kant’s concept of transcendent reflection to present agents as capable of elucidating their place in a universal consciousness or, ultimate subjectivity. While Fichte offers a concept of intuition based awareness which Taylor values, Fichte’s

theory falls short of satisfying the dilemma of the Romantics. Fichte's system relies upon a reductionist argument wherein all existent beings and natural objects exist as undifferentiated parts of an ultimate "Godhead". He replicates the Enlightenment paradigm of subjectivity overcoming nature, only now it is no longer a dualist model but a wholesale consumption. Fichte's theory does, however, provide a concept of a universal current connecting humans through shared sources of meaning. Fichte also develops a notion in which the drive to "self clarity" includes a spiritual dimension rooted in intuitive feeling and a "moral reality". The idea of "moral reality" is critical to an argument against "radical subjectivity". Taylor acknowledges this in his assertion that

If the highest spiritual side of man, his moral freedom, is to come to more than passing and accidental harmony with his natural being, then nature itself has to tend to be spiritual...as a set of underlying forces which manifest themselves in phenomena. (Taylor 1975, 38-39)

Fichte's concept of a universal subjectivity had obvious origins in a theistic perspective of ultimate reality as divine reality. This reflects the trend in which many of the Romantics were drawn into increasingly theologically centered arguments against the objectification of Enlightenment "materialism". However, the demand that the universal element which unites subjects with one another and nature not impede the freedom of rational subjectivity made the retreat to orthodox dogma impossibly problematic. As Taylor makes clear, any serious answer to the crisis of disunity had to provide for a vision of union which neither robbed humans of their free will nor nature of its substantive force. Neither one could be subjugated to the other. In light of this, a trend towards casting both nature and human subjectivity as equally oriented towards spiritual ideals began to dominate the response to the "materialist", or ironically "naturalist"

depiction of the emptiness of the physical realm. This spiritualization provided common cause between subjects and fundamentally rooted them in a meaningful reality. Taylor describes this as “man...at one with nature in himself and in the cosmos while being most fully a self-determining subject... [whose] basic natural inclination [must] spontaneously be to morality and freedom.”(Taylor 1975, 39) Taylor, in his own moral philosophy, will make this orientation contingent on a commensurable drive in exterior reality towards the realization of moral “goods”. Demonstrating that, “underlying natural reality is a spiritual principle striving to realize itself.”(ibid)

As we shall see later, this depiction of humans and reality as oriented towards a vision of meaningful “goods” resonates strongly with Taylor’s own presentation of the self’s determination of moral will. However, the theoretical framework borne of the “expressivist” and Romantic critiques examined thus far do not provide the central inspiration to the theory developed in “Identity and the Good”. The philosopher who, in Taylor’s reckoning, advances the most effective response to the nature/subject divide was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel was a contemporary of the Romantics who was deeply influenced by Herder, but ultimately found both Herder and the Romantics attempts to arrive at a satisfactory synthesis lacking in gravitas. Hegel devised to solve the paradox which had plagued all efforts to unite subjects and nature. His first task was to address the circular argument which posited humans as engaged in an unrelenting moral struggle against contrary desires emanating from exterior reality. This was further complicated by the Fichtian idea of a universal subjectivity which possessed value for Hegel, yet when coupled with Kant’s theory placed humans in an unceasing battle against themselves.

The underpinnings of Hegel's model were set out by Friedrich Schelling, an early collaborator of his who embraced Romanticism and espoused a philosophy which sought to overcome dualism by elevating art to the forefront of human activity. Schelling advanced a concept of a comprehensive subjectivity akin to Fichte's ideal. However, he introduced the qualities of "consciousness" and "unconsciousness" to the vision of universal subjectivity. By asserting that human's immediate conscious subjectivity is informed by a deeper unconscious current of universal thought, Schelling surmounted the division and isolation effected by dualism. Further, he claimed that art acts as the prime medium through which these two levels of being can be united. Thus, through the process of "expressive" creation, individuals tap into the unconscious stream to inspire their work which is shaped by their conscious faculties. Schelling sought to overcome the Kantian perpetual struggle by this device, as art acted as the channel for collaboration between the forces of freedom as "consciousness" and feeling as "unconsciousness". Taylor acknowledges the importance of Schelling's thought to Hegel's subsequent theory. However, he also outlines its intrinsic flaw which pressed Hegel along in his own work. The dilemma which undermined Schelling's model was its opaque characterization of the exact composition of universal subjectivity. If the subjectivity which generates self and nature is a property of finite human beings, it necessarily falls back into the grand ego of Fichte's vision. However, if it is above all else a cosmic phenomena, then where do humans fit into the scheme? What is the nature of the finite subject's relationship to an infinite subject? Once more freedom is challenged.

Hegel's solution incorporated Fichte's notion of a universal cosmic subject, but differentiated it from the subjectivity of humans. He also interpreted Kant in such a way

as to make free will and reason the conduit through which subjects come to the awareness of a universal subject which he called "*Geist*". Taylor focuses on Hegel's abiding emphasis upon the central roles which reason, consciousness and action, play in the realization of the unity of being. While the Romantics increasingly acquiesced to "visions of the power of fantasy and endless creativity" (Taylor 1975, 48) Hegel emphasized the requirement that rational reflection act as the mitigating factor in a relationship which posited humans as the conscious "vehicles" for the expression of a universal subjectivity, "*Geist*". This contrasted sharply with the Romantic return to an orthodox notion of an absolute/omnipotent universal God which fueled an unceasing creative drive, subordinating rational freedom to mystical sensuality. The salient feature of Hegel's system, according to Taylor, is the unrelenting demand that humans not sacrifice self-understanding to achieve unity with "*Geist*". Subjects must be aware of where they stand in the world and why. Hence, Hegel rejects any solution which relies on a process inaccessible to rational reflection. Freedom depends on the capacity to understand what motivates our deepest feelings. The solution then is for the finite rational subject to provide the "vehicle" through which the infinite subject can express itself. Crucially, this takes place as collaboration and not as a possession. As such, the finite being must be able to fully grasp the process to which they are an integral party. Thus, Taylor lauds Hegel's system for its attempt to

Arrive at the 'identity of identity and non-identity' (*Differenz* 77), the unity of the single current of life and the division between subject and object implicit in rational consciousness...[a] concept of infinity which incorporates finitude, and his insistence on the unmitigated claims of reason... (Taylor 1975, 48-49)

This concept influenced two critical features of Taylor's own theory, the "best account" and "qualitative distinction". The impact is evinced by the central requirement based on the reflection of "goods" received through a connection with a source exterior to subjectivity but integral to the conception of self. What is communicated through Hegel is the ability of subjects to assume a "functional vision of life". At the core of this paradigm is the rational, finite subject and the "universal spirit", or "moral sources" in Taylorian theory, coming together to actualize an ultimate realization of a meaningful reality. This effectively bridges the divide between the pre-modern "enchanted" universe and the modern demands of responsible rationality. For Taylor, Hegel's effort contains several valuable insights which he eventually synthesizes into his own attempt to reconcile meaning with reason. Hegel's insistence upon the place of rational reflection in understanding what motivates us, as conscious beings, represents what becomes central to Taylor's notion of "accounting" for our "moral sources". So too does the emphasis which Hegel places on the need for agents to act in their life to realize their subjective vision. Contained in this idea is the sense of struggle which Kant made the theme of his theory. Taylor interprets this as the need to exercise our "intuitive" facets of understanding to hone the ability to recognize and "articulate" what contains meaningful (moral) value. Where Hegel's system fails in Taylor's estimation, is in its idealization of an exclusive, universal meaning in the figure of "*Geist*". This ignores the plurality of different "goods" which orient people's lives and can be observed between disparate societies/cultures or even within the same social group. The homogenous character of Hegel's "universal spirit" resembles too much Fichte's universal subjectivity in that it

subordinates humans to an absolute force. Even though in Hegel's model the human is a partner to the process, the power of free will is nevertheless undermined.

Taylor draws out of the Romantic period what are to become the basic materials for his construction of a new framework for understanding modernity. Taylor's framework attempts to address the "*malaise*" which has plagued western societies since the advent of Enlightened thought usurped the pre-modern universe of meaning; a paradigm which had for so long provided substance to mundane existence. Taylor, like Hegel, is attempting to forge a middle way between the rigors of reason and the emotive dimension of feeling. The test is whether he can craft a coherent model which upholds a standard of critical reflection, while also acknowledging the heterogeneity of meaning at work in the exterior world. To ascertain how he seeks to accomplish this feat we shall turn to the first part of his tome *Sources of the Self*. Taylor's exhaustive examination of the first attempt to solve the problematic of the Enlightenment divide, undertaken by Hegel et al., was a necessary preparation for the development of "Identity and the Good". However, despite the inestimable worth of the work of Hegel and his cohorts Taylor believes that moderns still languish in a condition of liminality. This has left humans stranded between the enchanted world of the pre-Enlightenment and a new, potentially comprehensive form of moral thought. Taylor's theory is proffered as a map with which to chart this transition.

Chapter Two

Taylor on the “Good”

From the outset of *Sources of the Self* Taylor makes it clear that the work should be approached as two related, yet unique endeavors. He even provides the humorous disclaimer that “those bored by modern philosophy might want to skip part one. Those who are bored by history...should read nothing else.” (Taylor 1989, x) Taylor divides the book into five parts. The first, “Identity and the Good”, constitutes what I contend to be a new theoretical model for understanding morality. The remaining four parts comprise a rather exhaustive history of western philosophy’s various interpretations of subjectivity and selfhood. Moral philosophy is central to this historical project, primarily in the context of a genealogy seeking to expose the influences exerted on the modern sense of self by seminal thinkers such as Socrates, Augustine and Locke. Hence this section of Taylor’s work has as its main focus a historical charting of intellectual movements such as the Reformation and the Enlightenment which prepared the ground for modern moral thought. Thus, the voice exercised by Taylor in the second part is that of analyst, in contrast to the theoretical tenor of the first part. Consequently, it is the first, theoretical part of *Sources of the Self* with which the present study is exclusively concerned.

The original theory constructed in part one is actually quite marginal to the larger project of the book. Taylor goes so far as to present his theory as a sort of preparatory exercise in moral thought. The purpose of which being to orient the reader by “mapping connections between senses of the self and moral visions, between identity and the good...This seemed necessary in that moral philosophies dominant today tend to obscure these connections.” (ibid) Despite Taylor’s qualification, I

believe that what is communicated in “Identity and the Good” is far more profound than a “preliminary discussion” (ibid) of morality. Rather, I see the theory advanced in “Identity and the Good” as a bold new vision of the role morality plays in forming human identity. This theory has the potential to radically alter the understanding of what gives lucidity and meaning to life. Further, the presence in Taylor’s theory of constituent elements such as the balance of reason and feeling, subjectivity and exteriority, and freedom and universal access to “moral sources”, all evince a clear link to the issues which occupied him in his work on Hegel. In light of this connection, I contend that Taylor is forging ahead where he perceives Hegel, and his contemporaries, as having failed. As such, “Identity and the Good” can be analyzed as Taylor’s effort to create a theoretical model capable of bridging the ostensibly conflicting demands of sober reason and transcendent feeling. What continues to make this enterprise necessary is what Taylor sees as the growing and pervasive “*malaise*” haunting the modern west. (Taylor 1992a, 1) The origins of this condition lie in the Enlightenment’s rift between the isolation of “radical subjectivity” and agents’ integral sense of substantive non-subjective, meaningful forces in reality.

Taylor is thus expressing a concern for the state of modern, popular moral thought. As attested to above, he feels the link between subjects and the sources which inform their ideas of what constitutes a meaningful life have been willfully obscured. To understand how Taylor proposes to resolve this tension we must first understand upon what his argument rests. The basis of his theory is primarily the assertion that morality is a feature of reality engaged with, and by the subjective self forming an integral relationship crucial to developing a coherent picture of human life. Taylor’s

belief in the interplay between moral ideals and a definite sense of identity is clearly affirmed by his assertion that “Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes.” (Taylor 1989, 3) As such, any discussion of identity is contingent on a lucid assessment of what “moral sources” command our respect. Or, in some cases even our reverence.

The tenor of Taylor’s discourse stands in stark contrast to what he casts as the normative theory of modern, moral philosophy. This challenge necessitates that he begin “Identity and the Good” by addressing the problems he perceives in the reigning “naturalist” attitude towards morality. It is under this auspice that he advances a critique of modern moral thought as an instrumental, formulaic process. Taylor casts the dominant moral system in the west as calculative, and anchored in supposed objective standards of result oriented behavior which

focus on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life; [which] has no conceptual place for a notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance (ibid)

This resonates keenly with the problematic presented by Taylor in the first chapter of *Hegel*. There, he argued that the romantics were reacting to strains in Enlightenment thought which sought to exile emotion from a legitimate understanding of reality. This eviction was based on the assumption that feeling is a wholly subjective phenomenon and thus lacks intellectual legitimacy. This requires that reality be defined as a category which can only be comprehended through empirical observation, as practiced by the natural sciences. Taylor’s appraisal of the contemporary climate of moral thought communicates a sense that this view has become increasingly entrenched in

the post Enlightenment west. Despite the dominance of empiricism in modern philosophy, Taylor asserts that this perspective does not enjoy complete hegemony over the modern *logos*. He claims that cohabiting alongside the utilitarian attitude in the modern subject is an incongruous concern for the worth of feeling and spirituality in one's life. This is evidenced by the central role that concepts such as authenticity and dignity play in discourses surrounding identity. This dialectic leads to a tension in modern life best characterized as a persistent struggle between

what appear to be the demands of reason and disengaged freedom, and equality and universality, on one hand, and the demands of nature, or fulfillment, or expressive integrity, or intimacy, or particularity, on the other...all linked in some way or other to the great intramural debate of the last two centuries, pitting the philosophy of the Enlightenment against the various forms of Romantic opposition. (Taylor 1989, 101)

The goal for Taylor is to resolve this standoff and actualize a new, comprehensive moral theory. The first step in his endeavor is the exploration of what he apprehends to be the "moral intuition" native to human beings. It is my contention that this faculty is foundational to his subsequent theory. It comprises a source which informs moral decision making beyond pragmatic considerations which account solely for the greatest good for the greatest number. The "moral intuition" is, for Taylor, a conduit for making contact with, and integrating, unique "goods". "Goods" which Taylor asserts act to orient us in moral space and provide personal and public standards justified by our belief in them as real. The insistence that "moral sources" be accorded the weight of real phenomena is vital to Taylor's system. Taylor argues that human morality is rooted in an evaluative process, governed by ideas of worth and purpose in relation to a given mode of life. As such, "moral sources" and the "goods" they contain exercise a continuous influence over matters both momentous and

mundane. Taylor explains that agents use “goods” to frame their perception of what matters to them in life. As a consequence, the “goods” which resonate most powerfully with an individual’s notion of a worthwhile life become “indispensible” to what Taylor deems the “moral ontology”. What is conveyed by the term “moral ontology” is an understanding of “moral sources” which Fergus Kerr describes as seeking to “open up a nonanthropocentric perspective on the good, to allow us to see the ‘sovereignty of the good’ over the moral agent.” (Kerr 2004, 84) The “ontological” component involves active reflection of “goods” by the agent and the “recognition of some good for human beings which springs from some other than purely human source... [which] has to be spelled out in instances of ordinary everyday discriminations.”(Kerr 2004, 102) Thus the “moral ontology” provides an operational understanding of one’s “vision of the good”, capable of supplying rational justification for moral choices and actions. As such, Taylor demands that these powerfully influential “goods” not only be considered real but also

indispensible to (what now appears to me to be) the clearest, most insightful statement of the issues before me... Now ‘dignity’, or ‘courage’, or ‘brutality’ may be indispensable terms for me, in that I cannot do without them in assessing possible courses of actions, or in judging the people or situations around me, or in determining how I really feel about some person’s actions or way of being. (Taylor 1989, 57)

Taylor’s argument for the acceptance of value terms and the “goods” they represent as real puts him at odds with the normative modern understanding of moral ideals. His stance in “moral realism” is assumed in contradistinction to that of the dominant moral “non-realists”. Taylor argues that the “non-realists” subscribe to a “naturalist” ideology, inspired by the methodology of the natural sciences. Thus, the “non-realists” limit the category of the real solely to those objects whose properties

can be tangibly investigated. Accordingly, the “non-realists” eschew the possibility that values or “goods” can exist separate from subjective projection. However, as Taylor’s argument makes clear, the power which “moral sources” exert over human thought and action have very real consequences. Hence, Taylor asserts that the only way in which one can denounce “goods” as un-real is to ignore the pivotal role they play in ordering one’s “moral attitude”. Taylor accuses the “non-realists” of just such a deception, in that their position relies heavily on the “good” of objectivity. Thus, Taylor concludes that the status of “goods” as real is confirmed by their ubiquitous presence and indispensable role in forming a coherent worldview. This includes the perspective of the “naturalists” who reject them as subjective projections. That one must make recourse to values and standards of thought and action, such as objectivity, to argue against the very same category of “goods” is the strongest evidence that they are indeed real. (Taylor 1989, 59)

This conclusion broadens the purview of morality considerably. Understood in this fashion morality not only shapes societal mores, it is vital to self-representation. Forming a central bulwark of Taylor’s theory, he locates the “moral intuition” in a broader “framework” of moral reasoning. The function of a “framework” is to provide moral agents with a “qualitative” sense of where they “stand” in relation to moral “goods”. Nicholas Smith furberishes a crisp description of the importance of “frameworks” to Taylor’s project by elucidating the way in which

Our sense of self is connected to the ‘stand’ we take on issues that matter to us. It matters to us that we lead lives that are fulfilling rather than empty, noble rather than base, admirable rather than contemptible, and the like. And we are able to tell the difference...by being placed in what Taylor calls ‘frameworks’ of qualitative contrast. We need the frameworks to know where we stand on

issues of significance. They provide us with an orientation not for *mere* life but for living well, for leading a fully human life. (Smith 2002, 92)

Smith's description highlights two important aspects of "frameworks". First, is the role questioning plays in stimulating agents to elucidate their moral "frameworks". The nature of such questioning pertains to the need agents feel to discern the "qualitative contrast" between the importance of particular "goods" to their understanding of "what it is good to be". This questioning may derive from either an "engaged", self-reflection or, equally, from other interlocutors involved in moral discourse. The second feature of "frameworks" which Smith outlines is the "evaluative" function they perform. An agent relies on their moral "framework" to make substantive assessments about what "goods" they feel to be most compelling to their notion of the "goodlife". Taylor calls this process "strong evaluation". The task of "strong evaluation" is reflective. It consists of an exercise which determines the qualitative difference between "right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires...but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged."(Taylor 1989, 4) This description of moral standards, locates them exterior to the subjective dominion of the self. Further, it implies that these "standards" or "goods" execute a claim upon humans independent of their particular desires. The conduit through which this demand is experienced is the "moral intuition", which Taylor characterizes as "uncommonly deep, powerful, and universal." (Taylor 1989, 4) Taylor's description of the "moral intuition" as a universal trait is highly contentious, as it challenges the "atomistic" view of subjectivity prevalent in modern "naturalist" philosophy. As heir to the mantle of the radical Enlightenment the "naturalist" school holds that humans are absolutely

sovereign subjects. Hence the notion that all of human kind is universally susceptible to the claims of real, non-subjective moral phenomena would be unacceptable.

