

Articulating the Secular: the Transcendent in Charles
Taylor's Pluralism

by

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Abstract

Charles Taylor's later work proposes to mitigate tensions in modern pluralistic society with an interpretation of the Rawlsian overlapping consensus based on a notion of fullness. His new approach seems at odds with his earlier critique of the overlapping consensus, which he links to the homogenizing direction of the politics of equal dignity. Taylor's former emphasis on the politics of difference to protect and foster individual particularities seems to have been abandoned in favour of a focus on universal traits. I claim that this not so much a change for Taylor as a complementary aspect of his work, the commonalities serving as a context from which the community can construct itself towards a fusion of horizons. This thesis argues that Taylor's notion of fullness is however problematic because it proves to be either restrictive of the spiritual experience or too general to be any help in fostering solidarity.

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Introduction

This thesis intends to outline the place given to the modern transcendent in Charles Taylor's thought. A close reading of Taylor's work will stress the contrast between his earlier and later writings vis-à-vis his proposed solutions to reduce tensions in modern pluralistic society. Whereas his previous take favoured particularities and diversity, Taylor's later work seems to uncover a desire for social cohesion and a set of commonalities from which a society can build. This seems to position Taylor closer to the "politics of equal dignity", an approach he has heavily critiqued in the past as homogenizing and as putting minorities at a disadvantage. However, his new approach is not so much a contradiction for Taylor as it is a complementary aspect of his work, the commonalities serving as a context from which the community can construct itself towards a fusion of horizons.

I claim that Taylor's emphasis on the emotional and the non-verbal brings forth a renewed concept of transcendence from which one can find those unity-building commonalities. In fact, Taylor searches for a consensus over an emotion that is universally felt and held as important but that, at the same time, would be linked to a very personal justification of its importance. This commonly held emotion would come to the fore for Taylor through articulating a notion of transcendence that everyone will share in his or her own way. This notion is what he terms fullness – that which provides one with a richer, more valuable and meaningful life and aims to achieve a balance between the uniqueness of individual meaning and the collectiveness of a consensus. I argue however that looking at emotions to reach this consensus is unfortunately not as preserving of

freedom as Taylor believes, since what is outlined in the non-verbal and the experiential will lose its openness and variety as it will enter into language. Moreover, the very desire to find a universal trait that will at the same time foster uniqueness and individuality will prove to be inadequate. I will conclude that such a problem in Taylor is due to his not having given an account of the shift of the transcendent he discusses in *A Secular Age* in terms of its repercussions on individuality and on the place of the transcendent within the hierarchy of goods discussed in the first chapter of *Sources of the Self*.

Taylor defines transcendence as “aiming beyond life or opening yourself to a change in identity” (1999, 26). It is a sense of the existence of something after life, something that transforms one from a ‘being’ into something else. Taylor also describes transcendence as involving a sense that there is something higher than mere human flourishing, a belief in a supernatural power and a notion that human life can extend beyond this one (2007, 20). This latter definition includes a strong reference to a religious association but the broad view of the first description still holds. Taylor’s transcendence can therefore include religion, more diffuse spiritual notions, or even convictions existing in immanence that are nonetheless still connected to a notion of something beyond human flourishing such as the order of nature.

Transcendence is significant for Taylor for many reasons. A core theme in his work is the embeddedness of the person into the world and the importance of one’s context to define one’s experience of reality. Faith or one’s position towards the concept of something ‘beyond’ determines one’s outlook on the world and on one’s place in that world.

According to Taylor, the concept of transcendence has shifted in modernity and no longer provides an unequivocal understanding of the world. Transcendence in secular modernity has taken a position where it has become one of many other options available to provide an account of the world. In terms of Taylor's hierarchy of goods, I hold that the shift of the transcendent can be explained as having gone from being a framework to being a constitutive good. The transcendent as a framework meant that the notion of a cosmological order was widespread and part of a largely unchallenged background; its shift to the place of a constitutive good means that it has become a personally held notion and while it may still be quite important to one's identity, it nonetheless has the potential to be replaced. This change is significant because transcendence now holds a different place in the conception of identity.

Individuals no longer view themselves in the world as subjected to a realm of forces beyond one's reality. Rather the individual is now understood as having a great deal more control over his or her life, being a self-creating and autonomous agent. As a result, people's way of believing has changed as well: one is less inclined to buy into all-encompassing, traditional ways to worship and will favour a context where one's own convictions and beliefs can be expressed freely. The modern loss of the transcendent as the higher authority has meant a gain in inwardness and individuality: agents determine their own view of what constitutes a good life and its pursuit demonstrates their autonomy. Inevitably, the very uniqueness of those free individuals will result in a plurality of notions of the good involving a plurality of values springing from those notions. However, Taylor holds that humans are dialogical in nature and even if autonomy and individualism have come to the fore in the modern context, one's family,

friends, community will have a determining influence on one's identity.

Taylor acknowledges that such emphasis on the individual results in a weakened notion of unity within a state, making the conflicts among values and convictions more likely to occur and more difficult to solve in a self-centered and individualistic context. The presence of a variety of outlooks in a society will inevitably lead to concerns about unity and about living together. Some behaviours will be considered unacceptable, or the exercise of one's freedom might frustrate the exercise of another's. Questions will arise about where the boundary between the pursuit of greater good and individual freedoms resides. More to the point, a question will be asked about what could be the characteristics of a society that would allow the exercise of one's individual freedom and yet encourage cooperation. Rawls asks that very question in *Political Liberalism* (1993, 4) and his formulation frames a possible solution at the level of institutions and guidelines. Taylor is also concerned with this question but his introduction of the term 'solidarity' in its formulation seeks a solution that is close to the community and involves some degree of emotion and deliberation.

For Taylor individual freedom is not enough: there needs to exist some notion that unites people together and make citizens accept the sacrifices the state might require of them for the benefit of the whole (such as raising taxes). Whereas Rawls looks for procedures and agreements to solve value conflicts, Taylor seeks a more organic solution that will foster attachment to the greater community and thus attain solidarity and cooperation through emotions, deliberations and dialogue. However Rawls and Taylor agree to the use of an overlapping consensus to try to achieve social stability, focusing on what Rawls describes as political conceptions of justice that all cultural and religious

groups' constitutive goods, can endorse, while giving to such conceptions a very personal justification. Yet, Taylor sees the limited solution the overlapping consensus can be. For instance, in a secular society, the openness to other understandings of the world might not include those that hold a different set of answers to fundamental questions, especially if that understanding is informed by a conception of the transcendent. In Taylor's view, without an emotional involvement towards others, the overlapping consensus would remain a *modus Vivendi*: even if the overlapping consensus opens the possibility of dialogues in a community, without the willingness to engage, that dialogue will remain sterile.

The solution Taylor proposes is to reinvigorate feelings of solidarity to the larger community by introducing a way to reconnect with transcendence and by focusing on the feeling such reconnection will bring forth. For Taylor, the overlapping consensus based on public reason is not enough to inspire a lasting emotional attachment to the community. He introduces subtler languages – art, poetry, common experiences and music – as a way to get people to feel connected to every other person, to live something beyond human existence, without being limited by language. Individuals will interpret this feeling of unity in many different ways but Taylor will define it as the existence of something that brings significance, richness and fulfillment to people's life. This feeling of fullness is what Taylor will use as an overlapping consensus but will prove to be inadequate as soon as this conception leaves the visceral and enters the descriptive.

Its position in modernity as a constitutive good means that the transcendent can not only take many forms, it also means that it stands on the same level with non-belief,

and conceptions on the world based on purely immanent concepts such as natural science. This range of outlooks between belief and unbelief is not unified by any notion except the overlapping consensus, which gives no basis for those positions to view others in any other way than as competition.

Taylor wants to add an emotional aspect to his version of the overlapping consensus by bringing forward the notion of subtler languages and of what I term the experiential, or that which is perceived through the senses, without using language to interpret it. These kinds of languages remain within ambiguity, non-verbal communication, and the emotional. Taylor refers to music, poetry, or art as well as common experiences where one's encounter with those subtler languages will give the feeling that there is something greater than all of us. It is Taylor's hope that interactions with others, a renewed emphasis on the experiential – as opposed to the dialogical and the deliberative – will instill a visceral sense that everyone is connected to the same thing. Subtler languages and their experience will simply articulate in a way that cannot be limited by language that transcendence is at the very core of everyone's existence and that its rejection, its critique, or even its endorsement all amount to the same connection to transcendence. This notion will serve as an addition to the overlapping consensus, to address and reduce tensions along the gamut of moral positions, catering to what Taylor claims to be an inherent human need for transcendence.