In making his case for the “moral intuition” as a universal human attribute Taylor employs a rhetorical device, replacing “intuition” with “instinct”. This substitution elucidates the seemingly innate nature of certain common moral compunctions. According to Taylor, morality as an “instinct” is most strongly expressed by the reluctance of humans to inflict wanton harm upon others. Taylor inserts the caveat that this taboo applies only to those possessing the culturally and historically determined qualities which confer human status in a given society. However, Taylor also makes the point that in the contemporary west the status of human is, for most, “coterminous with the human race”. (Taylor 1989, 4) In exploring “instinctual” prohibitions Taylor exposes the underlying ideal of respect for life. Taylor contends that the “instinctual” response to an underlying ideal such as the respect for human life forces subjects to make moral determinations. These deliberations are governed by “claims, implicit or explicit, about the nature and status of human beings... [hence] a moral reaction is an assent to, an affirmation of, a given ontology of the human.” (Taylor 1989, 5)

The trajectory of Taylor’s model is quite convincing. Subjects feel an “instinctual” demand to act morally towards those who have been determined to merit respect based on post-intuitive “ontological” reasoning. This presents humans as sharing in a common moral experience which can produce a consistency in moral regard or standards. This process is facilitated through an engagement with the phenomena of moral “goods”. While differing in its results, this process is nonetheless

“universal” in its experience. The device of “instinct” however, does not possess the necessary depth for such an experience. While it served the purpose of conveying the visceral like response provoked by the claims felt by subjects of moral “goods”, “instinct” is limited by its reflexive nature. While reflexivity conveys the kinetic force of “intuitive” moral feelings, it lacks recourse to the necessary reasoned reflection to construct a “moral ontology” required to frame one’s reaction. Hence, Taylor incorporates “instinct” into his more comprehensive “intuition” model. Thus, the range of “intuition” encompasses visceral reactions while also being capable of the reasoned reflection required to construct the nuanced “ontological” accounts needed to make sense of life as authentic, worthwhile, etc. This leads to Taylor’s assertion that morality possesses a dual nature evidenced by

The whole way in which we think, reason, argue, and question ourselves about morality [which] supposes that our moral reactions have these two sides: that they are not only ‘gut’ feelings but also implicit acknowledgements of claims concerning their objects. (Taylor 1989, 7)

I argue that “intuitive” moral feeling is pre-conditional to the subsequent notion of the “moral ontology” which it inspires. Taylor, however, focuses much more attention on the role that the “moral ontology” plays in identity development. In fact, much of his case is built on the premise that humans cannot function in a whole fashion without them. Perhaps the basic emotive quality of the “moral intuition” makes it an especially difficult facet of Taylor’s system to explain. Certainly the non-verbal nature of “intuition” makes a detailed description of it problematic. Taylor side-steps the need for an explicit depiction of the “moral intuition” by linking the “intuitive” process to “ontological” construction in a symbiotic relationship. This sublimates the “intuitive” component beneath the “moral ontology”, allowing Taylor

to assume the former in his analysis of the latter. Taylor's demurral from attempting a more satisfactory exposition of the role of "intuitive" feeling is unfortunate. However it is clear that in his estimation the "moral ontology" occupies the pivotal place in developing one's understanding of the "good".

In examining Taylor's concept of "moral ontology" it is clear that although he claims the universality of the process, any results will necessarily be particular. This can be clarified by a linear sketch of Taylor's theoretical chain of events. Subjects are inevitably confronted by a given problem, identified as problematic by the "intuitive" feeling of moral disharmony provoked in the subject. This problem demands a response. Based on this, subjects reflect on how to frame the situation in their own understanding. This leads to the construction of an "ontological" account which seeks to reconcile the problematic with the subject's "moral attitude". The "ontological" component, however, raises a difficult question. Why are certain objects or entities deserving of respect? I argue that this decision is primarily informed by the emotive component manifested by "moral intuition". This is what enables subjects to develop a feel for how closely something concurs with their notion of what is "good" or worthwhile. Moral reasoning, so understood, inherently defies empirical measure or standardization. Hence, moral deliberations, though instigated by universal "intuitive" feelings, ultimately produce conclusions particular to the deliberating agent. This particularity remains unique to their orientation towards what they feel is "good". If Taylor is correct, "naturalist" claims to a neutral, "disengaged" mode of moral reasoning are no longer tenable. Nothing filtered through emotional experience can pretend to be "disengaged". The character of such diverse, lived experiences

informing moral deliberations gives an impression of them as exerting a powerful, but obscured, influence over subjects. Taylor describes these experiential impressions as “background pictures”, which agents make use of when considering moral questions. These “background pictures” help agents to begin to make sense of their “intuitive”, emotional experiences of moral “goods”, developing a “moral ontology” through which they can

discriminate more finely what it is about human beings that makes them worthy of respect, [forcing one] to call to mind what it is to feel the claim of human suffering, or what is repugnant about injustice, or the awe you feel at the fact of human life. No argument can take someone from a neutral stance towards the world...to insight into moral ontology. (Taylor 1989, 8)

In weighing Taylor’s thesis it might seem, in light of his work on Hegel, he is seeking to rehabilitate the Romantic’s sentiment for a modern audience. While Taylor plainly finds value in the Romantic response to the Enlightenment which rejected its most de-humanizing elements, he stakes out an asymmetrical stance in the larger debate. This is evinced by his demand that “ontological” accounts be governed by a rigorous process of rational reflection. The effect of this rational criterion is to clip the wings of Romanticism’s most indulgent portrayals of the role of feeling in an “ontology” of the human. The role reason plays in Taylor’s theory is both that of illuminator and auditor of the aforementioned unexamined “background” of moral experience. Rational reflection will, according to Taylor, aid in revealing the “background picture” from which subjects draw the raw materials for the creation of meaning in their lives. Meaning, in this context, consists of the various “ontological” insights subjects use to elucidate their sense of “what it is good to be”. Ideally these “ontological” insights are then “articulated” by the subject in the broader social

discourse in which they can be examined and possibly challenged by others. This highlights the dialectical character of one's "strong evaluations" of moral "goods". Demonstrating how they are partially formed through self-reflection and partially informed by the questions of others. This dialectical questioning prompts agents to continually and critically reflect upon their "moral attitudes", staving off the reification of their notion of the "good". Thus "articulation" is as crucial to Taylor's theory as reflection. As Melissa A. Orlie describes, Taylor's theory "presses us to say what our visions of the good are, to say what we consider it good and right to do and become."(Orlie 2004, 159) Further, by "articulating" the "ontological" underpinnings of one's "moral attitude" subjects begin to actualize their beliefs. This, Orlie states, shows how "Taylor has worked to make us more articulate about what we believe to be good so that we might become more inspired to take action for its sake."(ibid) It is thus no exaggeration to state that, for Taylor, "articulation" is integral to one's sense of self as well as one's representation to others. Consequently, it can be argued that according to Taylor one's feeling of worth or authenticity regarding life is directly proportional to one's capacity to "articulate" what one apprehends to be meaningful and "good" about life. This evidences the need for a new "moral vocabulary" capable of elucidating the contents of "moral ontology" in clear and cogent terms.

In linking "articulation" to "ontology" Taylor is careful to maintain the dynamic quality of both. As one's "moral ontology" grows, changes and transforms over the course of life one's "articulation" of the "good" alters to reflect those changes. Taylor describes this process as the creation of a "story which makes the best sense of us, unless and until we can replace them with more clairvoyant

substitutes...yield[ing] the best account we can give at any given time” (Taylor 1989, 58) The “best account”, or “B.A. principle”, conditions “articulation” as tentative, ensuring that our “articulations” of the “good” remain open to change. Taylor argues however, that subjects fail to engage with and reflect upon their own “background” experiences of moral feeling, with the consequence being that “the moral ontology behind any person’s views can remain largely implicit.”(Taylor 1989, 9) Thus, the majority of subjects have a very poor understanding of their own ideas of what is “good” or meaningful about life. This moral lethargy is enabled by a social environment which discourages deep moral questioning. This perpetuates a comfortable consensus based on a status quo code of ethics justified by utilitarian ends. Taylor contends that this dearth of lucidity concerning moral motivation leads to a “lack of fit between what people as it were officially and consciously believe, even pride themselves on believing, on one hand, and what they need to make sense of some of their moral reactions, on the other”. (ibid)

Here Taylor accuses the champions of disengaged reason precisely of lacking an adequate degree of rational reflection in regard to their own moral sensibilities. This elicits an indictment of modern moral epistemology as suppressing the proper role of “intuitive” feeling. Excluding the “intuitive” genesis from what qualifies as rational, legitimate expressions of morality necessarily limits the purview of reasoned reflection. By placing the “intuitive” sense of the “good” out of bounds, modern subjects are denied the opportunity to gain a more profound understanding of their own moral reckoning. This leads to the conclusion that modern moral thought is at best ignorant, and at worst deceitful, regarding its sources of motivation.

Regardless of whether this ignorance is deliberate or simply conditioned “one is forced to conclude, there reigns an ideologically induced illusion about the nature of the moral ontology that the thinkers concerned actually rely on... which can show to what extent the real spiritual basis of their own moral judgments deviates from what is officially admitted.” (Taylor 1989, 10) The impasse in apprehending the roots of one’s moral vision are hobbled further still by an air of uncertainty which Taylor casts as pervading modern life in the west. This ambiguity casts a pall over any account of why we feel something is “good”, purposeful or contains meaning. This can, Taylor explains, be partially attributed to the collapse of definite religious orthodoxies, social hierarchies and “enchanted” narratives at the hands of Enlightenment thought. Thus, when confronted by the demand to validate their actions and attitudes, moderns are left “perplexed and uncertain.” (ibid) It is important to point out that his critique of contemporary thought is not launched from an anti-modernist perspective. Taylor considers himself if nothing else a modern philosopher. Taylor acknowledges the value of the liberation of human intellectual potential from the stunting traditions enforced by pre-modern teleological worldviews. What he is at pains to point out is that in limiting moral discourse to utilitarian justifications modern “naturalist” philosophy is simply propagating a new orthodoxy of sorts. As a modern thinker Taylor views this as a failure to accede to the promised freedom from intellectual tyranny heralded by modernity. In the face of the void of uncertainty left by the toppling of strongly assumed convictions intellectuals began to construct new narratives which cast empirical objectivity as the paramount lens through which to view reality. This move, which sought to import methods native to the natural sciences

into philosophical inquiry, produced a regime of ideologies which Taylor critiques as illusive. As an example Taylor offers the theistic formula of life as sacred because it is God given. This had enjoyed near total authority in the west under the long dominant Christian model of moral thought. In the wake of the Enlightenment it became untenable as a universal justification. The rise of rational inquiry based on the tenets of natural science rendered supernatural accounts inaccessible. This wholesale disavowal was carried out without considering the importance of the meaning which these narratives contained for their adherents. Nor was any weight given to the overwhelming appeal such definite worldviews possess for a substantive sense of self and community. The barring off of absolute justifications from authoritative status has left many longing for new universal standards. Taylor identifies the ascendance of the secular justice system as the strongest response to the lack of a popular moral authority. This is exhibited by the salient transformation of the moral realm in which the goal has been to replace formerly absolute theistic sanctions with new secular injunctions based on a concept of human rights. Herein, the respect for life is enshrined in a body of law. Taylor points out that this properly belongs to the category of outcome oriented “procedural ethics”. The emphasis remains on “what it is right to do” (Taylor 1989, 3). A law protecting life can command obedience. However, the basis for this reaction is principally rooted in the coercive force standing behind such laws. Thus, respect for them is contingent primarily on a fear of retribution. Further, they are logistically limited to the reach of the apparatus of enforcement. Hence, deference to such standards is by nature calculative. As such it cannot be the locus of

an earnest response to a strongly felt moral “good”. This lack of sincerity falls far short of Taylor’s conception of moral action motivated by a “love” of the “good”.

To gain a greater insight into why Taylor’s theory is so revolutionary, it is necessary to examine more closely the modern moral *zeitgeist* against which he is agitating. Taylor traces the effort to systematize morality into set rules to the utilitarian project begun during the Enlightenment. However, he discerns the inspiration for this project as more properly attributable to the ideology of the Reformation. Taylor characterizes this ideology as rooted in an “affirmation of ordinary life” (Taylor 1989, 14). Taylor describes this as the veneration of the mundane and the domestic as constituting the essential area of human endeavor. The celebration of “ordinary life” is first demonstrated during the Reformation, wherein the focus of dedication was shifted from the rituals of the church to the rhythms of family life and vocation. The result being that, “previous ‘higher’ forms of life [were] dethroned, as it were.”(Taylor 1989, 13) The focus on domestic and vocational life as devotional had the effect of essentially sanctifying usefulness. This is laid bare in the proliferation of the bourgeois notion that to be productive in one’s vocation and responsible in one’s role as a householder was “the very center of the good life.”(ibid) The contribution of Enlightenment thought did not so much transform this attitude, as simply strip it of its religious trappings. “Ordinary life” and production remained the locus of significance, but not as a testament to faith. In its secularized form usefulness became an end unto itself. To be productive and disciplined was to fulfill one’s potential as an enlightened member of society. The modern preoccupation with result oriented behavior is the successor to this legacy. The overwhelming contemporary emphasis on practicality

and self-control has grown out of instrumentalist theories seeking certain, predictable outcomes from sets of determined actions. This methodology extended to the realm of morality, imposing “procedural ethics” over the impetus of moral feeling. Taylor questions what was discarded in the rise of pragmatic reason. He asserts that the primary accomplishment of utilitarian thought was to usurp the cosmic narratives which had anchored pre-modern life. However, what took their place were simply new mundane narratives which portrayed “productive activity and family life as central to our well being.”(Taylor 1989, 14) Taylor acknowledges the value of this new paradigm in promoting ideals such as autonomy and equality of opportunity. However, while empowering on a practical level what is missing from it is a sense of substantive meaning beyond the immediate exigencies of domestic life and exchange.

Hence, the problem with this worldview lies in its myopic preoccupation with the superficialities of human life. The scope of the utilitarian view of morality is confined to rigid ethical formulas of right actions producing right results. Taylor sees this parochialism as ignoring the very substance of what is at stake in moral questioning. In contrast he locates a deeper, more diffuse sense of morality on “three axes of what can be called, in the most general sense, moral thinking.”(Taylor 1989, 15) The first axis, encompasses the respect for others well being. The second axis revolves around respect for oneself. The third axis fuses the respect for others and oneself into a holistic notion of dignity which provides individuals with what could be considered principles. Taylor classes these elements as “attitudinal” (ibid), as these stances in moral space are conveyable as distinct “attitudes” towards what is “good”. These “moral attitudes” express our evaluation of others moral character, as well as our own

proximity to a self representative ideal. These “axes” provide the means to critically question, from a plurality of perspectives, the moral worth of one’s way of life as well as the life choices of others. According to Taylor this assessment of worth necessarily intuits the potential of making choices that upon reflection feel wrong, leading to the danger that one may conclude they are wasting their life.

The measure of self worth ascertained through this process of critical reflection is, necessarily, linked to what one perceives as commanding respect in others. This points to the clear dialectic at work in Taylor’s theory which presents the moral agent as having to constantly assess the worth which their actions, and those of others, possess in relation to their vision of the “good”. Further, these determinations are made in the realm of the “moral ontology” requiring subjects to shift between different perspectives on the “good” in accord to a given context. Understood in this fashion, moral thought gains a dynamic and heterogeneous character. The attendant demand to occupy a pluralistic perspective made by this model of moral thought, rules out the reductive and static approach of “ethical proceduralism” which advocates that subjects simply conform to a pre-existing moral program. Taylor demonstrates through “intuitive” feeling, “ontological” reflection and context and contrast that subjects are deeply engaged in the construction of their moral perspective, and that this process is continuous and fluid. These qualities prove false the claim that a meaningful moral view can be coolly adopted by subjects without regard for how they actually feel about the “good”. Thus, I argue that Taylor quite successfully refutes the claims of utilitarian moral theories by providing a more inclusive and pervasive description of the process of moral thought.

The dialectic in Taylor's theory is managed by the mechanism of "strong evaluation" which seeks to provide a critical response to existential moral questions

about how I am going to live my life which touch on the issue of what kind of life is worth living, or what kind of life would fulfill the promise implicit in my particular talents...of what constitutes a rich, meaningful life...To understand our moral world we have to see not only what ideas and pictures underlie our sense of respect for others but also those which underpin our notions of a full life. (Taylor 1989, 14)

This sense of worry over the worth of one's life is, according to Taylor, the legacy of the transition from the pre-modern to the modern period. Questions regarding one's purpose in life would have been, by and large, unintelligible to pre-moderns. This certainty derived from the symmetrical relationship between the perceived cosmic order, outlined by pre-modern narratives, and the entrenched social order. Modern reason has, as discussed above, permanently problematized any absolute, teleological structure for human life. Taylor describes this as a loss of "horizon...the dissipation of our sense of the cosmos as a meaningful order" (Taylor 1989, 17). Taylor values the advancement of reason which grew out of this process. However, he rejects simply overthrowing the old paradigms and replacing them with the credo of radical subjectivity. This does nothing to provide for the existential desire for meaning which humans crave. And thus, the original challenge which provoked Hegel and the Romantics remains unmet.

My thesis, in part, casts Taylor as reviving the quest for substantive meaning in the post Enlightenment west. However, I do not perceive him to be a neo-Romantic, nor his theory to be based on anachronistic longings. There is a significant difference in how Taylor approaches the modern predicament. The Romantics, according to

Taylor, sought desperately to re-establish a common aspirational ideal to human life. Taylor rightly recognizes the futility of such a quixotic quest. He is no sentimentalist; he recognizes modernity is governed by a myriad of “goods”. Further, he values this plurality and incorporates it into his theory. This is best evidenced by his conception of the “frameworks” produced by “strong evaluation”, spurred on by the “moral intuition”. Some “frameworks” may indeed be rooted in traditional views, others may be more idiosyncratic. They are all, however, modern in that “no framework is shared by everyone, [none] can be taken for granted as the framework tout court, [none] can sink to phenomenological status of unquestioned fact.”(Taylor 1989, 17) The abiding need for these “frameworks” does, in Taylor’s estimation, provide an important insight into the place of meaning in human life. Without lamenting the loss of a common “horizon”, Taylor argues that the need for some commanding ideal(s) persists. In fact, Taylor likens the absence of ideals to an acute disorientation. The disorientation in this sense has to do with a lack of meaning and purpose in regard to one’s life. In the absence of a “framework” which organizes one’s “goods” into a coherent and meaningful order, agents are left without any sense of “orientation” in moral space. This disorder limits subjects from developing convincing reasons to live their lives beyond the narrow self-interest of basic biological survival. It is particularly interesting that Taylor assigns the need for “frameworks” to the category of the “spiritual”, joining the “moral intuition”. In modern popular use the term “spiritual” has come to be applied to a vast array of concepts. The ensuing ambiguity which the term has acquired obliges an elucidation of Taylor’s implied usage. Taylor defines the spiritual by outlining the repercussions of its loss, envisaging the consequences of the

“world los[ing] altogether its spiritual contour, nothing is worth doing, the fear is of a terrifying emptiness, a kind of vertigo, or even a fracturing of our world and body-space”. (Taylor 1989, 18) As such, the proper function of the spiritual can be described as the magnetic force which effects the connection between the subjective self and external ideals, standards and “goods”. If modern agents can be said to exist in a field of possible ideals, then the function of the “spiritual” faculty is to propel us towards those which resonate most deeply with our particular “background pictures”. Thus, to lose contact with these ideals is in fact to lose, as Taylor puts it, the “spiritual contour” (ibid) of life. Here then, we can make the connection between “spiritual contour” and “moral frameworks”, as “frameworks” provide agents with a meaningful “contour” for their lives.

What then stands in the way of this potential oblivion? Taylor proposes that “strong evaluation” possesses the required capacities to meet the penetrating questions regarding the authenticity and moral orientation of one’s life. The process of “strong evaluation” allows individuals to rationally reflect on the “intuitive” feelings provoked in reaction to “moral sources”. It also enables the construction of “frameworks” to organize “goods” into a hierarchy of meaning and a coherent orientation towards moral ideals. The ordering of “goods” is necessitated by our feeling that some “goods” are more important than others. It is essential to note however that the privileging of certain “goods” over others is not a function of their relative convenience for the agent concerned. What is assessed in “strong evaluation” is the meaningful force exerted by different, real “goods” on a subject’s “moral intuition”. Terry Pinkard provides a succinct description of what is implied by “strong evaluation” in “moral realist” terms:

a person is, in Taylor's well known terms, a "strong evaluator," taking a stance on what must be an end worthy for its own sake. This in turn confers a kind of value on other subordinate matters (in that they may be means to that end, or components of that end, and so forth). The end that is worthy for its own sake makes a claim on us, demands our allegiance to it, as opposed to our having chosen it... The goods toward which we orient ourselves are real, even if they depend on the existence of humans for them to be goods; they are not mere projections that we force onto the world. (Pinkard 2004, 195)

Thus the external, real "goods" which resonate with subjects via the "spiritual" conduit of the "moral intuition" are arranged into a meaningful "framework" through the reasoned, critical reflection of "strong evaluation".

The "spiritual" facet of Taylor's theory seems to correspond with his presentation of Hegel's conception of universal spirit, "*Geist*", as discussed in the previous chapter. In both Taylor's own theory and his analysis of Hegel's philosophy, the "spiritual" dimension of human life plays a central role as both instigator and destination of human thought/life. However, where Hegel ultimately resorted to an exclusive, divine absolute, Taylor makes no such restrictive claim. Rather, in his paradigm the "spiritual" is the bridge which connects the plethora of real, reverential "goods" to the subject's "ontological" capacity to rationally reflect upon and evaluate those "goods". Here plurality proves the difference. Taylor's concept of "spiritual" is a mode through which one can experience the vast array of "goods" available for subjects to help orient and direct their lives. It is not, as Hegel perceived a teleological manipulator of human life.

As examined in the first chapter, both the theory of "radical subjectivity" as well as the "expressivist" response presented reductionist arguments concerning the moral dimension of human experience. The former asserted that all perceived meaning in

human life, including morality, can be ascribed to the projections of insular subjectivity. The latter endowed a transcendent absolute, variously represented by nature, the Divine or for Hegel, “*Geist*” with the unique power to provide meaning, including that concerning the “good”, to human life. Taylor by contrast identifies multiple sources of meaning as accessible to individuals. Thus, agents have access to various ideals around which to construct “frameworks” which organize their vision of a worthwhile life. This does not imply, however, that all the possible “goods” integrated by their particular “framework” possess equal “ontological” weight. Taylor delineates between the power of regular “goods” against that of what he terms “hypergoods” in orienting agents in moral space. The notion that some higher “goods” take precedence over other regular “goods” is based on the premise that “To acknowledge the cognitive force of some claim is one thing, to be *moved* by it another.”(Smith 2002, 111) Hence, while subjects may find a range of regular “goods” appealing, it is only “hypergoods” which can elicit a feeling of love. The distinction between the two categories is made using the mechanism of “strong evaluation” as previously described. This process of evaluation produces a ranking of the “goods” which command one’s allegiance. This communicates a notion of the varying degrees of influence exerted by “goods” through the “moral intuition” and the discerning nature of the “ontological” reaction which results:

a framework incorporates a crucial set of qualitative distinctions. To think, feel, judge within such a framework is to function with a sense that some action, or mode of life, or mode of feeling is incomparably higher...the sense is that there are ends or goods which are worthy or desirable in a way that cannot be measured on the same scale as our ordinary ends...Because of their special status they command our awe, respect, or admiration.”(Taylor 1989, 20)

The ability to make “qualitative distinctions” between a plethora of “goods” available to individuals is crucial in establishing a coherent moral “framework”. Thus, while recognizing the plurality of available “goods”, Taylor’s theory also provides the intellectual means to manage such a diversity of “moral sources”. The notion of the “hypergood” does not extinguish the role played by multiple regular “goods” in constructing identity and meaning. Rather, the “hypergood” imposes a necessary order to the overall structure. The hierarchical configuration of “qualitative distinctions” allows for the flexibility of compromise regarding regular “goods”, while placing “hypergoods” in a more select position. While regular “goods” aid subjects to navigate moral space their claim on individuals is mitigated by the extenuating circumstances of mundane life. In contrast, “A hypergood has its own demands and these may indeed require self-sacrifice. There are life goods that the hypergood overrides.”(Smith 2002, 112) Thus, regular “goods” are secondary to “hypergoods” within the “moral ontology”. Subjects rely on both to help orient themselves in moral space, however the power to radically re-orient them is unique to “hypergoods”. This intuitively the notion that one’s moral perspective is susceptible to change in response to an adequate catalyst, represented here by a “hypergood”. This gives further evidence to Taylor’s concern for the dynamic nature of moral thought. His model consistently provides for the dialectical character of moral thought and action. For agents to function in heterogeneous societies, a certain degree of compromise must be allowed in relation to their normative “goods”. However there must also be a limit to such negotiable “goods”, otherwise no “ontological” stability could take root. Taylor’s model meets

both demands. Further, he makes it clear that “hypergoods”, while privileged, are not static. These also must change over the course of one’s life experience.

Taylor’s portrayal of the whole process of moral reasoning exudes lucidity. Beginning with the “intuitive” inkling through to “strong evaluation” and “qualitative distinctions” all collaborating in the “articulation” of one’s “best account” of “what it is good to be”, Taylor outlines a fluid development of an increasingly clear vision of the meaningful “goods” which command one’s admiration and inspire their actions. This process is integral to establishing a coherent and meaningful sense of self. However, Taylor argues that despite these resources most people lack a lucid understanding of the development of their own moral perspective. This ignorance is precipitated by the sense of ambiguity which pervades modernity. This lack of explicit self-understanding is a prime target of Taylor’s theory. He believes that, although “frameworks” are common to all functional agents they remain implicit and unarticulated by the great majority of us. Often, agents only reflect upon a deeper sense of meaning in times of crisis, when they feel they are losing touch with something foundational to their identity. In a particularly apt example, Taylor demonstrates how prevalent this dearth of self-awareness is. He uses the proponents of utilitarian, “naturalist” philosophy as an example of agents whose worldview is ruled by unacknowledged “hypergoods”. Taylor quite keenly observes that in extolling the “ordinary life” as the plane of proper human endeavor, “naturalists” are in fact employing “strong evaluation”. This is the only conceivable way in which to determine a “qualitative distinction” based on the notion of a right versus a wrong approach to life. “For the affirmation of ordinary life, while necessarily denouncing

certain distinctions, itself amounts to one; else it has no meaning at all.”(Taylor 1989, 23) This casts moderns as befuddled and apprehensive in relation to their deep seated beliefs. Hence, as Taylor argues, much of the modern moral discourse is replete with fundamental inconsistencies between its conclusions and the processes which produce them.

The remedy which Taylor proposes for this conundrum is based on the expressive power of articulation. This harkens back to his assessment of Romantic philosophy as celebrating “expressivism”, yet with a distinctly modern bent. Taylor presented the Romantics as emphasizing the aesthetic component of expression exemplified by painting, poetry and music. In contrast, he seeks to harness the capacity for clarity possessed by expression. It is important to note that “articulation” here rests on a critical reflection of one’s moral “framework”. Taylor explains precisely what agents do when they apply expressive power to underlying moral motivations.

Frameworks provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgments, intuitions, or reactions...To articulate a framework is to explicate what makes sense of our moral responses...when we try to spell out what it is that we presuppose when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile...or define our moral obligations in a certain manner, we find ourselves articulating inter alia what I have been calling here ‘frameworks’. (Taylor 1989, 26)

Thus, “frameworks” are integral to what Taylor describes as “undamaged human personhood.”(Taylor 1989, 27) To lack a “framework” of moral understanding would place a barrier between a subject and society. More disconcerting, the lack of a “framework” makes self-understanding impossible, as one would lack any orientation in moral space. Hence possessing a moral “framework” is, according to Taylor, central to being a functional moral agent. Simply possessing a “framework” does not,

however, meet the demands of authentic personhood as set out by Taylor. In addition to constructing a “framework” through rational, “strong evaluation” Taylor also expects subjects to consciously “articulate” it. The transparency of an open “articulation” of one’s moral vision renders the “goods” and “hypergoods” which provide meaning to life available to oneself and others. “Articulating” one’s stance in moral space also intuits the possibility of having one’s “framework” challenged, either through self reflection or the questioning of others. Taylor interprets this challenge as an opportunity for the development of a more cogent understanding of one’s “moral ontology”. Taylor asserts that the “goods” which engage “moral intuition” only become manifest through the articulation of their content. Despite Taylor’s opacity regarding the precise level of importance played by the “moral intuition”, it is my contention that “intuitive” feeling constitutes the most basic level of moral reasoning in his theory. Following this primacy of feeling it becomes clear that when agents discuss what moves them they are illuminating the intuitive experience of the “good”.

The central notion here is that articulation can bring us closer to the good as a moral source, can give it power... The constitutive good is a moral source, in the sense I want to use the term here: that is, it is a something the love of which empowers us to do and be good. (Taylor 1989, 92-93)

This intuits that upon critical reflection and expression one can discover the “qualitatively” higher “good” which provides their life with substantive meaning. Thus, the “hypergood” is presented as “constitutive” to one’s sense of moral identity. That is, it “constitutes” an ideal of what an agent judges to be an authentic and purposeful life. This “constitutes” a standard of self-representation which individuals struggle to realize through moral thought and action. As such, the subject not only comes to esteem their “hypergood”, which conveys respect, they love it. This

introduces a compelling emotion into moral thought. The presence of an emotion as powerful as love threatens detached reason with the possibility of irrational devotion. Thus, the “constitutive good” has the potential of eclipsing all the other “goods” or commitments in a person’s life. This threatens the modern, “naturalist” ideal of “disengaged” reason and absolute autonomy. Indeed Taylor’s argument intertwines reason, feeling and representation into an all-inclusive moral process. None of the facets of this process could alone produce a meaningful moral account. Humans engage intimately with “goods” which populate our reality. These “goods” can only exert their force through the connection effected by the “moral intuition”. The feeling of the “good” in turn depends on the rational reflection of “strong evaluation” to frame one’s “intuition” about the “good” into a lucid “ontological” account. Finally, the process must produce an explicit “articulation” of the moral “framework”, putting it into play for both the agent and their community. It is critical to recall that this process is continuous and that these expressions are ephemeral, presenting the “best account” that an agent can give at a given point in their life. To maintain one’s sense of authenticity it is necessary to continuously work towards developing a fuller, more lucid “articulation” reflecting the changes in one’s moral perspective.

Taylor’s claim that “moral sources” are real, and to a degree independent of human subjectivity, is dismissed by modern “naturalist” philosophy. Taylor cautions that this denial carries a heavy cost for those who ascribe to it. To suppress the “goods” which “constitute” one’s moral outlook leads to an unhealthy self-deception. Taylor describes the repercussion of this obfuscation of “moral sources” as, “the great unsaid that underlies widespread attitudes in our civilization”. (Taylor 1989, 104) To

ignore one's moral "framework" does not intuit that it ceases to exist, or that underlying moral feelings lose their power. The danger of such a pervasive moral inarticulacy is that it prevents subjects from managing the plural, sometimes contradictory, character of the "goods" at work in one's "moral ontology". Following Taylor's theory, agents are constantly engaged with various "goods" commanding differing levels of esteem. This profusion of ideals requires individuals be able to shift amongst differing perspectives to arrive at sometimes paradoxical conclusions. The only way in which these judgments can be made confidently is through the critical purview afforded by "strong evaluation". The rational capacity to evaluate "goods" must be coupled with an acknowledgement that the allure of certain "hypergoods" can only be comprehended in emotional terms such as love. Modern "naturalist" philosophy rejects the understanding of "goods" as real and exerting influence, and thus lacks the evaluative tools to provide order to them. This disavowal of the power of "moral sources" in the face of a problematic which elicits incongruous conclusions regarding the proper path of action, or way of being, risks a descent into an existential crisis. To avoid such a predicament, modern "naturalist" philosophy suppresses feelings of dissent through an adherence to a monolithic, "procedural" account which seeks to produce predictable outcomes based on ethical laws. This not only impoverishes moral understanding, it also leads to irrational edicts concerning what it is "right to do" delivered by fiat to protect the illusion of a consistent ethical standard. Taylor's theory offers a way out of this morass. The pervasive presence of "goods" in identity construction and moral reasoning demands that one acknowledge the reality of both their existence and influence. Through his recovery and reinterpretation of a

distinctly “moral vocabulary” capable of dynamically engaging with “moral sources”, Taylor’s theory offers a

way in which our strongest aspirations towards hypergoods do not exact a price of self-mutilation. [Taylor] believes that such a reconciliation is possible; but its essential condition is that we enable ourselves to recognize the goods to which we cannot but hold allegiance in their full range. If articulacy is to open us, to bring us out of the cramped postures of suppression, this is partly because it will allow us to acknowledge the full range of the goods we live by. It is also because it will open us to our moral sources, to release their force in our lives. (Taylor 1989, 107)

Taylor is not trying to rescue a pre-modern epistemology. He is developing a “moral vocabulary” capable of dealing with meaning in a substantive and nuanced sense. When individuals invoke terms such as loyalty, compassion or valor they are “articulating” the feeling these “goods” inspire in them. They are not inventing them *tout court*. Thus it becomes crucial that agents be able to express these sentiments in a plain and cogent language. One must have recourse to a legitimate “moral vocabulary” to offer a “best account” of what they believe constitutes the “goodlife”. The requirement that individuals “articulate” their “moral attitudes” highlights the vital importance of communication in Taylor’s model. This social dimension is a consequence of the fact that when one “articulates” their moral vision they unavoidably join in a broader moral discourse. A discourse in which agents can test and refine their “best accounts” against those of other interlocutors, as well as against their society’s historical and cultural mores. This accomplishes the double feat of enabling agents to reach a more approximate understanding of their own values, while simultaneously pulling them out of the artificial isolation imposed by the fiction of “radical subjectivity”.

I contend that the “moral vocabulary”, and the discourse it makes possible, are tangible manifestations of the universality of Taylor’s concept of “moral intuition”. Further, Taylor’s assertion that expressing ideas about the “good” releases their power into life intuitively that “articulation” has transcendent implications. The basis for this transcendent capacity lies in the collaborative effect which “articulation” can engender between subjects. By making one’s “best account” available to others, one is contributing to a pool of ideas about morality which can transcend the limits of individual “ontology”. Consequently, the repository of ideas about “what it is good to be” is not restricted by the particularity of any single contributor. This is evinced by the way in which modern subjects access and incorporate moral ideas from a wide range of sources that transcend culture, language and time. Although the particular “goods” at work in the moral sphere are of a plural, fragmented and sometimes competitive character, the “moral intuition” and the “moral vocabulary” which engage and “articulates” them are universal capacities available to all moral agents. This is Taylor’s greatest contribution to moral philosophy. Our “frameworks” remain local and rooted in particular “background” experiences, culture and history. However, the spiritual capacity which enables us to articulate our “ontological” constructions and drives us to take a stand in moral space is a part of the transcendent moral experience common to all human subjects. Taylor’s theory brings “moral sources” to the surface, allowing agents to “articulate” an explicitly moral identity so long sublimated by the myth of modern subjectivism. Further, Taylorian theory enables agents to critically explore the “goods/hypergoods” that underlay their sense of self, in a fashion that

takes account of subjective feelings without excluding the reality of exterior influences.

The repercussions of Taylor's theory for normative modern moral philosophy, and modern thought generally, are profound. His demand that moral "goods" be accorded the status of real and sovereign features of our lived experience runs counter to two of modernity's most deeply seated assumptions. The first concerns the character of human freedom. If morality is in part dependent on pre-constituted, non-subjective "goods" then humans must be conceived of as co-dependent upon these ideas in developing a coherent moral perspective. Further, the fact that "goods", in turn depend upon human engagement and "ontological" elucidation to become active intuitions that we have a moral responsibility to rationally examine and express these "goods". Under this paradigm the notion of inalienable freedom acquires a hubristic tone. By ignoring the "moral sources" underpinning our sense of morality we consequently fail in our duty to critically reflect upon and "articulate" the "goods" which populate reality. This casts the modern ideal of the absolute independence of the subject, and its basis in the "naturalist" model of "disengaged" reason, as an expression of self-mythologizing bravado conveying an ignorance; or denial, of anything or anyone irreducible to one's subjective reification. Following Taylor's theory, to persist in the illusion that morality is a totally anthropocentric phenomenon comes at the cost of denying our "intuitive" feelings about what "it is good to be". It also propagates a picture of human liberty which cannot be rationally justified as its credence relies on the suppression of its own sources. The second modern dogma which Taylor's theory challenges revolves around the limits placed by particularity on the possibility of universal understanding. The

modern belief that individual, and societal, statements or actions are derived primarily from a subjective perspective implies that any universal understanding across the boundaries of culture, language and history become, ultimately, impossible. At best, “radical subjectivity” allows that we may achieve some points of consensus through translation, but the essential understanding of the particular idea remains exclusive to its originator(s). However, if Taylor is correct about the existence of real, non-subjective “moral sources”, that “ontologically” anchor agents in meaningful moral “frameworks”, then the boundaries of particularity become permeable. Certainly any “articulation” will continue to be outwardly colored by the difference of its articulator’s particular “background”. However, the “constitutive goods” that inspire the agent’s “intuitive” feelings about the “good” remain non-subjective, and thus accessible to any interlocutor willing to do the “ontological” work necessary to unpack the other’s “best account”. As such, the non-anthropocentric character of “goods” coupled with the universality of Taylor’s moral process, presents the potential for the achievement of an authentic understanding across the boundaries of particularity.