As a concrete addition to the overlapping consensus, this reconnection with transcendence will be carried over to Taylor's discussion of the concept of fullness. He will begin with an attempt to outline commonalities between the diverse fundamental convictions that provide individuals with a particular conception of the world. The

acknowledgment that everyone exists within some notion of the transcendent, no matter the nature of one's convictions, serves as an attempt to limit the diversity of positions between belief and unbelief by emphasizing a unifying aspect.

Transcendence articulated as an inevitable, yet all-encompassing notion will inform the similar discussion of fullness. Added to an overlapping consensus based on commonly held principles, fullness will add an emotional side to the discussion of diversity, referring to that which provides individuals with a richer and more fulfilling life. This concept which holds a special place in everyone's life stands as a possible source of inspiration for feelings of solidarity – the idea being that if such a personal and deeply held feeling of fullness is also present in someone else whose beliefs and convictions are foreign or seem strange, it will trigger feelings of sympathy and unity.

I claim however that emotional concepts such as a connection to transcendence and a notion of fullness cannot serve as an adequate source of sympathy nor is it a suitable aspect of an overlapping consensus. Whereas an emotion can be universal, as soon as it is devoid of its object and defined as the base for a consensus or as a way to emphasize commonalities, it can only take a form that is either restrictive and exclusive of a part of the population, or too general in including everyone and consequently reducing its meaning. The notion of transcendence, for instance, could be informed by both a firm belief in God and by a sense of being part of the great pulse of nature. While both provide a notion of something beyond life, one concept is informed by a religion and the other is rooted in immanence. The two positions are diametrically opposed and thus the decision to include both definition or to reject it will determine the meaning of the term.

I will set out into this analysis of Taylor's work by first giving an account of the modern context where I will give a brief survey of the influence that one's beliefs and convictions have on identity through a discussion of Taylor's first chapter of *Sources of the Self*. This reading of the secular through the making of identity will aim to emphasize the repercussions that a shift in the place of the transcendent has on the way we understand ourselves. The aim of this discussion is to demonstrate that the modern concept of transcendence no longer has its former unifying character, which could once serve as a rallying point for identity and a sense of belonging. The rise of the autonomous individual has shifted transcendence to a place where it can be personalized – in taking whatever shape the subject wants it to have – but is still important enough to be constitutive of one's identity and give one's life meaning. The conclusion of this chapter will establish that the modern individual no longer has an unequivocal principle from which to orient his or herself and that consequently a variety of individual conceptions of the world, of the good and of an authentic life will take shape.

The second chapter will develop from the previous discussion and describe the consequences associated with the rise of the modern buffered individual in the state. I will outline the resulting diminution of the importance of a sense of community and the increasing importance given to the autonomous, self-constructing individual. This chapter will argue that the near exclusive focus on individual freedom and equality has led to the decrease of a sense of community and to a need to revive it. Such individualistic context will not instill a needed openness and solidarity in its population to deal with the inevitable conflicts among a plurality of values and fundamental convictions. Hence individuality and the sense of community that will come into tension

in dealing with the demands of a pluralistic society need to cease to be put into conflicting positions. I will discuss Taylor's solution in the Rawlsian overlapping consensus as an attempt to foster unity in a state by emphasizing the unanimous endorsement of a set of general values obtained through individual's free exercise of human reason. I will conclude that such a consensus is necessary in the current modern individualistic context to prepare the ground for dialogue but that this is not enough for Taylor.

Finally, I will establish that this overlapping consensus can only be partly efficient because the secular context – which is characteristic of modernity – involves a restriction of the kind of discussions that can occur over the notion of transcendence: making illegitimate, naïve and fanatical the language used to talk of such things and consequently has restrained the possibility of various positions towards transcendence to openly engage in dialogue. The culture of the majority being secular immanence, the believers are at a disadvantage and tensions between such groups are exacerbated and doomed to remain unresolved, except superficially with an overlapping consensus, in this case closer to a *modus Vivendi*. I will give an account of Taylor's introduction of the notion of subtler languages as a way to circumvent discourse and propose a new access to transcendence through an experiential notion rather than one predicated on rigid interpretations.

My conclusion will address the implications and shortcomings of this emotionally inspired overlapping consensus. I claim that the need to account for the place of the non-believers in Taylor's notion of fullness and in the discussion of transcendence seriously weakens his proposed solution to trigger solidarity. Moreover,

this very solution is misdirected from the very beginning and shows that Taylor does not see that the change in the modern place of the transcendent he described in *A Secular Age* makes the transcendent a constitutive good, which means it can no longer have the unifying quality it once had as a framework.

1 Chapter: Man's Place for God

Taylor's premise for *A Secular Age* is that over the last few centuries, the conditions of belief, which had remained the same for the larger part of known human history, have shifted. In a short time, humans have gone from living in an 'enchanted' world where belief in a supernatural beyond was largely unchallenged, to inhabiting a disenchanted world where unbelief has become widespread and the supernatural world no longer exists. The modern conception of belief has lost its hegemonic character and has become something that can be optional. He goes further in claiming that the immanent order that is the modern context gives unbelief a default position, which in turn makes belief a position more difficult to hold.

The major part of Taylor's volume is dedicated to what has led to such a shift in belief and what changes the experience of belief has undergone in modernity. In what follows, I want to look at this shift in a different light. This chapter will look at the change in the conditions of belief from a moral perspective, integrating Taylor's discussion of the making of the modern identity in *Sources of the Self*: I will look at what such a shift means for the state of moral sources and for identity. Taylor does not give an account of the shift of transcendence at the core of *A Secular Age* in terms of his discussion of the hierarchy of goods in *Sources of the Self*. I hold however, that it is important to situate the new place of the modern transcendent in this context to better understand its implications and to highlight the contradictions in Taylor's work, especially in his conception of the overlapping consensus, that arise partly from not looking at the modern transcendent as a changing concept of the good.

My claim is that, in the modern context, belief in a 'beyond' – or what Taylor calls the transcendent – whereas it could once be understood as such, can no longer be intelligible as a framework and has consequently taken the place of a constitutive good, which makes the optional character Taylor gives to belief in the secular turn possible. As a result, the transcendent no longer informs the shaping of one's identity the way it once did when it was an unchallengeable framework. I will use Taylor's distinctions between the 'porous' and the 'buffered' self to illustrate my proposition.

To be clear about what is implied in such a change in the conditions of belief and what makes it significant in modernity, it is necessary to give an account of what Taylor defines as the transcendent. First, it is important to point out that Taylor did not choose to use the term 'transcendent' without reservations since it can be taken as "an abstract and evasive term, one so redolent of the flat and content-free modes of spirituality we can get maneuvered into in the attempt to accommodate both modern reason and the promptings of the heart" (1999, 106). Yet he turned to it in the absence of a more adequate term to refer to the "different ways in which religious discourse and practice went beyond the exclusively human" (106). In *A Catholic Modernity?*, Taylor defines the transcendent as being beyond life "trying to get at something that is essential not only in Christianity but also in a number of other faiths – for instance, in Buddhism. A fundamental idea enters these faiths in very different forms, an idea one might try to grasp in the claim that life isn't the whole story" (20). Taylor's transcendent is therefore a concept which involves something beyond the realm of immanence in which we live, regardless of any denominational characteristic. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor attempts a more precise description of the transcendent as he posits three aspects viz., "(1) the sense

that there is some good higher than, beyond human flourishing; (2) belief in a higher power, the transcendent god of faith; (3) the Christian story of our potential transformation by *agape* requires that we see our lives as extending beyond ‘this life’” (2007, 20). These three characteristics remain quite broadly encompassing of many faiths and even the third aspect can find its equivalent in other denominations, such as the example he gives in *A Catholic Modernity* of the Buddhist notion of *karuna* (1999, 21). Thus his definition of the transcendent allows for a discussion of the state of belief, which will aim to be as inclusive as possible in order to be as widely applicable as possible.