In light of these claims, Taylor’s work has been subject to the critique of modern philosophers whose moral “non-realism”, influenced by “naturalist” dictates, his theory most directly challenges. The overarching theme of the critique questions how Taylor’s theory reconciles an acknowledgement of the plurality of moral perspectives with the possibility of a comprehensive and universal moral process. (Tully 1994, xv)

In addition, Taylor is perceived to be advocating a model of moral discourse that purports to achieve consensus without synthesis. His theory is cast as granting equal authority to all “articulations” about the “good”, leading to a common understanding

rooted in a dynamic reconciliation that remains open to change in response to new inputs. For the modern analytic tradition this model is untenable as it defies “disengaged” reason by locating the individual in a confluence of non-empirical influences, such as “moral sources” and “intuitive” feelings. The underlying suspicion is that Taylor is advancing a mode of reconciliation which descends into a paradox whereby individual expression and common “goods” become hopelessly entangled. Taylor’s theory is perceived to be polluting reason in making emotional “engagement” integral to rational reflection. Further, Taylor is presented as seeking to achieve this goal without descending into relativism. The tenor of the critique of Taylor’s theory presents him as framing the consideration of plurality in his own particular view. With the result being that what he considers an “open conversation” is in fact limited by his own terms. And that ultimately his comprehensive system for the articulation, consideration and implementation of moral “goods” is wholly a product of Taylor’s own subjective vision. James Tully raises these concerns when he writes:

in delineating the conditions of the conversation and the sources of modern pluralism, has Taylor not quietly enframed the entire plurality of conversations in the terms, sources, traditions and telos of reconciliation of his particular genre of conversation, masquerading as universal? (Tully 1994, xv)

The portrayal of Taylor as harboring teleological sympathies is common to the critical reading of his work. Isaiah Berlin casts Taylor as a theistically oriented thinker, whose Catholic faith animates a fundamentally soteriological philosophy. As such, Berlin’s critique focuses on Taylor as an idealist who “truly believes...that human beings, and perhaps the entire universe, have a basic purpose” (Berlin 1994, 1) This characterization of Taylor consigns his theory to the idealist tradition of the Romantics, and perhaps even the ancient Greeks. What is inferred by this

categorization is that Taylor's thought does not properly belong to modernity. Without overtly accusing Taylor of being anachronistic, his critics nonetheless condemn his theory on the grounds that it supports an outmoded conception of "essentialism".

Richard Rorty pursues this line of critique in regard to Taylor's argument concerning a "realist" vision of moral "goods". Rorty renders the division as being between "representationalists" and "anti-representationalists". (Rorty 1994, 22) Nevertheless, what is alleged to be flawed about Taylor's theory is his assertion that moral ideals possess intrinsic meaning independent of human being's subjective description of them. This is a central tenet of Taylor's work. To intuit that Taylor is wrong in his appraisal of moral "goods" as constituting substantive, non-subjective sources of meaning accessible to all moral agents impugns the legitimacy of his entire philosophical system. The basis of Rorty's argument revolves around a dichotomy juxtaposing "scheme" and "content" in relation to real objects. This is reflected in his asking Taylor:

can you find some way of getting between language and its object...in order to suggest some way of telling which joints are nature's (part of the content) and which merely 'ours' (just part of the scheme)? And if not, can you see any point in the claim that some descriptions correspond to reality better than others? (Rorty 1994, 27)

Thus, Rorty is challenging Taylor on the grounds that no clear delineation can be drawn between the description of an object by an agent, and the object's "essential" properties. This intuit that prior to having a descriptor attached to an object it cannot have any comprehensible meaning for us. To extend this argument to the realm of moral ideals, Rorty examines moral "goods" in the light of their historicity. If the "truth value" of a moral prerogative is susceptible to change over the course of human

history, how can the “good” it represents possess any substantive meaning? The conclusion Rorty reaches is that “goods” do not possess any “essential” nature, evidenced by the fact that their descriptions are not constant. (Rorty 1994, 28) Reality, so understood, becomes dependent upon agent’s subjective projections to manifest meaningful structure.

In many ways Rorty and Berlin’s critique reflects the Enlightenment’s legacy of “radical subjectivity” and the “naturalist” tenet of “disengaged” reason against which Taylor sets his theory. Both commentators insinuate that Taylor is confusing his own hopeful ideas about morality for an a priori regime of real, moral “goods”. The suggestion is that if these “goods” depend upon human engagement to become manifest, a principle Taylor supports, then these “goods” must inevitably be the product of subjectivity. Here the central argument relates to cause. If humans have any hand in causing moral “goods” to come into play, then said “goods” are the product of human subjective projection. No leeway is given to provide for the possibility of an interdependent relationship. Simply put, modern philosophers like Berlin and Rorty assert that morality is a feature of human agency and thus entirely a creation of humans. Commensurate with this assessment is the critique that Taylorian “moral realism” imports a “teleological” element into moral philosophy which assumes a providential purpose for human life. (Berlin 1994, 2)

In response to his critics Taylor seeks to clarify his positions on both the potential of rational, moral thought and the character of “moral sources” as features of reality. With regard to the charge that his theory carries a teleological component, Taylor re-asserts his view that a rationally “engaged” and “articulate” moral agent

possesses the capacity to work towards a progressively more lucid understanding of their changing “moral attitude”. The nature of this progress is based on the potential “ontological” gains reached through rational reflection and “articulation”. These gains are by no means guaranteed however, as would be the case in a pre-ordained moral teleology. Taylor roots his argument in the understanding that real moral “goods” have a real effect on human life, as they are engaged with and elucidated by the agents moved by them. Taylor makes this clear when he states: “what moral realism requires is that one be able to identify certain changes as gains or losses. I think we can, and also that there have been significant gains.” (Taylor 1994, 224) This evinces how Berlin mistakes “strong evaluation” for teleology, confusing the ability to improve our understanding of our “moral attitudes” with a claim that we are somehow destined to reach an ultimate moral state. The teleological critique is further disproved by two features of Taylor’s theory ignored by his critics. First is the characterization of subjects moral “articulations” as “best accounts”. This qualifies any statement regarding the “good” as limited to the current context of an agent’s “ontological” understanding. The descriptor “best” intuits the potential that one is always capable of developing a “better” account. In light of this, I argue that no complete or final stage of moral development/perfection can be identified in Taylor’s theory and thus no pre-ordained goal can be attributed to his moral process. The second aspect of Taylor’s theory which undermines Berlin’s characterization of it as based on a “determinist structure” (Berlin 1994, 2) is the role which open discourse plays in an agent’s “articulations” of the “good”. Here, Taylor acknowledges the difference and tension at play in the broader social discourse surrounding “moral sources” and the pivotal role

“webs of interlocution” play in aiding individuals to more cogently reflect on and express their moral “frameworks”. Thus Taylor states:

I speak of ‘my’ best account, but this may just as easily be ‘our’ account. No one thinks totally alone...I think with, sometimes also against, but largely at least in the terms offered by my community...So when I speak of ‘my’ best account, I don’t mean one that I would identify as totally self-generated. I just mean the one which in fact makes most sense to me. (Taylor 1994, 227)

What Taylor is delineating is an open source conception of moral thought. Under this rubric no statement about the “good” can ever be considered absolute or definitive. Every expression concerning one’s apprehension of the character of a given “good” relies on a hybrid process, borrowing the ideas of others to help elucidate the understanding of one’s own “moral ontology”. Even the language of “articulation” is, as Taylor points out, “offered” to the subject. This compels agents to consider other ideas when expressing their own. With so many variable inputs at work in Taylor’s conception of how moral thought functions, it seems impossible to charge his theory as “deterministic”. There exists no rigid or determined structure to Taylor’s moral process. Indeed one of the conditions which he ties to any authentic “best account” is that it remains open to the influence of the different, perhaps more salient, “accounts” of others. For moral thought to remain relevant it must be dynamically “engaged” with a plurality of different “accounts”, both competing and complementary, to allow us to orient and re-orient ourselves in moral space. Ultimately, agents must challenge and defend their “articulations” and be active in and amongst the heterogeneity of different “visions of the good” in order to better understand our experiences of “moral sources”.

Chapter Three

Taylor as Postmodern

Having reviewed the critical responses most relevant to Taylor's moral theory, it is my contention that they ultimately fail to adequately challenge his principle argument that moral "goods" be treated as real features of human lived experience. The fundamental weakness which plagues the opinions of commentators such as Berlin and Rorty lies in their inability to acknowledge that their reading of Taylor is exercised through their own ontological "framework". Thus, their evaluation of Taylor's theory is unavoidably influenced by their own "hypergood". This would not present a problem if these influences were openly acknowledged, however this is not the case. The ideals of "radical subjectivity" and "disengaged reason" are plainly in evidence when analyzing their critiques. In the case of Berlin, his charge that Taylor is a teleological thinker betrays his own allegiance to a conception of reason which purports to be capable of divorcing (or disengaging) the subject from lived experience. Although Taylor recognizes the force of real "goods" in agents lives, at no point does he argue that individuals are powerless in deciding how to respond to them. Nor, does Taylor claim that a particular response or outcome is predetermined based on the specific "good" in question. Berlin, however, equates the reality of moral "goods" with the resurgence of a rigid, teleological moral system. (Berlin 1994, 1) His inability to comprehend that moral "goods" can exist without being absolutely determinative is a consequence of his "disengaged" approach to reason.

For Berlin it is an "either/or" proposition. Either subjects are detached, objective, deliberative and in control or human life is a capricious affair, left to the whims of

supernatural forces. However, as my analysis of Taylor's theory demonstrates, his model is not based on a Hegelian notion of destiny or absolute "*Geist*". Rather, Taylor advances the concept of an engaged, rational reflection of one's "intuitive" feelings about morality. The idea that a dialectical relationship can develop between subjects and moral "goods", is incomprehensible to the proponents of disengaged reason. As heirs to the Enlightenment methodology of analytic thought, modern "naturalist" philosophy subscribes to a "logocentric" perspective expertly described by Ernst Cassirer.

Analytical thinking removes [the] disguise from psychological phenomena; it exposes them, and in so doing reveals their naked sameness rather than their apparent diversity and inner differentiation. Differences in form as well as in value vanish and prove to be delusions. As a result, there is no longer a "top" and "bottom" or a "higher" and "lower"...No moral greatness rises above this plane. For no matter how high the aims of the will may be, no matter what supernatural values and supersensible goals it may imagine, it remains nonetheless confined within the narrow circle of egotism, ambition, and vanity. (Cassirer 1951, 26)

Hence, for an analytic thinker such as Berlin any "moral attitude" which claims to be constituted in part on non-subjective sources is the product of imagination and a surrender of rational autonomy to supernatural delusions. Thus Berlin's own "hypergood" is what prevents him from contemplating a scenario in which humans enter into an inter-dependent relationship with substantive "goods" capable of producing a reciprocal realization of both the agent's "moral ontology" and the ideal represented by the "good".

For Rorty the problem is much more straightforward. His insistence that a subject's description of reality is wholly dependent on their subjective stance towards said reality rules out any possibility that moral "goods" possess characteristics which exist prior to human subjective engagement. (Rorty 1994, 27) This argument ignores

Taylor's demonstration that some "best accounts" of what is "good" resonate deeply across the boundaries of culture and history, intuiting that the articulator is offering a more accurate expression of a commonly felt moral "good". Neither commentator however recognizes the transcendent appeal of widespread, commonly felt "moral attitudes".

In spite of these shortcomings it is my view that the "naturalist" critique of Taylor's work nonetheless elicits a poignant insight regarding the context of his thought. A common theme in the critical responses to *Sources of the Self* is the subtle allusion that Taylor is agitating for the restoration of pre-modern, "enchanted" narratives that seek a return to a teleological view of purposeful life. Taylor's emphasis on the role spiritual facets play in moral thought is offered as evidence of his antiquated agenda. This is coupled with the overt charge that the underlying structure of Taylor's theory is essentially theistic, specifically Christian. (Berlin 1994, 1) The portrayal which emerges from this assessment casts Taylor as sympathetic to Romantic and theistic worldviews, both of which have been deemed illegitimate by modern, analytic philosophy. This reaction is foreshadowed by Taylor in his cutting critique of the dominant "naturalist" trend in contemporary thought, anticipating the attack which his assertion of "moral realism" would provoke. Namely, that there exist non-subjective "moral sources" and the basic function of the "moral intuition" is to establishing meaningful connections to those "moral sources". This prompts a question regarding taxonomy: whose argument, Taylor's or the "naturalists", is most properly entitled to claim legitimacy as modern?

As stated in the previous chapter, Taylor strongly self identifies as a modern thinker. Nevertheless, I argue that it is his critics who more accurately represent the

dominant perspective in modern philosophy, and modern thought generally. My conclusion is based in part on Taylor's own exposition of the attitudes dominant in post Enlightenment philosophical inquiry. The construction of epistemological models which enforce standards of objectivity, "radical subjectivism" and "disengaged reason" have all become native to modern thought. Taylor's theory, by contrast, seeks to reveal what these modern tenets leave out. His assertion that moral thought and identity will remain subject to an unhealthy "mutilation"(Taylor 1989, 107) so long as "naturalist" theories exclude substantive "moral realism" from legitimate consideration, amounts to a charge that modern moral philosophy is inadequate to its task. This argument intuits that "naturalism" is the genre of thought most representative of modernity. Hence Taylor's theory must be viewed as either an effort to reform the current paradigm, or as a wholly new model seeking to usurp the limits of modern moral thought. It is clear that the foundation of his theory rests on modern ideals such as reason, autonomy and the equality of open discourse. However, it is also evident that Taylor's theory transgresses the boundaries of what the dominant "naturalist" strain of modern philosophy considers valid. Although Taylor may harbor the hope of a possible reconciliation between his prerogative and that of his "naturalist" contemporaries, I argue that his argument in support of "moral realism" is ultimately unintelligible when read through the modern lens. In the wake of the Enlightenment far too many suspicions dog modern thought concerning worldviews which acknowledge any non-anthropocentric source as bearing meaning for humans. The immediate assumption is that an advocate of such a position is attempting to usurp the hard won right of self-determination, returning us to a pre-modern superstitious fatalism. Taylor, however, does not equate the existence of external moral

sources with teleological, deterministic outcomes. He maintains that it is the responsibility of moral agents to engage with, and determine how, these sources are to be employed in the construction of their “moral frameworks”. Thus the status of arbiter remains firmly invested in rational, moral agents. Still, the disparity between the “non-realism” of modern “naturalists” and that of Taylorian “moral realism” necessitates that his theory be placed in a context free from the self styled objectivism which dominates modern thought.

It is towards this end that I advance postmodern theory as the most effective context for interpreting Taylor’s theory. The aim of this re-contextualization is to educe greater insight regarding the relationship between human subjects and the moral “goods”. The association with postmodernism is one which Taylor himself would likely reject. Nevertheless, it affords what I consider to be the best set of hermeneutic tools for plumbing the potential of his theory. I am acutely aware of the amorphous character surrounding the moniker, postmodern. Ironically this opacity is both a strength and weakness of the postmodern category. By encompassing such a diverse body of reference i.e. literature, art, philosophy, architecture, music etc., the term postmodern exhibits its dynamic strength to accommodate difference and plurality. However, this flexibility also betrays a weakness regarding the coherency of a recognizable postmodern project. Hence for the purposes of my study I restrict the term postmodern to describe the late twentieth century philosophy of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard, which challenges the same “naturalist” tendencies of modernity that occupy Taylor. Further, it is my view that both Taylorian and postmodern philosophy make difference, plurality, tension and non-subjective realities central to their respective philosophical systems. This is evidenced by

Taylor's argument concerning the power of difference in "moral accounts". In his system it is the difference between individual's "best accounts" that urge us to work to respect, even admire, other accounts for relating to the "good". Taylor insists that we "not fudge the differences" (Taylor 1994, 229) between accounts, as this is where the power of challenge resides. Difference can compel agents to reflect on and potentially re-articulate their "best account" in response to those of others, prodding agents into more focused and critical reflections of their moral "frameworks". This in turn can lead to more lucid expressions of what subjects judge to be meaningful or worthwhile about a particular way of life, both for themselves and others. I put forth the term creative dissonance to describe this effect, as difference for Taylor does not end in "incommensurability", but rather uses the grounds of contrast to increase moral cogency.

Taylor's understanding of difference strongly accords with the role difference plays in the theory of Jacques Derrida. The connection between the two is rooted in the apprehension of difference as indicative of non-subjective reality. Both philosophers acknowledge real forces external to, yet intimately connected with, human subjects in co-dependent relationships. Derrida presents the evidence for this connection as the "problematic of the trace" (Derrida 1976, 70). The "trace" conveys a notion that a substantive sense of self, and reality, necessitates awareness of influential forces beyond insular, subjectivity. The "trace" of non-subjective influences becomes apparent to agents when they reflect on ideals they consider integral to their identity. Derrida asserts that upon critical reflection subjects confront ideas whose origins cannot be located strictly in subjectivity. Although these ideas may have been subjectively interpreted their essential content can be found in the common intellectual currency of the subject's social

environment. This, in theory, obliges individuals to acknowledge that they derive meaning, at least partially, from sources that are not reducible to their own subjectivity. Accordingly Derrida claims that the unity of monolithic narratives is usurped by the “trace” they contain of that which they exclude. Derrida designates these excluded properties as “supplemental”. In the case of the “naturalist” ideal of “radical subjectivity” it is the trace of a meaningful, non-subjective reality that is denied. Derrida argues that the absence of difference in modern, monolithic narratives points, paradoxically to its possibility and thus its presence. To elaborate, a narrative that claims totality, such as that of “radical subjectivism”, does so by first excluding that which is other to it. I contend that the “trace” can be compared with Taylor’s notion of the “moral intuition” as both point to the existence of non-subjective elements in reality. In the case of the “moral intuition” subject’s become aware of the influence and attraction of “moral sources” with which they can engage to develop meaningful identities. In the case of the “trace” subjects are confronted by that which is other.