Taylor establishes the making of identity to be a complex interplay between one’s own notion of what is good to be and the feedback one receives from one’s own context (upbringing, education, language, etc...). Thus being compelled by a notion of the good, and our relationship to those people meaningful and important to us – or a conception of love and of being moved – decisively affects the nature of identity.

In his essay *Cognitive Psychology*, Taylor describes his concept of human beings as self-interpreting: “there is no such thing as what they are, independently of how they understand themselves. To use Bert Dreyfus’ evocative term, they are interpretation all the way down” (1985, 191). Identity is rooted in the individual in that the individual is the engine of self-interpretation and therefore the generator of identity. However, it is important to note that this selfhood is not established in isolation – it cannot self-generate. Identity requires an outside world in which it can reveal itself and from which its own image can be fed back to itself. Taylor understands that the self cannot be a self without having a relationship to its surroundings. This holistic characteristic is expressed in the values and the notion of the good the individual chooses. These choices Taylor

sees as the first articulations of the self because they position the self in relation to the world, defining the position from which one speaks in terms of morals and beliefs, but also its position in the social space (including family, social functions, interpersonal relationships), all of which contribute to defining identity (1989, 35).

Thus moral positions are linked with identity formation and affirmation. Taylor defines a moral source as a motivation “which underlies our highest aspirations, and also our best practices, where we really live up to the demands we make of ourselves” (2007, 693). These aspirations can be rooted in various sources, from Christian *agape* to exclusive humanism’s benevolence and ethical concern. However, a change in what constitutes one’s moral sources will affect changes in one’s self-definition.

Taylor’s discussion in *A Secular Age* of the former place of the transcendent as a quasi-unequivocal authority defines it – in my reading of Taylor’s hierarchy of goods – as a framework. For Taylor, the framework once acted as a moral source as well as a source of meaning and of moral orientation for the individual. Such authority was not only inescapable in that it was exogenous and therefore all encompassing, it was also unthinkable to live without there being any such order in the world. As a consequence of such interconnectedness of meaning between oneself and the world, the authority of this moral source would prove to have a crucial effect on one’s identity and understanding of one’s orientation in the world.

Yet, the change in the importance of that moral source, from being a framework to a constitutive good, implies that identity will be construed differently. Such a change also implies that something else will replace the demoted moral source and thus self-understanding will be changed in accordance to the new one. In this case, Taylor argues

that unbelief has taken the place of belief and, as such, he sees the advent of the “buffered” self, which demonstrates a disengagement from the outside world where meaning is essentially inward and where any notion of the supernatural is gone.

To fully grasp the significance of that change for morals and identity, it is necessary to outline the crucial role the framework plays in identity formation. The holistic self I have described above by definition requires a context that is commonly shared with others in order for identity to have something to root itself into. This is the function that Taylor gives to frameworks: they are the building blocks of one’s identity.

The Background: Frameworks

In order to situate oneself in the world, and to define one’s identity by taking a position towards what one understands as good, it is necessary to root these decisions in an understanding of what is most important to oneself. To make a choice in that sense is to affirm one’s sovereignty and uniqueness, to define oneself as an entity distinct from others. Thus, to make qualitative distinctions between what is good and bad, higher and lower is what individuals do and what allows one to determine one’s strongly valued goods. Taylor defines these strong evaluations as what organize our moral landscape by establishing a hierarchy in the goods that help determine the choices we make. Strong evaluations provide one with a notion that some ways of life are more desirable, richer, more fulfilling than others. They also allow one to be able to determine which elements in one’s life matter and constitute a moral position and, in opposition, which aspects of life are not morally charged. For instance, the decision not to purchase a major brand of

running shoes because of the company's use of sweatshops and child labour to make their products demonstrates a behaviour informed by a moral stance. In contrast, the decision not to purchase that particular brand of trainers because they are too expensive or because of their bulky design is not a moral choice but merely a decision based on a monetary concern or on aesthetic preference.

Strong evaluations determine whether choices have moral implications and the grounds of such differentiations depend on what orients the individual in moral space, viz. the basic orientation that is the framework (1989, 30). The individual aspect of the framework provides the background for strong evaluations, the ordering of which depends on what makes sense to a person. It would consequently seem impossible to live without a framework because it provides the context within which we exercise our qualitative distinctions. Thus, someone without a framework would not be able to determine what was important from what was trivial; there would be no bearings upon which to stand on issues of importance or from which one could answer for him or herself on those issues (31). Frameworks are therefore essential to help define the way we will position ourselves in moral space: they require self-determination in that it belongs to "human agency to exist in a space of questions about strongly valued goods, prior to all choice or adventitious cultural change" (31). Each of us is thus called to take a stand on what we consider meaningful and important and frameworks provide the necessary context to make that stand significant.

Individuals cannot be fully defined without references to the context in which they exist. Not only are individuals self-interpreting, they are also dialogical. Indeed, through her moral choices, the individual can interpret her own identity but the

framework and the community provide the language and the standards of evaluation that she uses to express it – whether it would be the cultural community to which she belongs, the community of thinkers she has been studying, or the community of friends and family with whom she has grown. These webs of interlocution provide a gamut of intelligibility within which the dialogical individual can articulate her identity and her account of the good. It is not necessary however, to conform to the “limits of thought and vision of contemporaries” but any attempt at originality will be “lost in inner confusion, unless it can be placed in some way in relation to the language and vision of others” (37). Thus identity is in constant exchange with a community consisting in a series of webs of interlocution within the frameworks that characterize that community.

Consequently, a framework not only provides one with an orientation in moral space but also with a common space of interlocution with others since it involves a “reference to a defining community” (36). Taylor gives the example of being an Armenian, a Quebecer, an anarchist or a Catholic – an element orienting us in the world, without which our sense of identity would be lost. The need to have one’s own orientation in moral space is inescapable and thus makes the absence of frameworks in one’s life devastating. An individual living without a framework would be standing outside of any space of interlocution and hence would fail to be intelligible to her surroundings: the absence of a framework in a person’s life would be like experiencing an identity crisis. This emphasizes the dialogical aspect of frameworks since they need to provide a common ground upon which to articulate goods.

Having a framework not only provides one with a common language with which one can assert one’s identity within a community, it also means that membership to that

community will necessitate one's identity to be phrased within the bounds of this common language. Language shapes as much as it defines and consequently, as it changes, self-interpretation will also change. This is illustrated for example, with the advent of Marxism and how the new Marxist articulations of the economic and social structure provided new ways to understand work and the concept of class. As a result, the workers' understanding of their relation to their surroundings took on new meanings with terms like 'alienation', 'means of production' and 'objectification' and allowed for a perspective of their reality that was not previously available to them. Consequently, the formulation of an experience or one's self-definition is likely to change if the vocabulary to formulate or define it changes for instance, as will be discussed in Chapter three, the secular language of modern society makes difficult a legitimate articulation of a religious outlook. Moreover, since Taylor's concept of identity is inseparable from morals and beliefs, a change in a society will result in changes in identity and values, and with time, identity formulations that were once intelligible will no longer be so.

Frameworks also provide another important aspect of identity, which is the sense of having a direction and a goal towards which to aim to attain one's notion of the good. The decisions and the stances that one takes to get closer to the good further define identity by giving individuals a narrative element, making one's choices reflect one's progression toward the good and what contributes to reaching it: "a sense of what I have become which can only be given in a story" (48). Identity is thus also tightly bound with a sense of becoming as one's conception of the good and one's orientation toward it changes. Self-concept is defined by evaluating one's actions in relation to the good. In addition, this narrative is not merely isolated to one's own progression towards the good

but it is also put in context of the larger narrative of one's society and to the goods that it values.

However it is important to keep in mind that “we are dealing not with something grounded in the nature of being, but rather with changeable human interpretations” (26), which means that frameworks are bound to change and what's more, are not uniformly accepted. Frameworks can take different forms, given that they are the basis upon which identity is constructed. For instance, one's way of acting might be seen as purer, some way of living as fuller or more admirable than others (20). Thus, in modernity, not everyone shares the same framework since not all ways of living are considered good by everyone. Taylor contrasts our modern connection to frameworks with that of Martin Luther who could not separate the meaning of his life from the unquestionable framework within which he lived (18). In contrast, the quest for meaning of the modern individual can only be pursued within a framework that the individual will find plausible. The modern predicament, therefore, is a search for meaning that comes with a broadening of human agency – the individual being the one who defines which framework provides the best explanation for his or her life (52). Whereas the framework in Luther's time could not be challenged, the modern framework can be altered, chosen, replaced until it provides the best account¹ of one's life.