The notion that every concept, or subject, reflects the “trace” of its opposite allows for what Derrida terms a “de-construction” of claims to totality and objectivity. The goal of the “de-construction” is to confront totalizing claims with the pre-conditional other they exclude. Thus forcing them to acknowledge their creation in difference and exploding the fiction of assumed unity. (Derrida 1976, 47) The result of critical “de-construction”, to paraphrase Derrida, is to bring the outside, inside. (Derrida 1976, 44) The “de-constructive” method resonates with Taylor’s concept of rational reflection through “strong evaluation”. Taylor’s argument that “hypergoods” exert a profound, pre-articulate influence on an agent’s “moral ontology” parallels in some ways Derrida’s idea

of the “trace”. Taylor asserts that rational ontological reflection of the place and power which a “hypergood” exerts in one’s moral hierarchy is necessary to prevent their influence from remaining sublimated and unacknowledged. Hence Taylor can be understood as “de-constructing” the “naturalist” claim to objectivity when he asks “Can it offer an account consistent with its own metaphysical premises? Or is it really drawing implicitly on something it explicitly rejects?” (Taylor 1989, 104) and thus operating under the illusion that it is not pre-constituted by its own “hypergood”.

Taylor and Derrida both reject claims to a consistent and unified conception of meaning as originating exclusively in sheer “subjectivity”. Further, I contend that implied in this rejection is the notion that such claims are not only untenable, but hegemonic. This is a consequence of the demand radical subjectivism makes of individuals to disavow any other possible sources of meaning regardless of their actual feelings about them. In contrast, both “de-construction” and “strong evaluation” adhere to a shared principle of plurality in the creation of meaning, as evidenced by the centrality of difference to both methods. Through “de-construction” and “strong evaluation” the existence of difference in reality is confirmed rendering it present, accessible and threatening to the hegemony of dominant, unified vision of “naturalist” epistemology. Taylor demonstrates that any expression concerning what is meaningful or “good” emerges from the “strong evaluation” of one’s “moral ontology”. The key then to expressing a “best account” is an evaluative process governed by difference. Thus Taylor’s moral process, like Derrida’s notion of the “trace”, installs the awareness of difference as a fundamental precept. Beginning with the intuitive experience of “moral sources” different from subjective thought, through the “strong evaluation” used to discern the “qualitative difference”

between the “goods” and “hypergoods” populating one’s “moral ontology” to the “articulation” of a “best account” conditioned by change, difference is a central and constant companion in Taylor’s model of moral thought.

Like Taylor, Derrida emphasizes the function of difference in discourse. Both share the notion that through the exchange of different accounts agents are able to access different ideas concerning meaning. Derrida presents the process as a form of “*brisure*”, which connotes a broken joining, “hinging” agents together in “chains of expression” and enabling the integration of different perspectives on the world into their own understanding. (Derrida 1976, 69-70) Here understanding does not necessarily intuit accord or tension, merely that difference is acknowledged and given consideration. This model is relevant to Taylor’s presentation of the relationship between individuals and “goods”. Here too there exists a “*brisure*”, wherein we do not create “goods” nor them us, yet without one another no meaningful account can be developed. Further Taylor’s notion of subject’s identities developing through an embedded relationship with “moral sources” and the “best accounts” of others, described as “webs of interlocution” (Taylor 1989, 39), resonates deeply with Derrida’s argument that the “trace” of the other exposes the interdependence of all subjects in “chains of expression”. Both concepts intuit the impossibility of the totality of self assumed by “radical subjectivity”. Derrida combats the “ideal unity” espoused by modern “naturalists” which casts identity as the reflection of a wholly autonomous subjectivity. Refuting this “logocentric” idealization through “deconstructing” the perceived unity of identity and subjectivity, Derrida describes it as follows:

Representation mingles with what it represents, to the point where one speaks as one writes, one thinks as if the represented were nothing more than the shadow or reflection of the representer. A dangerous promiscuity and a nefarious complicity between the reflection and the reflected which lets itself be seduced narcissistically. In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. (Derrida 1976, 36)

This passage illustrates the need for agents to critically reflect on the pedigree of the ideas they express. Agents must recognize that while the form of their “articulations” may be particular, the content is by no means exclusive. This exposes the fiction of the absolute subject, demonstrating that identity construction depends partly upon the influence of non-subjective, equally accessible, sources of meaning. As Taylor emphasizes, the delusion of exclusivity is easily embraced when subjects defer from critically reflecting upon the content of their “moral ontology”. Taylor strongly criticizes the persistent denial effected by the proponents of “disengaged” reason who perpetuate the fiction of “radical subjectivity”. Taylor asserts that agents must confront the difference present in their own “best accounts” through an “engaged” reflection exposing the interconnectivity of subjects with each other and “moral sources” in an inclusive reality. Derrida reinforces this criteria stating that “The origin of the speculation becomes difference. What can look at itself is not one” (ibid). Hence if agents are capable of rationally reflecting on the “goods” informing their “moral ontology”, as Taylor states they are, then following Derrida these “goods” cannot be reduced to the subject themselves. This reiterates the strong parallels between “de-construction” and “strong evaluation” in uncovering the heterogeneous sources of our ideas about the “good”. “De-construction” complicates the assumed unity of identity by demonstrating its origins in difference. Similarly, “strong evaluation” problematizes instrumental assumptions

concerning the purpose of morality by legitimating “intuitive” feelings of the “good”. Both include sources different from, yet accessible to subjects.

Derrida and Taylor also partake in a common exploration of the interconnectivity of agents engaged in the construction of meaning through language. This process is presented as a continuous activity in both theories. They also share a commensurate emphasis on the fluid and dynamic capacity of subjects to reflect upon and integrate new ideas through an open discourse with others. While Derrida limits the exchange to an intra-human model, Taylor includes the capacity to connect with non-anthropocentric sources through the “moral intuition” in his model of exchange. These “sources” do however remain dependent upon “engaged” reflection and “articulation” to elucidate their potential meaning. Difference, both for Taylor and Derrida, is transcendent, confronting subjects with the immanence of other, sources and agents, that cannot be reduced to their own subjectivity. Both advance universal methods of rational reflection, instigated respectively by the “moral intuition” and the “problematic of the trace”, to expose the heterogeneous sources of meaning which subjects draw upon to construct their identities. Consequently, I assert that both theorists apprehend difference to be the primary phenomenon which allows subjects to become aware of their connection to others in “chains of expression”, or with “moral sources” through “intuitive” feeling. Thus the acknowledgement and integration of difference is vital for agents to transcend the false limitations of “radical subjectivity”. As such it is imperative that the discussion concerning the self and the “good”, or the self and the other have recourse to Taylor’s “moral vocabulary” for discussing difference as integral to identity, without reifying it.

The need is for a language which acknowledges that while it can never be identical to its subject it can nevertheless act as an interpretive sign of it. Further, any account is governed by the principal of change offering only an account of what the subject considers their most current “hypergood” and the coherent interpretation of what that “hypergood” consists of. Thus providing space for other “accounts”, derived from their own changing experiences or existent in broader discourse. Taylor’s critique of the “naturalist” attitude and its hostility to “moral realism” as endemic to modern moral thought requires a new context for carrying out a discourse rooted in difference. It is in this fashion that I view Taylor as, unwittingly or not, laying the ground work for postmodern moral thought. The assertion that Taylor’s moral theory possesses transcendent and universal qualities is central to my argument. As such, it is important to distinguish what I intend by the use of these terms. My thesis does not seek to derive from Taylor’s work a universal moral order or law. Neither do I contend that following Taylor’s model will produce a universal expression of the “good”. However, I do strongly assert that what is derived from Taylor’s integration of critical reason and “intuitive” feeling is a picture of a universal moral impetus and ontological capacity. This claim of universality is rooted in the assertion that there are qualities common to all human beings, qualities that make moral thought possible and humans unique.

Although postmodern philosophy almost by default dismisses universality as homogenizing, Derrida’s concept of the “trace” is based in a universal assertion that all subjects reflect the presence of the other. Hence, I argue that the integration of a universal component into postmodern philosophy vis Taylorian “moral realism” is not as ill suited as it may superficially appear. It is in this sense that I employ the term universal to

describe the feeling of the “good” experienced by all moral agents and the subsequent capacity for reflecting upon and ordering these moral sentiments through the development of an ordered “moral ontology”. Hence to be a moral agent is to have access to these “moral intuitions” and the potential to develop lucid, reasoned “moral attitudes” from them. Following Taylor the deeper these “goods” are considered and the more explicitly they are “articulated” the more fully one approaches an authentic understanding of their moral identity and their responsibilities. Herein what is universal is the common potential of all agents to access “moral sources” which contribute to the “articulation” of substantive moral identities. Coupled with this idea of universality of moral sentiment and reflection is the potential it possesses for transcendence.

The intent of my comparative analysis of Derrida and Taylor is not to present them as fellow travelers. Rather, the goal is to demonstrate their shared belief that humans depend upon non-subjective realities, both human and non-human, to develop a substantive identity. In support of this I have established their common use of difference to expose these non-subjective sources. In light of the importance which difference plays in this argument it is necessary to outline a major distinction between the two theories. For Derrida the “trace” of the presence of the other gave voice to the marginalized perspectives suppressed by the “logocentric” paradigm of modern “naturalist” philosophy in the west.

If the trace, arche – phenomenon of “memory,” which must be thought before the opposition of nature and culture, animality and humanity, etc., belongs to the very moment of signification, then signification is a priori written, whether inscribed or not, in one form or another, in a “sensible” and “spatial” element that is called “exterior.”... The outside, “spatial” and “objective” exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world, as familiarity itself, would not

appear without...difference as temporalization, without the nonpresence of the other...(Derrida 1976, 70-71)

Thus the “trace” of the subjugation of the other contained in dominant intellectual paradigms acts to disrupt the whole project of modernity. This opens up the possibility of a postmodern egalitarianism rooted in the irreducibility of any statement to an exclusive origin.

Taylor also endeavors to illuminate the intellectual hierarchies which underlie modern moral thought through “strong evaluation”. Unlike Derrida however, he does not seek to collapse them. On the contrary, he sees them as an innate feature of the “moral ontology”. Agents require these value orders to establish a meaningful hierarchy of “goods” which they apprehend as necessary to living a “goodlife”. What Taylor’s theory demands is that agents explicitly “articulate” the “hypergoods” central to their “moral ontology”. This moves deep-seated hierarchies of the “good” from the background of moral thought to the foreground, making claims about the “good” ascertainable to both the subjects who are allied to them as well as others who may offer rival accounts. The exposure to different accounts intuits the potential that agents may be inspired to reflect upon their moral prerogative and develop increasingly lucid “moral attitudes”. While Derrida augurs for a complete break from a supposed hegemonic modernism to effect a hoped for postmodern *égalité*, Taylor follows no such eschatological program. Nevertheless, Taylor is advocating a new model of moral thought. His hybridization of feeling and reason into the formula of “moral intuition” and “strong evaluation” surpasses the standard of objectivity imposed on modernity by the “naturalist”/natural science paradigm. Taylor, like Derrida, strives to rescue the integral emotional dimension central to human experience from the false limits imposed by the “naturalist” infatuation with

“disengagement”. The re-integration of emotion into a normative model of rational agency would transform the landscape of moral discourse. The acknowledgement of emotion as integral to orienting oneself in the world introduces a spiritual contour to the experience of reality foreign to modernity, locating moral thought in a context most appropriately identified as postmodern.

Commensurate to the transcendent potential of difference in Taylor’s theory is a portrayal of difference as the grounds for universality. Taylor argues that there is nothing wrong with apprehending one’s own perspective on the “good” as universal, so long as the same status is accorded to those of others. This does not require that the accounts of others necessarily be integrated into one’s own “framework”, only that they be treated as legitimate and that a genuine attempt be made to understand them. (Taylor 1989, 62)

Jean-Francois Lyotard provides a basis for elucidating what Taylor intends in his vision of the potential universality of difference. Lyotard proposes a fluid and limited model of understanding between subjects, albeit through a dynamic and “never finished” discourse paralleling Taylor’s “best account” principle. Lyotard argues for a mode of discourse in which the goal is not compromise or consensus but rather the development of a dynamic, engaged language capable of addressing changing concerns and meeting new needs.

A recognition of the heteromorphous nature of language games is a first step in that direction. This obviously implies a renunciation of terror, which assumes that they are isomorphic and tries to make them so. The second step is the principle that any consensus on the rules defining a game and the “moves” playable within it *must* be local, in other words, agreed on by its present players and subject to eventual cancellation. The orientation then favors a multiplicity of finite Meta-arguments, by which I mean argumentation that concerns meta-prescriptives and is limited in space and time. (Lyotard 1984, 66)

The conditions that Lyotard envisions governing postmodern discourse mesh with the conditions that apply to Taylor's "best account" principle. A subject's "best account" is always tempered by the "time and space" of history, culture and the experience of specific "goods". Further, as Taylor strongly asserts, a "best account" is imminently revisable, thus meeting Lyotard's criteria of "eventual cancellation" (ibid). Under this paradigm subjects confront the difference between their "best account" and those of others "articulating" alternative visions of the "good". They also face the critical awareness of the changing character of their own "best account", portending the "cancellation" of past "accounts", the tentativeness of present "accounts" and the inevitability of future "accounts". Through an internalization of difference subjects confront the fact that their "moral ontology" is dynamic and malleable. Thus the "best account" emerging from an "engaged" reflection of one's "moral ontology" and tendered in the present by moral agents will inevitably change in response to new moral experiences and interlocution with other moral agents. This follows Taylor's theory that subjects must be constantly engaged in the process of "strong evaluation", leading to increasingly lucid understandings of the most influential "goods" currently at work in one's "framework". Lyotard advances a concept of the temporal variance of narratives which adds credence to the understanding of the continuing integrity of "best accounts" as they change over time.

The narratives' reference may seem to belong to the past, but in reality it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation. It is the present act that on each of its occurrences marshals in the ephemeral temporality inhabiting the space between the "I have heard" and the "you will hear."...It is in this sense that this mode of temporality can be said to be simultaneously evanescent and immemorial. (Lyotard 1984, 22)

This passage evinces Lyotard's attribution of temporal ambiguity, and I contend transcendence, to knowledge narratives. He depicts them as simultaneously recounting the past, taking account of the present and setting up a "framework" for the future. These same characteristics can be applied to Taylor's "best account principle". A "best account" draws upon subject's "background picture" (past experience), announces one's current ideals (present "hypergood") and contains an implicit acknowledgement of the possibility for refinement, expansion or abandonment (future "framework"). Hence both theorists argue that difference, change and transformation are integral to narrative. Taylor for his part also argues that difference need not end in "incommensurability". Hence past "best accounts" are not rendered inauthentic, nor are agent's assumption of them as universal mistaken. The dialectical perspective which Taylor's model of difference grants, allows subjects to distinguish between past and present "best accounts" while maintaining the integrity of their identity. This evinces, once more, that difference need not necessarily intuit schism. In Taylor's system the continual emergence of new "articulations" does not intuit the continual creation of new identities. Hence, subjects come to understand that difference and change are necessary products of a critical engagement with "moral sources", motivating agents to endeavor towards increasingly lucid accounts of what they understand to be the "goodlife".

Once subjects are conscious that the difference between their own changing "best accounts" over time does not invalidate the meaning that they provided at the time of their "articulation", the same criteria can be applied to the "best accounts" of others. Such an acknowledgment of difference as a native and necessary component of moral thought also provides grounds for the construal of difference as a universal feature of the

experience of all moral agents. Taylor argues that a critical awareness of the dialectic of difference allows subjects to “think of the goods we are trying to define and criticize as universal, provided we afford the same status to those of other societies we are trying to understand.”(Taylor 1989, 62) Agents are capable of this heterogeneous perspective because they recognize that the difference between their own changing “best accounts” do not result in “self mutilation” but rather in better “accounts” of moral reality, as they understand it. This understanding can then be extended to the “best accounts” of others. Thus enabling agents to treat them as equally entitled to the claim of universality, as the difference between theirs and ours is commensurate with the difference between our own changing “best accounts”. “This does *not* mean of course that all our, or all their, supposed goods will turn out at the end of the day to be defensible as such; just that we don’t start with a preshrunk moral universe in which we take as given that their goods have nothing to say to us or perhaps ours to them.” (ibid) This demonstrates how Taylorian theory does away with the threat of the de-legitimizing of an interlocutor’s “best account” based merely on difference. Further Taylor here provides a common understanding of the tentative nature of all “best accounts”, ensuring that moral discourse remain open to the differing “articulations” and ever new “intuitive” experiences of the “good”.

Lyotard describes the “*postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.”(Lyotard 1984, xxiv) Contrary to the view of modern “naturalist” philosophy which presents modernity as a deliverance from pre-modern “enchanted” narratives, Lyotard contends that the notion of modernity itself constitutes a grand narrative. This argument resonates with Taylor’s discussion of the rise of “ordinary life”

supplanting pre-modern hierarchical epistemologies. Lyotard delves deeper into the shift to modernity, outlining how the idealization of objectivity engendered a suppression of difference. This idealization can be seen as a symptom of the larger “naturalist” project seeking to apply the empiricism of the natural sciences to the realm of thought. Lyotard describes this project as founded on principles of effectiveness, predictability and regulation which

allocate our lives for the growth of power. In matters of social justice and scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on its optimizing the system’s performance-efficiency... [this] necessarily entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear.”(ibid)

In this passage Lyotard exposes the ontological violence of the “naturalist” claim to “disengaged subjectivity”. For the “naturalist” ideal of the absolutely autonomous agent to prevail, any “trace” of difference must be expunged from their conception of self. The presence of ideas and voices in social discourse challenging the “naturalist” conception of autonomy are de-legitimated as irrational, subversive or worse. To gain access to the intellectual economy in the west one must divest their arguments of any unempirical elements, pushing concepts such as love, empathy and compassion to the margins and alienating moral agents from their “intuitive” experiences of the “good”.

To be clear, Taylor never accuses “naturalist” philosophy of employing the tactics of “terror” to enforce an “instrumentalist” program. Nevertheless, his critique of the “naturalist” ethos coupled with his assertion of “moral realism”, testify to the parallels between his and Lyotard’s respective views of the failure of modern philosophy to provide agents with a comprehensive, inclusive and meaningful “framework” for understanding their experiences. Central to both Taylor and Lyotard’s critique of modern

philosophy is the notion that the modern bureaucratization of knowledge has been artificially constructed to preserve the “naturalist” epistemology as the status quo. The unrelenting enforcement of “commensurability”, as a measure of legitimacy in modern analytic thought, is a consequence of the attempt to fit moral questions into a standardized, “procedural” process. Taylor judges that the cost of sustaining the “naturalist” status quo results in the severing of subject’s awareness of “moral sources”. This renders Taylorian theory subject to what Lyotard might describe as the “terror” of a system which denies any possibility of non-subjective sources of meaning. The concept of difference contained in Taylorian theory presents a direct challenge to the empirical standards of predictability and efficiency prized by “naturalist” philosophy and consequently idealized in the modern west.