¹ For Taylor, to give the best account of one's life “is not only offering the best, most realistic orientation about the good but also allowing us best to understand and make sense of the actions and feelings of ourselves and others” (1989, 57). Such an account emphasizes the experiential aspect of morals, acknowledging the importance of what is moving, personal and emotional. In contrast, he reproaches the proponents of reductive theories (such as utilitarians or Kantians) their limited explanations of people's behaviours that have nothing to do with how we actually experience the goods and what is significant to us. What Taylor terms “third-person explanations” provide a detached account of morals, attempting to find a system to determine how humans choose what is good but without any relation to what occurs in the real world. The best account of one's life – or the BA principle – while it could be seen as an incomplete explanation of our motivations (since we

As a result, there will likely be more than one framework present in one society: “Underlying our modern talk of identity is the notion that questions of moral orientation cannot all be solved in simply universal terms” (28). However, a diversity of frameworks does not necessarily mean incomprehension among them because of potentially great differences. On the contrary, all frameworks make sense of intuitive responses that are intrinsic to humans and which Taylor defines as moral intuitions. These intuitions – benevolence, or respect for others; fullness, or what we find makes one’s life richer, more complete; and dignity (15) –, are present in all frameworks but are expressed in different proportions, which explains why it is still possible to find potential for intelligibility between frameworks. Thus, since they must be intelligible, provide guidelines towards moral questions and maintain cohesiveness, multiple frameworks in the context of one society cannot be entirely unrelated to one another.

If we look at it as a framework, the transcendent would be largely unchallengeable but the permanence it enjoyed in Martin Luther’s time for example is almost nonsensical in the current modern context. As a result of his framework, Luther’s conception of the world was predicated on the transcendent but today “the cosmos theories are no longer believed; they are even no longer intelligible” (2007, 324). Consequently, a rigid framework can no longer properly define the individual: while the modern framework may be as comprehensive as it used to be, it is however no longer unanimous or unchallengeable. As a result, the individual is in a position to choose the framework he or she desires. To question and to determine our “best account” of what

cannot encapsulate it in a comprehensive system), is nonetheless the most adequate account. Thus, the language used to describe how we live our life is as important as the one used to discuss one’s morality, as Taylor demonstrates in his discussion of the goods and identity.

makes sense in our lives can put a framework into question and we can furthermore reject that framework as a result of the evaluative and critical perspective we have in modernity.

Furthermore, Taylor argues that the current lack of credibility of the transcendent is that it is essentially the result of a view towards religion that borders on the more radical yet equally pervasive attitude that is usually present after a revolution. “A post-revolutionary climate is extremely sensitive to anything that smacks of the *ancien régime* and sees backsliding even in relatively innocent concessions to generalized human preferences” (1999, 24). Therefore “it is by virtue of its post-revolutionary climate that western modernity is very inhospitable to the transcendent” (25). For this reason, I hold that the transcendent can no longer be credibly articulated nor established as a collective moral source such as it once was in the position of a framework. A framework is understood in modernity as a collective notion that provides a general context for one’s moral space, identity and place within the community. While frameworks still have a crucial identity-defining function, the transcendent has ceased to be an inescapable part of that role. Instead, the modern articulation of the transcendent needs to be a private choice without it being prescriptive, and the constitutive good allows for such individuality.

Collective Hypergoods

As has been established above, the framework provides the context from which one makes the qualitative distinctions that define one’s strongly valued goods. These

goods however do not have an equal importance in our lives and inevitably one of them will have a place above all the others as the most significant. Taylor defines such goods as hypergoods, i.e., “goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about” (1989, 63). They also have a crucial importance for identity, the proximity to what one holds as a hypergood giving one a sense of wholeness but the impossibility to attain it bringing one despair and a feeling of unworthiness. However, the fact that we have such a strong relationship to the hypergood based on its importance to our identity – and given that the transcendent is understood as playing a significant role in one’s life – does not necessarily mean that it makes the transcendent a hypergood: the nature of hypergoods, as we will see below, does not make such a categorization plausible.

First, it is necessary to determine whether Taylor understands the hypergood as having the role of a contingent individual good or of a collectively held good. In her book on Taylor, Ruth Abbey has rightly identified some vagueness in his definition of hypergoods but I am not convinced by her conclusion, which gives hypergoods an essentially individual character. Abbey begins by observing that “Taylor seems to vacillate about whether hypergoods feature in all moral frameworks or only some” (Abbey 2000, 36). She indicates some passages that argue for the former and for the latter: for instance, Abbey cites Taylor referring to hypergoods being a feature of moral life that is experienced by “some” people (36) but argues that as he furthers his description of them in *Sources of the Self*, he gradually clarifies his position towards the hypergoods being “necessary to one’s moral landscape (36), pointing to his use of the general ‘we’ as an indication that he considers the hypergoods as being collective (Taylor

1989, 71). She also calls attention to Taylor's claim that "our acceptance of any hypergood is connected in a complex way with our being *moved* by it"² (73) as another indication that Taylor perceives the hypergoods as collective.

As discussed in the previous section, frameworks are understood collectively to provide webs of interlocution that will allow for the emergence of a common language (in the form of values, history, traditions, practices) and subsequently provide one with a background that will contribute to shaping identity. However, as such they still have individual importance in that one's identity and one's position within the framework will define one's strongly valued goods through qualitative distinctions. Taylor first defines hypergoods as individual in positing that the recognition of a hypergood in one's life means that a disconnection from such good would be devastating, its proximity being essential to one's identity (1989, 63). Emotions are thus solicited when it comes to hypergoods considering that one accepts a hypergood as the moral standard in one's life based on a strong emotional response (73). Whereas Taylor grants that traditions, or established authorities will project a hypergood that one might want to – or feel compelled to – adopt, he clearly makes the distinction between "seeing the good and being moved by it" (73). Whereas a community, a tradition or even one's peers can communicate a view of the good, what one will find moving will not necessarily be the same thing: for Taylor, that deep feeling will therefore likely be a personal conception of the good. However, in addition to its partial origin in the community, Taylor defines the hypergoods as having a collective reach, which means that the same hypergood can be held by a large group of people; they also have the potential to be superseded by another

² Emphasis in the text.

hypergood over time, this supersession having an error-reducing character. Taylor gives the example of the modern “notion of universal justice and/or benevolence, in which all humans are to be treated equally with respect” which replaced, “through a number of hard-fought and painfully won stages” (64), the origins of other goods such as Platonism and Judaeo-Christian revelations which themselves were supersessions of the Homeric-inspired warrior ethic (65).

In light of these apparent contradictions in the nature of hypergoods, Abbey chooses to argue that they are personal goods and that “only some people’s moral frameworks include a hypergood” (Abbey 2000, 37). She reasons that if hypergoods were widely adopted, the tensions within pluralist societies would not be of much concern, most highly valued goods being unanimously held, and such a widespread embrace of that good would still not provide a convincing account for the many people who do not live a life strongly defined by such goods (37). Hypergoods for Abbey are therefore contingent. However, as such they fail to provide an account of what determines an individual to have or not to have a hypergood in their life. Moreover, because some features of the hypergood make no sense at the individual level, Abbey’s interpretation leaves them out and thus, in my opinion, provides an incomplete account of that higher good. For instance, if we take Abbey’s position, and define the hypergood as a largely individual moral standard – and what is more, as optional –, the transcendent would appear to have a possible place as an individual hypergood especially since, understood in this sense, it would feed into the individual narrative of one’s journey towards that good.