The dynamic and open character of Taylor’s conception of the “moral ontology” threatens the “naturalist” ethos by acknowledging a plurality of possible “best accounts”, imbuing moral thought with an asymmetric and unpredictable character. Taylor’s treatment of different “best accounts” as entitled to equal consideration without compromising their distinctiveness by reducing their inherent difference into “commensurable” terms is further evidence that his theory transgresses the modern, “naturalist” status quo. Indeed Lyotard asserts that the undoing of “meta-narratives”, pre-modern and modern, results from the forces of plurality and difference at play in the experience of subjects in history. Further, Lyotard points to these forces as the prime tools for the fragmentation of the illusory unity of knowledge into “clouds of narrative language elements-narrative, but also denotive, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives

at the intersection of many of these.” (ibid) This model of plurality accords with Taylor’s construal of the heterogeneous and changing character of the “goods” and “hypergoods” populating agent’s moral “frameworks”. While the postmodern emphasis on pluralism and difference help to underscore the asymmetrical condition of “moral realism”, Taylor’s notion of “qualitative distinction” allows agents to manage the difference they experience through tentative and revisable hierarchies of “goods”. What results from this process consists of an authentic, limited narrative of one’s “best account” of the “goodlife” expressing elements that are “denotive, prescriptive [and] descriptive” (ibid) and, crucially, subject to “cancelation” in the face of more compelling “moral sources”. In this way I present Taylor’s moral theory as “Postmodern knowledge... [which] refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable.”(Lyotard 1984, xxv)

Lyotard’s assertion that subjects exist at a confluence of different narrative streams echoes Taylor’s view of agents as capable of simultaneously occupying different and conflicting prerogatives oriented to different “moral sources”. This reinforces the fundamental place that pluralism and the tension of difference occupy in Lyotard and Taylor’s work. It also evinces their common demand that the artificial limits placed on the moral experience of modern subjects by the “naturalist” idealization of objectivity and empiricism be transgressed. Taylor, for his part, emphasizes the need to transgress the division between the self and the reality effected by “radical subjectivism”. This division is reflected throughout modern thought via the balkanization of inquiry into myopic, “non-communicative” categories of specialization. In this fashion difference and plurality are mitigated by the “naturalist” ideal of “radical subjectivity” sustained through

the quarantine of any potentially disruptive elements from its “meta-narrative” of modern objectivity. Taylor challenges the drive to construct an empirical taxonomy of ethical procedures disassociating “intuitive” motivation from moral thought resulting in a situation where “what we should do and how we come to do it, which were unproblematically seen as part of the same inquiry by Plato, Augustine, and just about everybody else until the last three centuries, have been neatly sundered and placed in non-communicating intellectual universes.”(Taylor 1999, 120) Taylor’s decriing of the divorce between reason and “intuition”, perpetrated by the modern ideal of “disengagement”, echoes Lyotard’s critique of the modern “meta-narrative” as presenting a homogenized vision of reality which “terrorizes” elements of “incommensurability”. Both Lyotard and Taylor expose the persistent, modern, intolerance for elements of difference which defy synthesis into a unified “scheme”. Taylor attributes the exclusion of non-subjective “moral sources” from identity construction to this denial of difference and casts it as ultimately untenable in the face of lived moral experience which is awash in conflicting “attitudes” and competing “accounts”. His argument finds an ally in the postmodern endeavor to rescue alienated perspectives exiled to the margins of inquiry due to their “incommensurability” with modern standards of objectivity.

In availing Taylorian theory of certain postmodern concepts, such as Derrida’s notion of “de-construction” or Lyotard’s model of narratives, the critical capacity of Taylor’s theory is sharpened. This is illustrated by Taylor’s objection, cited above, to the artificial separation of moral action from the source of its motivation. The moral act is interpreted by modern moral philosophy as the “doing of the right” to effect a predictable, ethical result, and is assumed to be the product of an objective and

“disengaged” procedure of reason. However by employing “de-construction” it becomes possible to uncover in the moral agent’s sense of themselves as moral the “trace” of the “moral source” towards which their action is oriented. This buttresses Taylor’s argument by demonstrating the inexorable link between “moral sources”, moral identity and moral action. Thus even when attributed to a “procedural” justification, moral actions exhibit the “trace” of “intuitive” feelings about “what it is good to be” (Taylor 1989, 3) which exist prior to rationalization. The “trace” becomes a thread allowing agents to discern continuity, in contrast to procedure, throughout the moral process. This evinces the “*brisure*” (the hinge) linking “moral intuition” to the “moral ontology” and “articulation”. As Taylor makes clear, being aware of the “ontological” process is only part of the puzzle for constructing an authentic moral identity. Agents also require a vocabulary capable of expressing their moral perspectives in transparent language. As Taylor asserts, moral sources require “articulation” to elucidate their meaning.

Moral sources empower. To come closer to them, to have a clearer view of them, to come to grasp what they involve, is for those who recognize them to be moved to love or respect them, and through this love/respect to be better enabled to live up to them. And articulation can bring them closer. That is why words can empower; why words can at times have tremendous moral force. (Taylor 1989, 96)

The “naturalist” language which dominates modern moral philosophy cannot meet these demands, indeed it doesn’t even acknowledge them. Its vocabulary is limited to empirical and “utilitarian” terms mimicking the “*lingua franca*” of the natural sciences. Taylor’s “moral vocabulary”, in contrast, acknowledges underlying “moral sources” as both real and demonstrable, through a salient reckoning of the force they exert on one’s moral “framework”. Access to a transparent “moral vocabulary” allows subjects to express their love for specific “hypergoods”. Taylorian theory enables agents

to express moral beliefs without delineating any attendant “instrumental” purpose, or qualifying their account on pragmatic grounds alone. Access to a “moral vocabulary” according “moral sources” the status of substantive features of lived experience intuits that feelings and “attitudes” about the “good” can transcend the limits of subjectivity. Terms such as “good”/“hypergood”, “qualitative distinction” and “best account” allow agents to assert their differing “best accounts” without resorting to the reduction or negation of others, as authenticity is not equated with homogeneity in Taylor’s model. Taylorian “moral vocabulary” insures that “moral sources” are treated as real, different and integral to the construction of a moral identity, capable of describing the plurality of “goods” without fear of potential paradox. These are the grounds upon which I base my claim that Taylor’s theory cannot be properly situated in modernity. Uniquely, he takes aspects of modernity such as critical reason and expands their purview to include the legitimate consideration of essential facets of human experience such as spirituality, which have been largely ignored by modern moral philosophy.

As Taylor does not cede to the “naturalist” boundaries erected around modern thought his theory must be approached as postmodern. This also addresses the charge that he is retreating into an archaic pre-modern “enchantment”. This does not bear out as his theory presents something new in its equal concern for reason and feeling. It is important to note however, that his theory chafes against some key concerns of postmodern philosophy as it is currently constituted. Lyotard and Derrida share a conception of the world which rejects any definite notions of qualitative difference. In their theoretical models the idea of worth is synonymous with mechanisms of domination. They cannot separate the idea of value or hierarchy from the specter of inequality and hegemony.

Taylor in contrast makes hierarchies central to the paradigm of a comprehensive and functional moral identity. However his theory operates on an ethic of critical, engaged reflection working towards an authentic “best account” of one’s “moral attitude”. Any “articulation” of what the most moral or most worthwhile way of life consists of will depend on subjects making choices between competing “goods”. To attempt to express an understanding of one’s “moral ontology” without recourse to evaluative language would result in either a relativist evasion or, worse still, self-denial. Consequently, I contend that Taylorian “moral vocabulary” provides postmodern philosophy with a much needed mode of expressing ideas of worth and value which emerge not from a desire to supplant rival claims but rather to allow for a full disclosure of a subject’s actual feelings about “what it is good to be”. Narrative provides a conduit for the incorporation of Taylor’s evaluative language into the existing postmodern paradigm. Lyotard describes narratives as the “quintessential form of customary knowledge” (Lyotard 1984, 19), providing a platform for the transmission of perspectives on reality on both an individual as well as a societal level. Lyotard outlines a rigid narrative structure based on “know how”, “knowing how to speak,” and “knowing how to hear” [savoir-faire, savoir-dire, savoir-entendre]”, his argument being that the uniform nature of narrative exchange produces a “set of pragmatic rules that constitutes the social bond.”(Lyotard 1984, 21)

Accepted at face value Lyotard’s characterization of the process and role of narrative in human affairs portrays it as an oppressive structure enforcing conformity. However, another interpretation is possible. Retaining Lyotard’s contention that narrative constitutes the most effective vehicle for the transmission of societal mores, it is possible to task the process with alternative goals. Towards this end the application of Taylor’s

concept of “articulation” becomes transformative. By overlaying Taylor’s notion of “webs of interlocution” onto Lyotard’s observation about the centrality of narrative, a new insight can be gained. Taylor’s theory presents the process of moral reasoning as incomplete without an explicit “articulation” of one’s “best account” of the “good”. The “articulation” of one’s “moral attitude” is worthless however if it is unintelligible to potential partners in a moral discourse. Hence, the narrative structure, as laid out by Lyotard, in which participants are equipped with the tools to communicate with one another presents a model well suited to accommodate the interlocution which Taylor’s theory demands. The result being that the “moral sources” towards which one’s “moral ontology” is oriented can be constructed as narrative knowledge. This conveys a new role for narrative, no longer restricting it to the propagation of traditional knowledge. Introducing Taylor’s concept of real “moral sources” to the structure of narrative transforms it into a forum for the exchange of different “best accounts” about the “good”. The intelligibility of this discourse is based on the common “*savoir-faire*” of “moral reality”. Herein Lyotard’s poignant observation of the negative role of narrative in the proliferation of intellectual uniformity is radically transformed. To serve Taylor’s theory this uniformity is put to a progressive purpose, providing subjects with a common “moral vocabulary” to express their feelings about the “good”. Hence, Lyotard’s critique of modern narrative opens up an established and entrenched mode of communication for the dissemination of Taylor’s “moral vocabulary” as a new means of postmodern narrative knowledge.

Taylor directly addresses the role of narrative when he explains that “our modern senses of self not only are linked to and made possible by new understandings of good

but also are accompanied by (i) new forms of narrativity and (ii) new understandings of social bonds and relations.”(Taylor 1989, 105) This elucidates the dynamic impact which the recognition of the reality of “moral sources” has on the concept of narrative knowledge. Commensurately, it also establishes social bonds on grounds beyond didactic tradition, providing space for different and changing perspectives on the “good”. The notion that an engagement with, and an expression of, the “moral sources” at play in reality can lead to new understanding between subjects based on an equal consideration of different “best accounts” introduces a new dimension to postmodern philosophy, moving beyond disruptive critique into the realm of possible alternatives to the modern hegemonic paradigm. The prospect for integral change in the way humans think about, and act in the world, is only tangentially considered in postmodern theory. In fact Taylor offers a salient commentary on the limits of the postmodern critique of normative western thought and power structures casting it as fixated on negation, employing a method which makes “appeals to difference that are, in fact a refusal of exchange, of complementarity, which turn difference into incommensurability.” (Taylor 1999, 114) Taylor is elucidating what I contend to be the failure of postmodern philosophy to move beyond its original impetus of intellectual provocation and socio-political resistance.

Ironically, the stagnant rigidity of the systems which it sought to disrupt has now come to afflict its own methodology. Taylor offers the work of Michel Foucault as an example of the cost of a critique which employs difference in an exclusively negative form.

The emphasis is on relations of oppression and on the undoing of these. The goal seems to be one in which the person or group concerned will have achieved full autonomy and will no longer be controlled or influenced. No place is allowed for

another possible telos of this struggle, one in which the agents or the groups, previously related by modes of dominance, might reassociate on a better basis...The history is usually painted in such a way as to make it almost inconceivable that there could be a new mode of association, let alone that both sides need it to be complete beings. (Taylor 1999, 115)

The introduction of Taylor's theory into the postmodern context would undo this "*immobilisme*" via its potential for effecting integral change through dialectics of difference rooted in the common recognition of "moral reality". Taylor's theory holds as a basic tenet that subject's perspectives on the world can, indeed must, change and that by explicitly dealing with "moral sources" as real that change can be for the better. Taylor's comments on postmodern philosophy would seem, superficially, to contradict my own thesis that his theory is best understood in the postmodern context. However, I would argue that his concern for the shortcomings of the postmodern use of difference as a critical tool is motivated by the potential of the postmodern perspective to contribute to a more inclusive moral discourse. The capacity of postmodern philosophers such as Lyotard and Derrida to represent the marginalized other is clearly of value in Taylor's attempt to accord a place for all "best accounts" in an open discourse. Taylor dubs postmodern philosophy "neo-Nietzschean" alluding to their concern for power. However, he also acknowledges that their reading of modernity "resembles my critique, because we both want to show that this modern philosophy *has* moral motives, instead of being uniquely determined by epistemic ones." (Taylor 1989, 99) Taylor states that any commonality ends on this point, as the postmodernists deny their own "hypergood" of "universal and equal respect" (Taylor 1989, 71) which inspires their critique. However, I contend that they share much more philosophical ground than Taylor allows. I accept the assertion that postmodern theory obfuscates its moral motivations, however in my view this is precisely the type of weakness which the introduction of "moral realism" into

postmodern philosophy addresses. Further, I argue that Taylor holds two additional views which resonate with the postmodern perspective. First, is the acknowledgement of the historicity of modernity and the profound influence of the Enlightenment on its development. The assignment of certain trends in intellectual and popular thought to the temporal category of modernity allows both Taylor and postmodern philosophers like Derrida and Lyotard to critically reflect upon not only its genesis and content, but also to determine its failures.

The reflective orientation of both critiques intuits that they are being carried out from a stance posterior to the modern period. This is what enables them to advance ideas which, although emerging from modern concepts of reason and autonomy, offer interpretations of them such as “de-construction” and “strong evaluation” which challenge a strictly modern understanding of rational agency. In this sense the problematization of modernity by Taylor and postmodern philosophy can best be understood as “historical criticism”, intuiting that their critique derives from a new historical period. Secondly, like Taylor “postmodernists believe that the world is real...the postmodern view has us already embedded within reality, specifically within our representations of ourselves and our world.” (Natoli 1997, viii) Morality as a non-subjective feature of reality is commensurable with this stance. Thus in the postmodern context “moral sources” are legitimately available to agents for the interpretation and representation of their understanding of lived experience, making moral feelings real feelings. This resounds with Taylor’s argument that being a self (with an attendant identity) is “essentially linked to our sense of the good” (Taylor 1989, 51) Further, Taylor links the collapse of grand narratives in the wake of the Enlightenment with the loss of a

common “horizon” (Taylor 1989, 17). In the postmodern context reality is construed as a complex plurality. Hence, the rehabilitation of narrative as a substantive vehicle for expressing “best accounts” could lead to the rise of myriad postmodern “horizons”.

Following this argument, I contend that these new horizons can function as manifestations of Taylor’s “moral frameworks” in the world. In this model postmodern pluralism provides Taylor’s theory with a concept of reality capable of accommodating the heterogeneity native to “moral sources”. Commensurately, the anarchic character of postmodern critique is made more coherent through Taylor’s recognition of a hierarchy of “qualitative differences” between competing “moral sources” as responded to by moral agents. Thus, postmodern theory is rendered more lucid and accessible, while Taylor’s moral theory finds a terrain in which reality is not limited to “naturalist” homogeneity.

The emergence of a plurality of postmodern moral “horizons” renders “best accounts”, and the “moral sources” which inspire them, accessible to all agents. The concept of “horizons” as representative of myriad “best accounts” intuits a transcendence of insular subjectivity as they allow agents to engage with, reflect upon and potentially integrate different “horizons” into their own changing “moral ontology”. It is in light of this capacity that I describe these as transcendent “goods”. To clarify, my notion of transcendence here relies on a comparative analysis of Taylor’s “hypergood”, Derrida’s “trace” and Lyotard’s description of the “sublime”. All three concepts refer to phenomena powerful enough to move individuals beyond the limits of subjectivity. In the case of Taylor “intuitive” feelings about “what it is good to be” or to love engenders an “ontological” reflection of the “hypergoods” one most strongly esteems and their integration into a moral identity expressed through the tendering of one’s “best account”.

The engaged reflection and “articulation” of a “hypergood” allows subjects to put them into play in their lives so as to better understand what they require, and why. Thus, “moral sources” are shown to be engaged with, but different from, subjectivity. Hence, through the work of “ontological” reflection and “articulation” agents are able to transcend the epistemological vision of the world which depends on a “disengaged” stance. The “naturalist” model is no longer tenable in the wake of the acknowledgement of the power of an emotional connection to “moral sources” in reality.

The idea of connectedness is echoed by Derrida in his concept of the “trace” which forces individuals to confront the myth of absolute autonomy and the fiction of any completely subjective thought or utterance. The evidence of the “trace” demonstrates how everything that is thought or said contains its antithesis and thus cannot be understood as separate or complete. The “trace” exposes the “supplement” of expression, confronting individuals with their location in what Derrida terms “chains of expression”. Once aware of this inter-dependence subjects can begin to transcend the illusion of the absolute sovereignty of the self, based on their reliance upon other links in these chains to formulate substantive expressions about reality. The “trace” forces subjects to acknowledge the reality of the other upon whom their sense of self in part depends.

Lyotard’s portrayal of non-subjective reality affords a weigh point between Derrida’s other and Taylor’s “hypergood”. Lyotard bases his theory on the Kantian notion of the “Sublime”, which he interprets as “a strong and equivocal emotion” which “develops as a conflict between the faculties of a subject, the faculty to conceive of something and the faculty to “present” something.” (Lyotard 1984, 77) Lyotard further asserts that agents become aware of the “sublime” via an emotional sense. This strikes a

strong chord with Taylor's assertion of subject's "intuitive" sensitivity to "moral sources" and the limited, never fully complete "best accounts" that they inspire. Hence the "Sublime" refers to an element of human experience that can never be fully represented and is thus not susceptible to reification. In Taylorian terms the "Sublime" could be conceived of as a "source" of inspiration, keenly felt by agent's yet possessing a great ambiguity regarding its ontological elucidation. In this fashion the "Sublime", like "hypergoods", attests to the existence of non-subjective features of reality.

The link between subjects and the "Sublime", and subjects and "hypergoods", is further established in Lyotard's description of the attempt to express the feeling of experiencing the "Sublime". "Finally, it must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented." (Lyotard 1984, 81) Here Lyotard advances an argument against the notion of radical subjectivity. Like Taylor's "hypergoods", the "Sublime" for Lyotard confronts agents with an element of reality and of experience that cannot be reduced to subjective projection. Lyotard goes further than Taylor in his assessment of agent's abilities to express this dimension of experience. Taylor argues that even though the attempt to "articulate" one's feeling about a "hypergood" will always be inadequate, the attempt can nonetheless increase one's lucidity regarding the "moral sources" underlying their vision of the "goodlife". In Lyotard's philosophy the awareness of the "Sublime" and the inevitable failure of agents to ever fully represent it, functions to push individuals beyond the limits of the modern "naturalist" worldview. The "Sublime" cannot be contained, figured or reduced to self. The ephemeral nature of the "Sublime" gives it the character of a "source" which usurps the modern ideal of radical autonomy by arousing in subjects an awareness of meaning

that transcends subjectivity. Lyotard construes subject's attempts to formulate an understanding of the "Sublime" as the stimulus for the "the little narrative [petit récit]." (Lyotard 1984, 60).

The "little narrative" has some semblance to the Taylorian "best account" in that it is a tentative attempt to "articulate" a profound experience of a meaningful "source". However, where Taylor allows for the mitigating work of the "moral ontology", Lyotard allows only for the auspices of imagination. This does not refer to agent's capacity to invent meaning, but rather the ability to invent new representative forms to try to convey the feeling of the "Sublime" which nevertheless continually defies representation. This evinces the importance of the artistic outlet for Lyotard, which we might say substitutes for the "moral vocabulary" of Taylor. For Lyotard the mere attempt to express the "Sublime" elicits a sense of "jubilation which result[s] from invention of new rules of the game, be it pictorial, artistic, or any other" (Lyotard 1984, 80). In the unceasing effort to present/express the unrepresentable/inexpressible agents invent new forms and ideas. While none adequately capture the essence of the "Sublime" they do enable their authors to transcend their conceptual limits and open cultural, philosophical and moral thought to new and vital sources of meaning. What this does for Taylorian theory is reinforce the characterization of the relationship between agents and substantive, non-anthropocentric sources of meaning as real. In both theories subjects must first concede that these sources, the "Sublime" and "Hypergoods", are neither created by nor reducible to their own subjectivity. Further, as Lyotard's theory ultimately denies the possibility of fully presenting the "Sublime", so too does Taylor reject the notion that agents can ever fully "articulate" the complete character of their "hypergoods". However, both philosophers

assert that there is a substantive gain derived merely from the awareness of the existence of “hypergoods” or the “Sublime”, which spurs individuals to actively engage in the struggle to comprehend the effect of these “sources” on their understanding of reality and their own identity.

While I recognize that each philosopher’s theoretical model is particular, defying an easy synthesis, I strongly argue that they are complementary to the establishment of a perspective rooted in “moral realism”. The “trace”, the “Sublime” and “hypergoods” all confront subjects with an opportunity to transcend the myopia of “radical subjectivity” and establish substantive connections with other agents, inspirational ideals and “constitutive” meaning. The transcendent quality of these connections helps agents to achieve liberation from the staid categories of “naturalist” objectivism, a goal common to Taylor, Derrida and Lyotard. In both Taylorian and postmodern philosophy difference is treated as real and indicative of a richness of meaning existent beyond the confines of the ego or subject. However, what this ultimately intuits for the moral life is not clearly adduced in either theory.

All three philosophers demure from making any clear, definitive statement as to the ramifications that their theoretical findings must have upon the way in which subjects actually live their lives. This ambiguity is, I contend, intentional on the part of Lyotard and Derrida. As essentially critical philosophers, the lack of lucidity regarding an alternative to the hegemony and “logocentrism” of the contemporary “naturalist” paradigm can be perceived as a calculated strength in the work of Lyotard and Derrida. Postmodern philosophical critique seeks to make of itself a hard target for counter argument, hence to maintain the efficiency of its disruptive effect it refuses to claim to

offer an explicit alternative to the modern status quo. Further, the centrality of difference, pluralism and anti-totalitarianism to postmodern philosophical critique engenders abhorrence to orthodoxy and encourages the use of ambiguity as a guard or failsafe against a lapse into doctrinaire or restricted ideology. Postmodern philosophy supplies a context in which plurality and difference are integral to reality which, if elucidated clearly, has the potential to afford a solid ground for an understanding of the love of “hypergoods” as a legitimate feature of moral agency. However, to accommodate such an explicitly moral concept, postmodern philosophy must surrender the ambiguity surrounding its own “moral attitudes”. It is abundantly clear that postmodern philosophy as represented by Derrida and Lyotard subscribes to a “moral realist” perspective and that the concerns which drive its critique of modernity are rooted in, as Taylor assessed, “universal and equal respect.”(Taylor 1989, 71) Once this inherent moral concern is conceded, to paraphrase Derrida, “bringing the inside outside”, the suitability of Taylorian theory to the postmodern context becomes all the more clear.

In contrast to the tactical use of ambiguity by the Derrida and Lyotard, Taylor leaves his theory’s conclusions mired in unintentional ambiguity. He qualifies his assertions in a cautious fashion, dampening the force of his ideas. This reticence is exhibited by his “hunch regarding the possible fruit of articulacy” (Taylor 1989, 106).

The BA [best account] principle can also function as a test for the genuineness of our moral stands. If this turns out to be so, then the moral conflicts of modern culture rage within each of us. Unless, that is, our greater lucidity can help us to see our way to a reconciliation. If I may give expression to an even farther – out hunch, I will say that I see this as the potential goal and fruit of articulacy. (ibid)

What should be a declarative and definitive conclusion is, instead, couched in tentative language. I recognize that ambiguity is a necessary feature of philosophical thought,

allowing for the acknowledgement of the place which concepts such as plurality, openness, and change occupy in experience. Nevertheless, I argue that the degree of uncertainty surrounding the conclusions of Derrida, Lyotard and Taylor lead to the obfuscation of the radical implications of their philosophical arguments.

If Taylor apprehends his critique of modern moral philosophy to be accurate, then I argue he must conclude that the alternative theory he espouses, from “intuition” to “ontology” to “articulation”, is in fact a universal facet of human moral agency. To be clear, I am not asserting that humans somehow transcend their humanity, becoming superhuman or other than human. A claim of that nature would no doubt deserve the tag of “Neo-Nietzscheanism.” Rather, what I am arguing is that Taylor’s theory presents “moral sources” as the means through which individuals can transcend the fiction of “radical subjectivity” and make contact with others “across difference”. Taylor portrays “moral sources” as possessing the power to awaken agents “intuitive” feelings of the existence of non-subjective, meaningful elements in reality. Further, the “hypergoods” derived from an “ontological” engagement with “moral sources” places demands on agents based on their perception of these “goods” as worthy and valuable in a moral sense. Moral “goods” require agents to engage in a critical process of “ontological” reasoning in order to elucidate the form and intent of these “goods”. Subjects must struggle to discern what the love of them requires and how they effect one’s understanding of “what it is good to be”, thus making agents accountable to something other than narrow self interest. This is how “moral sources” elicit universal sentiment and transcendent understanding. This also implies that to fail to actively develop one’s “moral attitude” and clearly “articulate” it, is in fact to fail to fully develop one’s humanity. This

conclusion irrevocably tears down the objective limits erected around moral thought by modern “naturalists”. Hence, to champion Taylorian moral theory requires one to move beyond the normative, modern understanding of morality and into postmodern morality. However, the obdurate refusal of postmodern philosophers such as Derrida and Lyotard to admit to their own moral concerns, and Taylor’s demurral from strongly asserting the universality of his moral theory, ultimately limit the efficacy of both.

I will proceed in the next chapter to examine how these obstacles can be overcome. My aim is to elucidate how the universal and transcendent qualities of moral thought and identity are constituted in a postmodern context. It is my contention that the religious agent is uniquely suited to this examination. The religious perspective has been excluded from the modern philosophical discourse on morality and ethics, based on the notion that an allegiance to a “pre-modern” teleology disqualified it from legitimate consideration. This de-legitimation due to an assumed lack of objectivity has pushed the religious moral worldview to the margins of modern discourse. This has led to the alienation of those agents who explicitly acknowledge an orientation to a transcendent “good” they apprehend to be a substantive part of reality from modern moral philosophy. This scenario exemplifies the central concerns of both Taylorian and postmodern philosophy. For Taylor the religious subject represents a moral agent capable of identifying their primary source of moral meaning as existing outside of the heretofore imagined totality of their own subjectivity. In the postmodern context the religious agent represents a victim of modern suppression, estranged precisely because of their difference from, and “incommensurability” with, the modern “naturalist” empirical paradigm.

The modern hostility to the difference inherent in the religious perspective, coupled with the implied “moral realism” of religious claims, exemplifies the conditions which necessitate the development of a postmodern moral philosophy. Hence, my examination will seek to establish how the heterogeneity at the core of postmodern philosophy such as that of Derrida and Lyotard, and the “moral realism” of Taylorian theory can provide a fertile ground for the “articulation” of a “best account” oriented towards a “hypergood” legitimately apprehended as transcendent. Further, I will demonstrate how in the postmodern context, moral agents can use Taylor’s “moral vocabulary” to name this “source” as God without excluding non-religious agents from understanding the meaning and intent of their “best account”. Thus, allowing for the legitimate consideration of all “best accounts” in an open discourse which, while testing their validity, does not deny their “authenticity”.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

The vital place which the relationship between agents and “moral sources”, occurring as an integral part of our common human experience of reality, occupies in Taylorian moral philosophy offers convincing evidence for the description of his work as postmodern. Taylor rebuts the “naturalist” convention privileging empirical formulas over “intuitive” experience, and usurps the modern paradigm wherein moral thought serves ethical procedure. His notion of “moral realism” demands that agents consider their feelings about the “good” as integral to the development of an authentic “best account”. Taylor contrasts his model of “engaged” moral thought against the dominant “naturalist” model of moral philosophy which advocates the rigorous application of objective standards derived from a theoretically “disengaged” reasoning procedure. Under the “naturalist” “disengaged” paradigm subjects are required to discount their emotional responses from the consideration of moral questions. This “naturalist epistemology and its focus on the natural science model” (Taylor 1989, 71) demands that subjects abstract themselves from their moral sentiments and “disengage” from their “intuitive” experience of the “moral sources” in question.

Taylor’s portrayal of the “naturalist”, “disengaged” model exposes its underlying reductionist tendency, demonstrating how it attempts to subject heterogeneous moral experience to homogenous ethical proofs. The aim of the “naturalists” was to devise “instrumental” rules for moral reasoning which could produce proven and consistent results. This not only denies subjects the opportunity to work out their own perspective on moral issues, it portrays the “intuitive” moral feelings of individuals as dangerously

disingenuous. Taylor usurps the validity of the “naturalist” paradigm by making agent’s “intuitive” experience of “moral sources” a fundamental component of moral reasoning.

Taylor’s argument focuses on the way that subjects interpret the development of their “moral attitudes” through “transitions”. These “transitions” are understood by the agents experiencing them as the means by which they come to increasingly lucid understandings of the “moral sources” they consider integral to understanding their lives as meaningful. Taylor’s argument presents subjects as relying upon “biographical narrative” (Taylor 1989, 72) to provide coherency and continuity through the changes in their moral identity. The notion that agents use their shifting orientation to different “moral sources” as signposts in the development of their identity reinforces Taylor’s assertion of “moral realism” by demonstrating the impact which “moral sources” and the “hypergoods” which populate them have on self understanding. Taylor frames his discussion of “transition” narratives by critically contrasting them with the modern “disengaged” model, or in Taylor’s reckoning:

The bad model of practical reasoning, rooted in the epistemological tradition, [which] constantly nudges us towards a mistrust of transition arguments. It wants us to look for ‘criteria’ to decide the issue, i.e., some considerations which could be established even outside the perspectives in dispute and which would nevertheless be decisive. But there cannot be such considerations. My perspective is defined by the moral intuitions I have, by what I am morally moved by. If I abstract from this, I become incapable of understanding any moral argument at all. You will only convince me by changing my reading of my moral experience, and in particular my reading of my life story, of the transitions I have lived through—or perhaps refused to live through. (Taylor 1989, 73)

Taylor’s rejection of the “disengaged” model of reason, acting as an objective arbiter for solving ethical dilemmas, does not intuit a rejection of the need to employ reason to elucidate the “intuitive” experiences of the “good”. Rather, what Taylor objects

to is the notion that reason can operate isolated from “intuitive” experience. His critique is directed at the form of pure, analytical reason imported from natural science by “naturalist” philosophy which dominates modern thought. This “disengaged” model presents reason as a levy preventing “intuitive” or emotional experiences from effecting the sober consideration of moral challenges. Under the auspices of the “disengaged” model, “naturalists” sought to establish a meta view of society from which objective courses of action could be plotted and categorically imposed upon various categories of ethical questions. The theory of “disengagement” advances an ideal of objective moral reasoning that relies on an “abstraction” from experience, an abstraction which could be equally described as a “self-mutilation” (Taylor 1989, 107). I base this claim on the incumbent demand that “disengagement” makes upon individuals to sever the idea of what is “right” from their “intuitive” feelings about what is “good”. As previously discussed, Taylor asserts that reason is integral to the process of moral thought, employing a mode of “engaged” reason as fundamental to the development of a “moral ontology” from the raw experiences of the “moral intuition”.

The requirement that agents submit their “intuitive” experiences of the “good” to a process of rational/critical “ontological” reflection places him solidly in postmodern territory. A central theme of the postmodern critique is aimed at the modern empiricist denial of experiential knowledge. This perspective is demonstrated best in Lyotard’s notion of “savoir faire” which presents knowledge as experiential and communicative. The postmodern understanding of knowledge and experience finds symmetry with Taylor’s assertion that “intuitive” experience is integral to the development of what might be termed moral “savoir faire”. Further, the modern “neutralization” of experience,

cutting individuals off from a substantive engagement with their own “intuitive” experiences of “moral sources” is precisely the type of empiricism that postmodern philosophers such as Lyotard and Derrida seek to expose. Like Taylor, both Lyotard and Derrida see experience as the fundamental generator of the plurality of different ideas about what is meaningful. Underlying this view is the assertion that “transitions” are part and parcel of the process, and that reflection and change safeguard agents from an atrophy of their ability to understand themselves and others. Taylor makes this point explicit in a way that postmodern philosophy has not when he describes the “hypergood perspective, some notion of a good to which we can grow, and which then makes us see others differently.”(Taylor 1989, 71) This offers a lucid account of the transformative impact which an engaged reflection of “intuitive” experience can affect in the “transition” to a more salient perspective on the self, and the difference of others.

Taylor’s assertion that “growth” and “transition” constitute basic properties of moral thought stands in stark contrast to the “procedural” model of modern moral philosophy. Although Taylor attempts to dampen the ramifications of “moral realism”, his belief that agents risk “self-mutilation” through the continued attempt to “disengage” themselves from their “intuitive” experiences is unmistakably clear. The development of moral identity must not be hemmed in by static limits imposed by instrumental “procedure”. Agents must attune themselves to the changes in their own “moral intuitions” and remain “engaged” in the rational reflection of these feelings and the difference and heterogeneity they embody. Taylor alludes to the complexity of agent’s moral “frameworks” and the conflicting “attitudes” towards the “good” they contain. (Taylor 1989, 105) I interpret this to reflect a remarkably postmodern perspective, in that

it requires agents to acknowledge the legitimate place of difference and plurality in their own moral identity. Further, Taylor requires that agents proceed to inhabit the space created by difference in an attempt to simultaneously occupy rival perspectives on a range of “goods”. This tension spurs subjects to challenge their assumptions about, and readings of, the “good”. This leads to more critical and cogent “articulations” of one’s “moral attitude”. Taylor’s emphasis on the “growth” of “moral attitudes” through “transition” experiences shares with postmodern philosophy an understanding of ideas as features of reality that are necessarily subject to the influence of difference and the forces of change. The modern “naturalist” theory eschews the notion that moral thought can be influenced by non-subjective reality, and thus places the onus on predictable, immutable systems of “practical reason”.

“The excellence of practical reasoning is defined in terms of a certain style, method, or procedure of thought. For the utilitarians, rationality is maximizing calculation.”(Taylor 1989, 86) The theory of “radical subjectivity” assumes that reason is sovereign from the influence of any “intuitive” experience. Hence, subjects and societies are presented as able to construct uniform “procedures” of best practice with which to police the ethical realm, enforcing principles of right action justified on objective and pragmatic grounds. The contrast between the modern static “ethical proceduralist” model and the dynamically “engaged” model of Taylorian moral philosophy is striking. For Taylor “moral realism” intuits that, as a feature of reality, moral prerogatives are subject to changes commensurate with salient shifts in the “intuitive” experiences of the individuals and societies which “live through” them. Once again “transitions” are presented as central to comprehending the experience of “moral sources” in Taylor’s

theory. In the case of changing “moral attitudes” and social mores the “transition” which takes place is of a dialectical nature, wherein the experiences of different “hypergoods” collaborate to produce a plurality of ideas about what constitutes a “good or worthwhile life”. Taylor thus rejects the modern notion that individuals determine what is “good” through an independent exercise of “practical reason”, enabling them to instrumentally arrange their life and society to fit an “instrumental” blueprint. Equally, Taylor’s theory rejects pre-modern assumptions of a hegemonic, supernatural ideal commanding reality and fate by fiat. Taylor’s new, integral model of “moral realism” lays out a process of contemplation, evaluation, articulation, argumentation and tentative understanding functioning within the change and difference native to human experience. The persistent divide between what Taylor describes as the “monological” modern tradition which “takes very little account of the fact that human beings are plural and even less account of their difference” (Taylor 1999, 111) and his own theory which places difference and plurality at the forefront of moral reasoning, demands that Taylor explicitly break with the modern tradition which has, by his own account, impoverished moral thought (Taylor 1989, 3).

Taylor however, refuses to take this step. This reluctance is in part, I contend, rooted in his perception that modernity is not alone in its “monological” error. Commensurate with his critique of the myopic focus of modern “naturalist” philosophy is his assertion that postmodern philosophy falls into the same “monological” trap. Taylor acknowledges the adeptness with which postmodern philosophy can “liberate” alienated perspectives from the marginalization and “oppression” of the modern “logocentric” paradigm. However, once this “policy” of rescuing the “oppressed” is carried out Taylor

asserts that postmodern philosophers engage in a parallel denial of difference. The postmodern denial reifies the “oppressed” and the “oppressor” rejecting the possibility of establishing new connections between the two based on “different” (better) grounds. Taylor contends that this rejection of the possibility of a *détente* in the relation between the formerly “oppressed” and the past “oppressor” deteriorates into a cycle of recrimination. These are the concerns which prompt Taylor’s asking:

What is the telos of this policy? Does it aim to restore a comity in which our need for each other can be met without the distortion of repression or exclusion? Or does the whole way in which the demand is framed point rather to liberation into solitary self-sufficiency as the only adequate solution? Worse still, does it point this way even if this liberation cannot, in fact, be reached, so that the protest is doomed to be repeated forever in a ritual of endless accusation? (Taylor 1999, 116)

These are valid and prescient questions, exposing the weakness of postmodern philosophy as it is currently constituted. However, these are weaknesses that I argue are specifically addressed by the inclusion of Taylorian philosophy in the postmodern context. In contrast, placing Taylorian theory in the modern context is far more problematic. Modernity is bound up with the “naturalist” assertion of “radical subjectivity” and idealization of reason as “disengaged”, both of which necessitate a denial of “moral realism”. The incongruity between the “monological”, “naturalist” paradigm that governs legitimacy in the modern context and the concerns at stake in Taylorian philosophy is thus fairly complete. The “monological” bent of the postmodern context, however, is derived from an inability to move beyond the critical mode by owning up to the explicit moral concerns which underlie the work of postmodern philosophers like Lyotard and Derrida. I contend that rather than a point of schism, as with the modern tradition, this represents an opportunity to put Taylorian theory to work.