Yet, to view the hypergood as a private good likens it to a Kierkegaardian life-

defining, unconditional commitment, where the moral ideal becomes a commitment that overpowers all others (Kierkegaard 2006, 29), a moral duty that becomes the sole guide and judge of one's position in a moral landscape, and the only measure through which one evaluates the world. Abbey gives the example of a political activist willing to sacrifice his freedom in going to prison to follow his moral ideal (Abbey 2000, 36) or of an environmental activist living in a tree with the sacrifices to her comfort and privacy that such measures entail to fight for her convictions (35). This definition could imply that the transcendent, whether in the form of organized religion or an embodiment of a particular denomination, could be a hypergood – for instance in the life of a cloistered nun or of a catholic priest – where one's entire life is dedicated to one's hypergood, to the exclusion of most other goods. Yet, I believe that the modern notion of the transcendent in its secular context as optional and varied would emphasize the exclusiveness and hermetic character of a Kierkegaardian hegemonic commitment, especially since a hypergood is rooted in one's personal emotional response to a good. This trait of the hypergood would make more plausible an individual spirituality rather than an attachment to a mainstream religion that includes a great number of people in its ranks yet, if the hypergood is contingent and essentially individual as Abbey argues, this close relation between the individual and its hypergood might just make it unintelligible to others. However, to define the hypergood as an exclusively individual good is to disregard its error-reducing character and as such hypergoods would not account for the supersession of collectively held goods in time. Within Abbey's definition, the error-reducing character of hypergoods could not apply to individuals because then the hypergood could not hold such a hegemonic position in a person's life if it could always

be toppled by a better version. The very tentativeness of the hypergood would be contrary to its dominant character in one's life. Such a supersession of the hypergood at the individual level would wreak havoc in the identity of one who goes through that kind of transition, as it has been established that Taylor tightly links morals and identity.

Rather, Taylor gives hypergoods a role to play in individuals' lives in that their existence is an important characteristic of society, which in turn informs and further defines individual identity and morals. He defines them as a source of conflicts in a society, as former hypergoods are replaced in time by a more suitable one that will hold what its adherents will consider as a "higher moral consciousness" (Taylor 1989, 65). Thus a hypergood is understood as providing a much better moral source than the previous one and its supersession establishes a new standard by which to evaluate the current views held in a society. The presence of such a hypergood implies the inevitability of making choices between goods but also that there is incommensurability among goods when some will have to be rejected because contrary to the hypergood. In addition, the new hypergood alters what was considered a good moral value in a society and posits it as no longer relevant, thus creating a break over time, pushing aside what was once esteemed.

This error-reducing character not only means that the new hypergood will better define the current society³; to hold it as a hypergood implicitly means that it will potentially get replaced. Having a hypergood therefore implies somewhat of a

³ The error-reducing attribute of the hypergood seems to imply a teleological undertone, which could suggest that the supersession of hypergoods would lead society towards a higher, or more adequate rendition of the world through its values and beliefs. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, Taylor's argument in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, which claims that the present incommensurability of some goods will be reconciled in time, seems to substantiate the seemingly teleological feature of hypergoods, i.e. that a solution to value conflicts may be solved with the supersession of hypergoods in time.

Kierkegaardian leap of faith, or even a dose of cynicism in knowing that it constitutes merely a society's best account of itself, until a better one is articulated. However, the hypergoods that are superseded still remain, some "seem[ing] ineradicable from the human heart" (65) and thus may cause tension within a society. Since it has such a strong emotional hold on the individual's very identity, and since the process of its supersession in time suggests an improvement towards a "higher moral consciousness" (64), accepting someone holding a different hypergood will prove difficult when there is an irreconcilable "absence of unanimity" about them (70), i.e. incommensurability between goods held by various members of one society.

Moreover, as a hypergood is gradually replaced in time, the rise of a new hypergood does not occur overnight. The articulation of our moral ontology can only be made through our best account and, like our best account of what moves us individually, this description must be given in terms of what we consider moving and significant "in the human domain" (72). A change in this account is one that tends to occur gradually and is a result of many factors, as demonstrates the shift to the modern secular turn, which as Taylor relates in *A Secular Age*, occurred over the course of 500 years. Morals and notions of the good define our identity: they cannot be neutrally chosen but need to move people towards them. So the adoption of a hypergood, as with the adoption of any good, requires an emotional link to it: the choice cannot be essentially based on practical reason since one cannot be convinced of the superiority of another's hypergood on purely rational principles. For this reason, imposing a hypergood on groups of people who do not share any of our moral intuitions would likely put those people in a situation of crisis if their identity were disconnected from their hypergood and had an unconnected one

imposed upon them.

Thus, Taylor is very clear when he states that as hypergoods get replaced by 'better' ones, they do not wholly disappear but still inform some aspects of our moral landscape and as a result keep a society's morals in tension (65), which hints at a degree of plurality. Thus Abbey's argument that "the challenges of pluralism would not be as piquant as Taylor [...] suggests" (Abbey 2000, 37) if hypergoods were central to everyone's moral structure is not entirely justified since the broad adoption of a hypergood is not a unanimous phenomenon. While there may be a prevailing hypergood in a society, it is nonetheless constantly challenged by resilient moral standards left by those that were superseded. However, Abbey's concern could be warranted if one were to see hypergoods as unanimously held but the collective character that Taylor attributes to hypergoods does not imply unanimity.

It follows that one cannot plausibly understand the transcendent as a hypergood since the nature of the hypergood as something that can and will be superseded – as we come up with better standards for the good – cannot be reconciled with the a-temporal character of the transcendent. If one could argue that the transcendent once was held as a hypergood, it certainly is no longer the case in our current modern context. Moreover, since the adoption of a hypergood is predicated on one's ability to be moved by it, it can often be informed by a higher order, viz. nature, the Good, or God (Taylor 1989, 73), and it would therefore be redundant to understand the transcendent as something predicated on a transcendent notion. On the contrary, I hold that the transcendent in the modern context can only be articulated as a constitutive good.

Constitutive Goods – or the Innocuous Transcendent

Constitutive goods are what explain the goodness in one's goods. They inform what makes a good life between various actions, feelings or lifestyles, which Taylor defines as life goods (93). The constitutive goods provide the context within which these life goods have meaning, which means "the life good itself becomes something different when one is induced to see the constitutive good differently" (308). For instance, a life good like freedom seen through a constitutive good predicated on Christian theism will have a different implication than if seen through one predicated on rational agency. Therefore, while life goods can be commonly shared among constitutive goods, the actual meaning – or the reason for the goodness – of those life goods cannot. Whereas hypergoods are mutually exclusive and the presence of more than one in society creates tensions (which nonetheless can be understood as bringing dynamism in that society), a plurality of constitutive goods – as long as they are compatible with the current moral framework – can coexist relatively peacefully. Therefore, different constitutive goods can facilitate a multifaceted context, which would allow for the possibility of plurality in a society.

Taylor argues that constitutive goods were once widely rooted in a source external to humans (for instance, the good, nature, or God), but now the source of constitutive goods is much more diverse. For instance, with what could be argued as a widespread modern humanist view, the source of constitutive goods is internal. However, "an entirely immanent view of the good is compatible with recognizing that there is something the contemplation of which commands our respect, which respect in turn empowers" (94). The important factor is in how one's love of a constitutive good

“empowers us to do and be good” (93), whether the source is rooted in the transcendent or in the immanent, whether it is exogenous or endogenous⁴. Once again Taylor emphasizes the experiential aspect of our identity: constitutive goods, as all other elements of Taylor’s depiction of our moral landscape, are directly related to a deep emotional response. What is important is that the individual must purposefully adopt the constitutive good as a result of such response.

This individual aspect however does not imply that there are no connections between constitutive goods and the collectivity. Taylor has given the example of human rights or freedom of conscience as examples of values that could be shared by everyone but for different reasons. Those reasons are expressed individually, which means they are determined on the basis of being moved by something that is particularly significant to someone. The justifications behind those shared values can however still have a collective aspect in that many people can share a similar reason for holding values like freedom of conscience or universal equality. For instance, such justifications can be religiously based, linked to the belief that people are created by god and therefore being equally worthy of respect; or they can be largely philosophical, as with a Kantian notion of the universal dignity of individuals as rational agents (Taylor, 2010). Yet, it will not matter: the shared values will not lose their strength if the justifications behind them are uniform or diverse. Since those justifications depend on what will be moving to

⁴ Chapter two will discuss at length Taylor’s call for an overlapping consensus where some basic and crucial goods could be held by all members of a community in order to allow for both stability and plurality. These basic goods would provide the opportunity for a stable society while the individual reason for their goodness – the constitutive good – would not matter. As a result, the consensus would allow for some degree of pluralism in the freedom to of conscience and of practice, as long as all respect the basic goods. Hence, the transcendent as a constitutive good makes a pluralist society, as characteristic of modern society, more realizable and potentially harmonious than it would, were it still held as a framework.

someone, it is reasonable to assume that constitutive goods will be multiple within a given society, but also that one single constitutive good can be broadly shared as well, such as with religion, the scientific view, the radical humanist view, or utilitarianism (1989, 339). All of those constitutive goods coexist within modern liberal democracy.

The modern condition of the transcendent that Taylor describes is one that is no longer unchallengeable and where there are many other options possible to provide one with meaning and a moral source. This depiction leads me to hold that the modern transcendent can only be plausibly articulated as a constitutive good. Within the modern context, the current place of the transcendent is essentially the place where it can still be intelligible. As a constitutive good, the transcendent gives to the person who holds it as a moral standard an understanding of his or her world that does not necessarily contrast with a society that might not share the same position. Since there are already some levels of commonality in the goods that are more widely shared as a society, a constitutive good does not fundamentally conflict with others' or the community's established goods like hypergoods and frameworks. While constitutive goods are essentially individual and may not be fully comprehended by others, such lack of understanding does not make interlocution impossible: the framework allows various constitutive goods to interact and coexist – at least on a basic level. Such goods can furthermore be primordial for an individual without necessarily being so for many, as would a hypergood. Furthermore, the transcendent as constitutive good does not have a hegemonic hold on one's life at the cost of all other goods as it would have if it were understood as a contingent hypergood. However, the transcendent still has a great deal of meaning in an individual's life in that it is linked to one's identity but it also announces a new approach to belief and religious

practice: privatization in what Taylor terms as excarnation, or “the transfer of our religious life out of bodily forms of ritual, worship, practice, so that it comes more and more to reside “in the head”” (2007, 613).

Porous and buffered

Taylor exemplifies the result of a change in the sources of identity formation and self-concept with a distinction between the porous and the buffered self. First, his use of the term ‘porous’ to define the individual living in a cosmological world order has to do with the nature of meaning in that order, which was essentially exogenous and all encompassing. Being part of this world made the individual an inextricable part of that meaning. Thus belief was inescapable and consequently can be understood as a framework, since it was what oriented one in the world. Such inescapability of belief was necessary and had crucial purposes, viz., it provided a series of practices and rituals to maintain order and equilibrium in society and it strengthened the social bond by having the sacred merged with it, making it inescapable (1989, 43). Thus, to reject God in the cosmological order was not to reject the enchantment of a world where supernatural forces were present and active: for some people, rejecting God meant chancing it alone or turning to another force, such as Satanism (41).

In contrast, the current understanding of our self as disengaged from the outside world in the modern immanent order – which informs the modern conditions of belief – comes from a notion that we have made our way to this condition. It feeds a narrative, a sense of “where we are [which] is crucially defined in part by a story of how we got

there” (2007, 29). This is the reason why, as Taylor claims, many modern secular narratives are relating this shift as a subtraction story, where we have freed ourselves from the naïve view of the world in our reflective outlook and thus have ‘progressed’ away from some misled position or belief (22)⁵.

As buffered individuals, we are no longer vulnerable to an outside world as it ceases to have a grasp on our everyday lives: the enchanted world and its authority is unconvincing and exorcism takes place in that the religious experience becomes inner, depends on one’s sense of fullness – of being moved by something. Authority is inner, which makes individual choices central and what is constitutive of authority. Whereas the enchanted world existed and directly affected one when the self was porous, with the buffered self the enchanted world not only has no effect on one, it largely does not exist and as a result, the supernatural aspect of religion (miracles, angels, demons, etc..) are no longer inextricable from religious faith.

As opposed to the porous self that has no clear notion of a boundary between the outside and the inner, the buffered self sees a boundary between it and the rest of the world and thus can disengage from everything outside the mind. The ultimate purposes of the buffered self arise within it and the importance of certain things are essentially dependent on its response to them (2007, 38). Hence, not only can the self become disengaged from whatever is beyond its boundary but it also gives “its own autonomous order to its life” (38). In Descartes’ interpretation, this understanding of the world

⁵ Taylor rejects the subtraction story narrative and rather sees the secular turn as a result of many factors that have occurred in the course of history and that have emphasized and or atrophied various aspects of our nature at different points in time. The shift in the conditions of belief is merely a succession of events, something which could have happened a myriad different ways, with many possible alternative results. The secular turn is therefore not a teleological concept.

through disengaged agency is based on the dynamic of object related to subject, the individual being the subject to which all around is related (Descartes 1898, IV. ix). Thus reality is seen as pure mechanism, which means the individual “[takes] an instrumental stance, or a stance of reconstruction towards it” (Taylor 2007, 131). Not only does it provide a ‘buffered’ understanding of the world as perceived through one’s own reason and conscience but it also implies a license to intervene upon the world as things are merely instruments to one’s will. The modern detachment with which one can approach the world when the center of everything is the individual makes “buffered self” distant from everything outside the mind. It allows the possibility of detachment without precluding a wholehearted engagement, whereas the “porous” individual did not have such a choice: it could not define its inwardness and have a detached rapport with the world (38) – the boundary between the self and the world being indeed permeable and fluctuating.

Human agency is thus central to the buffered self, and the world that it creates in its image is rooted in immanence. Such agency leads to a shaping of the community that is based on the order of mutual benefit, which puts emphasis on rights and freedom and thus brings society closer to its norms. This ideal order of ethics of freedom and mutual benefit requires consent and consequently furthers the emphasis on human agency (171).

This modern individual stance means that “[w]e tend to live in our heads, trusting our disengaged understandings: of experience, of beauty [...]; even the ethical: we think that the only valid form of ethical self-direction is through rational maxims or understanding” (555). Such a turn inward and away from the experience of the senses and emotions is an aspect in the modern self-concept that Taylor advances is missing and

that absence provides an incomplete account of our lives. With such explanatory language, the sense of vulnerability to the world that came with a more 'porous' self is rejected with the notion that what matters and is real is inwardly generated based on disengaged reason, which gives a different understanding of self and world than if the experiential and non-explanatory was included (1989, 58). As a result, negative feelings or pains are no longer viewed as reflective of the balance of the world and therefore are dealt with differently, thus making the solving of these problems a further disengagement by using medication or therapy: the modern depressed individual knows how the world really is and that depression is distorting his or her perception but this is merely a medical condition that can be relieved with a pill (2007, 37). Following such focus inward to establish meaning, the notion of a higher end that was posited by the cosmological order shifts into a life devoid of higher purpose and essentially based on mutual benefit and on human flourishing (242). In a similar spirit, any notions of miracles are reified as they are put within an order of things grounded on the predictable, natural order and thus are mere "punctual intervention interrupting a regular order" (547). This emphasis on inwardness opens the way to a culture of authenticity where human flourishing and self-realization depend on the individual's emotional responses, and where outside pressures to conform are to be rejected in favour of one's own individuality, the affirmation of which will be praised (475).

A focus on individuality, authenticity and rational agency points to the fact that the transcendent no longer holds a general reach in modern secular society. Phrasing it in terms of Taylor's hierarchy of goods, the transcendent can no longer be understood as a framework. This acknowledgment has serious implications: With the secular turn and

the buffered identity, human agency is now central to our self-conception and our new source of meaning. Whereas the option to believe in the transcendent is still available, the belief itself is not experienced through a porous self and an enchanted world anymore: the mere notion that the world is inhabited by forces that directly engage with and affect people is now nonsensical. The belief in a beyond entirely depends upon our own choice to believe and has become a matter of personal conviction rather than an unquestionable notion. As a result, the modern transcendent will be more plausibly articulated as a constitutive good – as a personal choice, contributing to affirming one's unique identity. With the individual pursuit of meaning will arise a great deal of diversity in its expression, which will in turn change the way individuals relate to one another and to the community as a whole.