What the existent body of postmodern philosophy lacks, and Taylorian theory supplies, is the lucidity of “qualitative distinctions” and an explicitly “moral vocabulary”. Supplying postmodern philosophy access to the concept of substantive change in “moral attitudes” effected through the now familiar Taylorian model of “intuition”, “ontological reflection” and “articulation”, postmodern philosophy can be moved beyond critique and begin to argue strongly for the “goods” which inspired its original project. In particular, Taylor’s concept of “moral vocabulary” can give a saliency to postmodern discourse which it has heretofore lacked.

In his excoriation of postmodern philosophy Taylor exposes how the “hypergoods” which guide postmodern critique (freedom, justice etc.) are left unexamined, implied in critiques which avoid explicit “articulation”. This evasiveness weakens the integrity of postmodern philosophical critique, making it easy prey for critics who denounce it as indecisive and provocative for its own sake. It is my contention that a main factor contributing to this inarticulacy is that postmodern philosophers cannot envision a way in which to make strong moral arguments without recourse to the modern, hegemonic, rhetorical language of exclusivity which they are seeking to usurp. Taylorian theory, however, offers a solution to this dilemma. Taylor’s alternative to modern “naturalist” language is proposed in his argument that to “admit how a constitutive good can interpellate us, move us, empower us... will [often] be a question precisely of articulating what has remained implicit... One has not just to record but to invent language here” (Taylor 1989, 103) The notion of “inventing language” strikes a direct accord with Lyotard’s concept of inventing new forms of narrative. Further, while the “sublime” quality of the “hypergoods” undergirding the implicit “moral attitudes” present

in the work of Lyotard, Derrida and other postmodern philosophers will never be fully representable, Taylorian “moral vocabulary” will at least render them explicit through “articulation”. The expression of these “goods” is, I contend, crucial to realizing the potential of the postmodern era as a new context for critically “engaged” thought.

Consequently, if the postmodern era is to signal a genuine break from the modern era it must include an overt and inclusive moral discourse in which implied moral arguments can be made declarative without repeating the modern pattern of exclusivity.

As previously asserted, I propose that Taylor’s theory can act to pioneer the formation of a new field of postmodern moral philosophy. Beyond simply using his philosophical arguments to test these waters, I advance what I consider to be Taylor’s own “best account” as an example of what an “articulation” of a postmodern “moral attitude” might consist of. My aim is to demonstrate how a particular moral agent’s “best account”, examined through the lens of Taylorian theory and postmodern “deconstruction”, can elicit a transcendent understanding of the “hypergoods” at stake based on the concept of the universality of “difference”. Taylor’s treatment of the relationship between subjects and “moral sources” reflects the strength of his conviction that individuals must endeavor to realize their full potential by working to establish “substantive” connections with the “hypergoods” which inspire them. Taylor, daringly, asserts that the relationship between an agent and the “good” emerges from a feeling of one’s “love of the good”.

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

and to exhibit certain moral qualities but also to love what is good. (Taylor 1989, 93)

The use of the word “love” to describe the quality of the connection between subjects and “hypergoods”, and the commensurate claim that to “love a good” is a necessary element for being a “good human being” is deliberate on Taylor’s part. He is conscious of the fact that this is precisely the sort of language barred from legitimate modern philosophy, derided as subjective and irrational. Despite the controversy this language was bound to arouse amongst modern philosophers, Taylor has no recourse but to express himself in such emotive language. To have done otherwise would have been to shirk the responsibility to give an authentic account of his “intuitive” feeling of the “good” using a strong “moral vocabulary” reflecting the reality of the experience. Taylor’s concept of the “love of the good” is irrefutable evidence of his movement beyond the accepted, legitimate boundaries of modern philosophy. It also acts as an example of “moral vocabulary” at work.

Part of what equips Taylor to make such an unabashedly emotional “articulation”, in my view, is his deep commitment to “moral sources” that can be described as religious or spiritual as they are oriented towards the belief in an ultimate other. As outlined in the previous chapter, I advance the religious agent as a subject in whose “best account” of reality we can identify elements of both Taylorian and postmodern theory at work. The religious agent readily and openly acknowledges the moral dimension of reality, testifying to the existence of “moral sources” of meaning through their experience of “difference”. The religious agent also strongly asserts that the “moral sources” with which they are in contact are in no way reducible to their own subjectivity. This irreducibility is based on the “difference” they feel pertaining to the distinction between

their own existence and that of an ultimate other. Regardless of whether the ultimate other is conceived of as a being or a state of being, the religious agent acknowledges their incapacity to fully represent it. This incapacity does not however dissuade religious agents from attempting to “articulate” what the ultimate other means to them. The experience of such a “constitutive” and meaningful “moral source” apprehended as totally different from oneself exhibits how through the conduit of “moral intuition” subjects develop overwhelming feelings of devotion and duty, best expressed by Taylor as the “love of the good”. In the “moral vocabulary” particular to the “best accounts” of some religious agents, the “love of the good” is expressed as the “love of God”. It is my contention that religious agents engage in a mode of thought rooted in “moral realism”, which in some ways parallels Taylor’s theory in that they share a fundamental conception of “intuitive” experience. This further evinces Taylor’s divergence from the modern paradigm wherein the empirical constitutes the basic material for rational thought.

In both Taylorian and religious terms “intuitive” experience reflect aspects of Lyotard’s notion of the “Sublime” in that while the subject can develop a tentative conception of the source of their “intuitive” experience they cannot fully present it to others, or for that matter themselves. For both, however, the emphasis is placed squarely upon acknowledging their strong “intuitive” experience of a dimension of reality that while different from their own subjectivity, has become central to their identity. Beyond the commensurability of Taylorian and religious concepts of the “intuitive” experience of “moral reality, I argue that parallels can be drawn between the ways in which subjects reflect upon their “intuitive” experiences in both Taylorian theory and the religious context. One religious response to the “intuitive” experience of the “good”, or God, is to

seek an engagement with the source through reflective prayer. This practice resonates with Taylor's concept of an engaged "ontological" reflection of the feelings of the "good" elicited by the "moral intuition". Both reflective prayer and "ontological" reflection engage with ideas or ideals that the subject apprehends to be derived from the experience of a source in reality altogether different from their notion of self, yet critically important to their sense of "what it is good to be". Further, both prayer and "ontology" provide the subject with a contemplative space in which to rationally evaluate what their "intuitive" experiences mean and what they demand, resulting in a "best account" of the "good" or in religious language a bearing of witness to God. I contend that the relationship between the religious understanding of "intuitive" experiences of moral reality and Taylor's philosophical construal of moral theory is clearly evinced in Taylor's explicit demand for "an end to the stifling of the spirit and to the atrophy of so many of our spiritual sources." (Taylor 1989, 107)

This argument finds its full expression in his Marianist award lecture *A Catholic Modernity?* At the core of this dissertation is the concept of a "unity-across-difference" (Taylor 1999, 14) which advances a highly lucid argument for a fundamental shift in the understanding of the grounds upon which unity between moral agents, and moral sources, might be established. It also bolsters my own case for the inclusion of Taylorian theory in the postmodern context based on Taylor's assertions concerning "complementarity" and the need for a "radical decentering of the self" (Taylor 1999, 21). These notions evoke certain aspects of the "trace" and the "sublime" advanced by Derrida and Lyotard respectively. The link between these concepts derives from a shared intent to displace the exclusive focus on the self through an experience of the human "other" in the case of

Derrida and the conceivable but unrepresentable “Sublime” for Lyotard. For Taylor the decentering experience is of the “Trinitarian” God. To argue his case, Taylor employs explicitly religious language. The content of his argument includes dogmatic concepts such as “redemption”, “incarnation” and the “trinity”, Taylor is, however, careful to guard against their use inculcating an air of exclusivity. He accomplishes this by offering a new, open reading of their possible meanings. Returning to the universal root of the notion of “catholicity” Taylor asserts that “oneness” can be achieved even amongst subjects who hold disparate perspectives on the “good”.

Redemption happens through Incarnation, the weaving of God’s life into human lives, but these human lives are different, plural, irreducible to each other. Redemption-Incarnation brings reconciliation, a kind of oneness. This is the oneness of diverse beings who come to see that they cannot attain wholeness alone, that their complementarity is essential, rather than beings who come to accept that they are ultimately identical...this unity-across-difference, as against unity-through-identity, seems the only possibility for us (ibid)

Taylor’s “best account” of the possible grounds for a “unity across difference” presents unity not in its modern guise as an instrument of synthesis, or subjugation, but rather as a means for achieving “complimentarity”. As such it uses “difference” to form connections, or reveal already existent bonds, through the universal moral faculties of “intuition”, “ontology” and “articulation”. Taylor expresses his concept of unity in a “framework” oriented to his transcendent “hypergood”, the Christian “Trinitarian” God. This exemplifies what I consider to be an explicitly postmodern moral account, as it is oriented towards a source which is apprehended by the subject (Taylor) to be part of reality, thus acknowledging moral experience as real experience. Further, while Taylor identifies God as the essential source for his understanding of “what it is good to be” he does not construct his account in an exclusive fashion, but rather frames it in a pluralistic

context. Thus, Taylor's "articulation" is authentic to his own "ontological" understanding of the "good" while acknowledging its status as only one among many possible, different "best accounts" in the plurality of discourse. The condition of plurality also ensures that his "account" is open to possible challenge in the moral discourse. Thus difference and plurality prevent an understanding of the underlying moral argument at stake in Taylor's "best account" from being restricted solely to other religious agents. Using Taylor's theory from "Identity and the Good" in a postmodern context, all parties are able to "deconstruct" his account and identify its "ontological framework" and the values, ideas and meanings expressed through his "articulation". Thus, even if one does not share a commensurate feeling of affinity for Taylor's "hypergood" they can nevertheless engage with him through "moral realist" discourse engendering understanding "across difference".

Taylor's use of Christian terms to "articulate" his interpretation of the universality of difference, and the potential for "reconciliation" without synthesis, illustrates what I contend to be a postmodern moral argument. Taylor fulfills two fundamental postmodern criteria in this passage. The first is the acknowledgement of difference and plurality as ubiquitous features of human life. The second is more complex in that "unity" is a notion which postmodern philosophy generally suspects of intuiting some form of oppression. However, Taylor's model of a "unity-across-difference" specifically rejects the idea that unity is somehow synonymous with conformity. What takes shape is a union rooted in heterogeneity, as opposed to one presided over by hegemony.

For his "naturalist" critics such as Berlin and Rorty, Taylor is seen as finally exhibiting his true, theistic, colors. However, this critique only stands up so long as

Taylor's assertion is read superficially. A deeper reading, versed in Taylor's moral theory, can uncover the various principles of "moral realism", and I contend postmodernism, at play in his account. Taylor is expressing his "best account" of what he envisions as the conditions for the rise of a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of morality. He orients his assertion toward a "moral source" which, as a Catholic, he identifies as God. These are the terms which most accurately reflect the "intuitive" response to the "good" which inspire Taylor's moral "ontology". In Taylor's "best account", the "Trinitarian" God represents the preeminent model for "unity" in plurality; "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." (Taylor 1999, 14-15) On its face, Taylor's assertion excludes any interlocutor who does not subscribe to the Trinitarian doctrine. However, this is precisely the point upon which a modern "naturalist" and a postmodern "moral realist" reading radically diverge. For the latter Taylor's invocation of God in his "articulation" represents his "hypergood", the acknowledgement of which does not necessitate that one share his religious convictions, but merely recognize that he is offering his own particular response to "moral reality".

At the core Taylor is attempting to elucidate how morality and "moral sources" constitute a universal current in human life which, as a religious agent, he describes as a "catholicity" or "wholeness". Hence, for Taylor it is an "incarnate" moral impetus which unites us as humans. From this common basis agents proceed to express "different" and distinct "moral attitudes" developed through their unique "ontological" engagement with universally accessible "moral sources", thus respecting the place of plurality and "difference" without degenerating into incomprehensibility. Taylor uses the concept of

the “Trinitarian” God to describe how heterogeneity can exist within “wholeness” without giving way to paradox or negation. This is accomplished through the “complimentarity” of different accounts of the “good” which all emerge from a universal “moral” impetus. Further, Taylor’s express dependence upon what I contend to be a conceivable, but unrepresentable other (God), resonates with both Derrida’s “Trace” and Lyotard’s “Sublime”. Thus, I argue, evincing the “complementarity” of Taylorian and postmodern philosophy wherein understanding transcends synthesis. Further, it shows that, as Taylor asserts, a “unity” can be achieved between agents who express different moral perspectives based on the understanding that what girds their “best accounts” are “intuitive” experiences of “moral sources” that are universally accessible. Although the experience of these “goods” remains particular to each agent, the force of “moral sources” can be understood by all.

Taylor’s use of religious language to explain his concept of “unity-across-difference” increases the cogency of his argument by employing the language most meaningful to him as a moral agent. The intelligibility of his argument becomes clear to interlocutors when “de-constructed” and broken down to the “goods” his “articulation” revolves around, namely, the “complimentarity” of different “moral attitudes” which transcend particularity based on their common emergence from the universal experiences of “moral intuition”. While Taylor’s account goes some way in clarifying the overarching reconciliation he envisions his moral theory effecting between concepts of “unity” and “difference” and “pluralism” and “complimentarity”, he leaves several problematic concerns unaddressed and unresolved. Amongst these issues the specter of teleology looms large. Taylor’s discussion of the way in which agents understand their moral

identity to develop through narratives which include “construals of life as growth” (Taylor 1989, 105) does not satisfactorily deal with how we might measure progress in moral understanding. The explicit acknowledgment of hierarchical distinctions between moral “goods” contained in Taylorian theory necessitates a more significant elucidation of how, and if, individuals critical reflection and “articulation” of their moral prerogatives might not only bring them closer to their “hypergoods”, but actually make them more fully human. Certainly the notion of measuring progress towards degrees of humanity invites great controversy, but in the same way that “unity” need not negate “difference” surely a concept of progress can be formulated without intuiting a teleological predestined end.

Nor need progress always be conceived of as linear. Conspicuously absent from Taylor’s discussion of “moral realism” is a substantive consideration of the “sources” of phenomena best characterized as contrary to the “good”. My thesis marrying Taylorian and postmodern philosophy demands that experiences of subjugation, intolerance and persecution be examined through the rubric of “moral realism”, reflecting the concern of postmodern philosophers such as Derrida and Lyotard regarding justice and equality. Taylor’s silence concerning the reality of immoral phenomena leaves a gap in his careful study of “moral sources”. If love and compassion are proved real through an “intuitive” experience of their force, certainly commensurate experiences of suffering and violence point to the reality of their “sources”. Towards this end, a more thorough exploration of Taylor’s notion of “self -mutilation” and the consequences of failing to “articulate” one’s moral prerogative would, I believe, be of some benefit. Underlying both Taylorian and postmodern philosophy are strong currents of the responsibility of individuals to the

“good” or to the “other”. Coupled to this is the notion that to give an account of the “good” intuitively entails an acceptance of “accountability”. On this crucial aspect Taylor remains vague regarding the nature of this responsibility, even though he alludes to the consequences of avoiding such accountability when he discusses the perils of “self-mutilation” (Taylor 1989, 107)

The prospect of such dire costs requires that the character of moral obligation be expressly elucidated. This necessitates a consideration of the struggle demanded of moral agents in their daily lives to actualize their “moral attitudes”. The notion of moral obligation represents what I apprehend to be a discerning feature of the emergent postmodern moral identity, moving beyond the isolation of modern “naturalist” thinking and engaging with, and accepting responsibility for, the “goods” and the others with which we share reality.

Finally, it is my contention that Taylor moves far too rapidly from the basic experience of the moral “intuition” into the more nuanced and rational work of the moral “ontology”. In his haste to direct his full attention to the rational component of moral thought he fails to adequately address the primacy of the “intuitive” experience of “moral sources”. Taylor acknowledges that prior to the expression of reasoned “best accounts” subjects make “qualitative discriminations” about the “good”.

Prearticulately, they function as an orienting sense of what is important, valuable, or commanding, which emerges in our particulate intuitions about how we should act, feel, respond on different occasions, and on which we draw when we deliberate about ethical matters. (Taylor 1989, 78)

This intuitively suggests that becoming a responsible moral agent begins at a pre-rational level of emotive experience, providing the raw material for the ensuing exercise of “engaged”

moral reasoning. Despite the primacy of the “intuitive” experience of the “good” in Taylor’s theory, he nonetheless insists that it is the “ontological”, rational component of the moral process that is preeminent and thus most deserving of elucidation. Whether this is the case or not is debatable. Nevertheless, the brevity of Taylor’s investigation of our “moral intuitions” begs serious question, leaving the nature of “pre-articulate”, pre-rational, experiences of “moral sources” unanswered. Hence, for Taylor the “intuitive” experience takes on the character of an innate, assumed, feature of human morality. It is my strong contention that this lack of lucidity regarding the content of the “intuitive” experience of the “good” is untenable and compromises Taylor’s project as a whole. My conclusion is derived from the fact that in Taylor’s own reckoning the “intuitive” experience of the “good” constitutes the genus of morality, the trait which most fundamentally marks us as human. Consequently, a deeper examination of its auspices is required, including a speculative inquiry seeking to more cogently describe the actual “moral sources” with which our “moral intuitions” initially engage. The tenor of such an investigation necessitates fluency with extra-rational ideas such as transcendence and transgression, alterity and sacrifice.

It is my belief that religious philosophy and postmodern philosophy are uniquely equipped for such an undertaking, bringing to bare interpretations of the ephemerality of “intuitive” experience that may point towards possible depictions of the “sources of the good” both challenging and profound. Religious philosophy in particular can provide a deeper exploration of the notion of accountability which I ascertain to underlie Taylor’s moral theory. I base this conclusion on the fact that religious perspectives are rooted largely in a sense of special or sacred obligations and can thus serve as a framework for

the “articulation” of a new postmodern notion of our universal responsibility to the “moral sources” that move us and the others with whom we share moral reality.

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