2 Chapter: Faith in the Community

With the loss of authority once given to transcendence and its replacement as a framework by a focus on the reflective autonomous human agency, comes the authority of the individual to determine what his or her own set of values will be like. The society that comes out of this modern focus on autonomy and authenticity, results in a plurality of cultures, outlooks and beliefs that give rise to new challenges in the liberal state. People, as buffered and disengaged, can shape their identity and attribute it whatever meaning they choose. Such autonomy achieved by the modern self is freeing and favours the possibility for an authentic existence according to one's own conception of what it is to be true to oneself. However, with regards to social cohesion and unity, this multiplicity of views and values along with the individualistic propensity to believe that we are the masters of our own existence would not be favourable to a strong sense of social cohesion and of belonging to a common identity. Consequently, questions arise as to what could be the state's role in maintaining some degree of cooperation in the modern liberal context without limiting the emphasis put on the freedom of individuals.

John Rawls suggests the notion of an overlapping consensus based on a set of liberal, i.e. broad, free-standing values based on the reasoning capacity of individuals and of the values they hold as significant according to their own culture, outlook or beliefs. The Rawlsian overlapping consensus focuses on the equality of individual freedoms as the best way to establish a sense of cooperation and unity in our modern context where individualism is predominant. The standards attached to the consensus are based on reason and thus uniformly accepted by all who are reasonable.

Taylor sees the advantages of the overlapping consensus as a way to foster unity in a plural society. However, he is very much in disagreement with Rawls since not only does this liberal outlook give an incomplete account of the nature of the self – thus ignoring its dialogical part – it also comes up short when using reason as a difference-blind approach to accommodate the multicultural reality of our modern society, especially since this approach usually favours the culture of the majority.

Both those shortcomings become especially important when the tensions concerning individuals' beliefs and moral outlooks come to the fore. Moral positions and religious attachments can contribute to a further lack of social unity and feelings of belonging when such positions and beliefs come in conflict or seem to upset the general order, such as when demands are made for accommodations on a religious basis. Demands like these are for Taylor a demonstration that identity is indeed complex and only a multi-faceted outlook can solve those tensions. He claims that practical reason is not enough to provide an overlapping consensus that could address the tensions caused by religious and moral disagreement and their demands for accommodations. Notions of transcendence cannot be accounted for adequately on purely rational grounds and yet they cannot be relegated solely to the private sphere since they are constitutive of a person's identity, and thus will inform his or her public actions. Taylor's version of the overlapping consensus will consider the emotional aspect of identity, as it attempts to provide an adequate and fair understanding of the individual.

Communitarian Differences

First it is important to clearly frame the problem that Taylor tries to solve with the overlapping consensus. The discussion of Taylor's hierarchy of goods in the previous chapter highlights the great diversity of values, ways of life, practices and beliefs that will arise out of having a sense of one's own notion of the good and the need for an authentic life by pursuing that good. Taylor's notion of the pluralism of values takes root in Isaiah Berlin's account of the term: yet, while he agrees with most of Berlin's account, he rather sees it as a starting point for his own solution.

Berlin attributed the inevitability of value pluralism to the uniqueness of individuals and their use of reason to determine what is significant to them. John Gray claims Berlin's doctrine of value pluralism is inherently conflictual as a result of this diversity. More precisely, Gray explains that for Berlin, the human generation of genuine goods or authentic virtues is no reason to expect a peaceful coexistence among them. Moreover, when such conflicts occur between goods, the use of reason often will not be enough to resolve them – especially since goods are often uncombinable, so a compromise is necessary – but sometimes such conflicting goods are incommensurable (Gray 1996, 43). Gray furthers that Berlin's plurality doctrine will apply to the codes of conducts that are linked to what he calls intrinsic goods (such as liberty vs. equality; fairness vs. welfare) which will often come into conflicts in practice and cannot be arbitrated by an overarching standard (43). Even the goods themselves will hold conflicting aspects that will often be incommensurable, such as could be the freedom of information and the freedom to privacy or the equality of opportunity and the equality of

outcome (43). Finally, the conceptions of the good generated by different cultures will mean different moralities and values, some of which are bound to be incommensurable. In fact, Berlin held that not only this plurality of values is sure to occur among people of different cultures, it also inevitably occurs within one person and requires one to make a choice between values of equal importance. Where these values will be incommensurable, a choice between two values will result in a loss with regards to the value that was not chosen (Berlin 1990, 13).

Consequently, whereas many of Berlin's contemporaries and predecessors aimed to find ways to solve this incommensurability, he held that it was impossible to do and that any attempt to try to solve them or try to find a unifying principle that would rank all values in a systematic order would prove to be restrictive. The danger to avoid then is the hegemonic imposition of one such principle, should it be believed to be the true account of humans' notion of the good.

Berlin considered that focusing on achieving and maintaining equality across a population rather than protecting the legitimacy and worth of individuality has potentially dangerous consequences. Equality for Berlin involves the definition of a notion of the good in order to establish a standard for that equality. The precedence of one good over others can lead to the outright hegemony of that good in a society, at the cost of all the others which happen not to fit within that norm. Hence, not only can cultural minorities not get their particularity recognized but, pushed to what Berlin views as the equality principle's logical conclusion, such minorities could be persecuted, repressed and homogeneity could be coerced for the promotion of such good. Thus, for Berlin, fostering particularity ought to be put above a focus on equality. Moreover, for him the

attempt to establish a harmonized series of principles on which everyone can agree and be considered equally is unrealistic: such principles being generalizable in theory but not so much in the real world (13).

The recognition of the individual in Berlin's work is found in the exercise of one's freedom and obtained on the basis of universal intelligibility when debating conflicting claims. The commonality of being part of the human species is enough for a presumption of universal worth when entering the public space and for beginning a dialogue on a basic common ground yet for Berlin, it is not possible to harmonize values and goods unless one set of goods takes precedence as superior to others, which in turn would reduce individual freedoms and undermine particularities. Pluralism is therefore most important to keep a society dynamic and the decisions made about conflicting claims would contribute in establishing priorities but would never be final or absolute (17).

Taylor begins from a similar position but differs in his conclusion. He acknowledges the plurality of values within the individual and across cultures. He however does not agree that the incommensurability of certain values is the final word. In *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, Taylor hints that a 'transvaluation' may be possible among those incommensurable values "which could open the way to a mode of life, individual and social, in which these demands could be reconciled" (Berlin 1994, 214). There could be a solution in time and he gives for example the former claim that public order and popular rule could never work together but that democracy proved otherwise. He further allows that some values might disappear as a consequence of such 'transvaluation' but it nonetheless remains that such dilemmas are not impossible to solve

(214). Taylor gives his own critique of the liberal focus on equality in his essay *The Politics of Recognition* and hints at what could be done to promote the occurrence of such changes and solutions between conflicting values.

The liberalism on which Taylor focuses his critique is one associated with the thought of John Rawls: it is a liberalism that is based on a principle of equality and individual freedom where the role of political institutions is to protect individual rights and the equal opportunity to act as the autonomous agents that Rawls considers human beings to be (1993, 5). Taylor defines that kind of principle as he politics of equal dignity. In his essay, he contrasts the politics of equal dignity with the politics of difference, which he considers more adequate to promote equal recognition in a plural context. Whereas both approaches to liberalism aim at the best way to promote individual freedom while maintaining equality, Taylor holds that the former is incomplete in its systematic simplicity.

The politics of dignity are defined by the importance given to providing individuals with equality of rights, liberties and opportunities. Thus, it is the state's aim and responsibility to ensure that individuals are provided basic rights and immunities in order to have similar opportunities and start from a similar point (1995, 233). This leveling the playing field aims to foster equality based on similarities of context: everybody is equal in front of the law; everybody equally deserves respect and the possibility to perfect oneself. Such universal notions aim to evaluate people from a neutral and difference-blind standard: race, gender, age, or social status are not to come into consideration when the state passes judgments, which consequently avoids

discriminations based on those terms.

The principle of equal dignity tends to focus on the similarities in a population. However, its difference-blind approach, can undermine differences and individual rights, making it inhospitable to cultural minorities. This is especially significant since it can be argued that the standard of evaluation that informs such difference-blindness is often not neutral but rather reflective of the culture of the majority (237), leaving everyone outside that culture compelled to conform and thus having their unique identity denied or at least restricted. Rules are applied uniformly which results in viewing cultural demands from the minority as suspicious since they challenge this notion of uniformity. In this case, equality could be viewed to promote homogeneity in a population, at the cost of individual particularities.

With this view, the suggestion of any arrangement to promote a collective good would be considered an infringement on individual freedoms. Any definition of a common good would be viewed as an attempt to impose it as a homogeneous concept and thus undermine the liberty to act according to a private notion of the good. This rejection of any notion of the good is that since no one notion of the good is universally shared, the minorities would not be treated fairly (245). However, the very freedom that allows the coexistence of individual interpretations of what is a good life seems to be a common good itself. From the view of the politics of difference, such an emphasis on a notion of the good – because it is not acknowledged as being so – encourages homogeneity because of the emphasis on its uniform application as a standard: all are the same in the face of it and all ought to expect the same treatment from it. Thus, minorities requiring special treatment to avoid some aspects of this standard – if it comes into conflict with one's own

good, for instance – is not equality. It follows that the politics of difference would consider the liberties that are frustrated as a result of the state’s refusal to accommodate a minority as detrimental to individuality. Yet, as with the case of Quebec and the obligation on the French-speaking parents to send their children to a French school in order to preserve the language⁶, such restrictions on freedom can be seen as a possible and acceptable sacrifice for a good that is broadly valued (140). For those holding an atomist outlook, such provisions are never more important than the liberties of the individuals and the collective good should never be put above them.

The crucial aspect of the problem of homogeneity in equality is that identity, which is quite dependent on recognition, is not getting any of it, hence causing psychological harm to minorities whose particularity is glossed over for the benefit of the majority. Taylor has several objections to this, mainly that this view abstracts a whole aspect of humanity that he considers crucial, viz., the dialogical nature of the individual (226-7). Thus, one can understand oneself and define oneself to others only through a commonly understood language, making identity difficult to construct in a purely atomistic context since “people do not acquire the language needed for self-definition on their own” (230). Identity is “negotiated... through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others” (231) and thus is dependent on one’s interaction with others. The impossibility to escape others in constructing one’s identity combined with the modern notion of universal dignity makes being recognized as an authentic individual something

⁶ This is a perfect example of the politics of difference that very consciously require restrictions on its population for the good of the collective – in this case the preservation of the French language in a province surrounded by English-speaking cultures. It is worth noting, however, that, in the spirit of the politics of difference, the native English-speaking citizens of Quebec are allowed to send their children to an English-speaking school in order to preserve their own cultural heritage.

that is necessary and demanded. Not to be recognized is consequently harmful because it projects a negative vision of the individual, as insignificant. Not to be recognized – i.e., not to receive other people’s acknowledgment of one’s existence and worth as a human being – is perceived as an attack. Omission, even non-inclusion in this sense can be perceived as harmful, even oppressive, because for the modern identity, it is not enough to be equal: uniqueness must be equally recognized as well (225).

The politics of equal dignity aims for a minimal and neutral standard of values, which could be adopted by all cultures and which would focus on the equality of citizens rather than on that which differentiate people. However, Taylor holds that it is not a neutral standard and that the fact that the non-neutrality is not acknowledged is the cause of more inequalities towards minorities. The belief that the politics of equal dignity is neutral is mistaken, and thus skews the judgment over the worth of a culture by using another culture as standard of evaluation (249). Liberalism is a non-neutral standard according to Taylor; it is not a meeting ground for all cultures, hence it should not be held as the premise for the politics of equal dignity (249). Otherwise, minority cultures would not be evaluated on their own terms, hence their worth would be determined by standards that have nothing to do with them, like the example of Saul Bellow who claimed was willing to grant respect to Zulu culture when they produce an equivalent to Tolstoy (236). If the standard were indeed neutral, then everyone would truly be on an equal footing. But since it is informed by the culture of the majority, the minorities in a society cannot be equal without some provisions to preserve them as the majority culture is preserved by its superiority in number. The homogeneity that the politics of equal dignity generates forces minorities to take alien form and proves to be quite discriminatory (237).

As established above, the politics of equal dignity considers important the need for recognition and an authentic life, which is why it aims to ensure they are equally accessible to every member of society. However, this is not enough because of the disadvantaged minorities this scheme occasions. Taylor is clear that identity cannot be homogeneous and the differences must be taken into account lest the absence of recognition should carry with it the implication that one's identity, beliefs and values are of little worth, as well as the distorted mode of being associated with such an absence of recognition (225). The notion of authenticity is also crucial to identity and unless one can fulfill his or her need to live an authentic life – a life that is genuine and meaningful and uniquely significant to one – the demand to live according to the values of a culture that is not one's own – because it is that through which one is judged – is an attack upon one's individuality and worth as a person. To limit the political institutions' role of preserving equality when a majority culture is held as the norm is harmful to the authentic life of individuals and that is not an expression of equality.

In contrast, the politics of difference does not dispute the equal dignity of individuals but is in fact based on a principle of universal equality. For Taylor, the universal demand for equality powers the demands for the acknowledgment and status to something that is not universally shared. The unique identity of individuals or groups is recognized by the politics of difference. It also addresses the universal human potential for forming one's own identity, which must be given adequate respect. The politics of difference is also a supporter of non-discrimination. But instead of basing it exclusively on equality, it looks at it from the point of view of differential treatment such as the

example of Quebec's language laws mentioned above demonstrates.

What Taylor attempts to convey in his essay is that the uniform treatment of citizens, while necessary for addressing their common needs, is not adequate when it comes to their differences. To give recognition to those fitting a standard of judgment that is mistakenly taken as neutral is just as harmful as giving recognition to everyone equally. Taylor finds that interaction across cultures and values is more appropriate for our modern liberal democracies. He mentions that a fusion of horizons would get us closer to a fairer evaluation of minorities and of their values and that would come about by studying the other and being transformed by it as a result (254-5).

The problem with the politics of equal dignity is that there is rigidity in the standard of what is viewed as the norm that everyone should be able to attain. Individuals are uniformly recognized – everyone is just as important as everyone else, which means that no one is superior or inferior to anyone. However, this recognition is not extended to matters of culture, which usually concern groups (226-7), whose influence is just as crucial in the constitution of identity as are individual rights and freedoms. Hence, unless the neutral standard extends to include the minority cultures, an objective evaluation of those cultures on their own merit is impossible.

Openness to other cultures is what is behind a fusion of horizons. It allows us to “learn to move in a broader horizon” and develop “new vocabularies of comparison” which allows us to develop new standards through which our judgments can be made (252). This change of horizons seems very much in line with a way to find solutions to incommensurability by changing our outlook and hence find solutions that this new

perspective makes available.

In *The Politics of Recognition*, Taylor speaks of developing a new vocabulary for evaluating other cultures that would take shape through dialogue and interaction across cultures. This vocabulary would eventually transform the very standards of evaluation that were once linked to the culture of the majority, and turn it into something propitious to the presumption of equal worth (252)

A fair and genuine exchange among cultures could eventually lead to a fusion of horizons of standards where we cease to take our familiar standard of value for granted and instead see it as a possibility among many. The presumption of equal worth is what Taylor believes is the beginning for this openness to others (250-1): it presupposes that “all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings” (252). This does not mean that equal worth should be automatically attributed to all cultures as an extension of the politics of equal dignity but rather that the study of a culture should begin with such a hypothesis and such receptivity. Presuming everyone’s culture might have worth – without equating this to a guarantee of worth – will lead to a greater openness to others, to the unknown, and to the possibility to learn from the experience. It could also lead to a “sense of our own limited part in the whole human story” and to a willingness to be open to a new kind of comparison for cultures (256).

Unlike Rawls’s claims that living in a liberal state will shift people’s values and cultures to fit more closely with it, Taylor’s argument for openness is rather that the study of minorities will transform the liberal standard itself, starting its judgments from a more open stance. This outlook, strongly rooted in a holistic approach – where the individual

and his or her context determine one's identity – is central to all of Taylor's work and gives considerable importance to the role of the community in this regard.

Taylor's insistence on the importance of the community in the constitution of identity and his view that we are first and foremost embedded in the world has led to his critique of a liberalism too strongly leaning towards atomism and to his being labeled in turn as a communitarian. Will Kymlicka outlines two principal characteristics to the communitarian thought. They by no means are the only traits but definitely are the most common and will be briefly developed in the following. According to Kymlicka, communitarians reject the self-determining character of the liberal self (1990, 199) and the use of practical reasoning as a tool for self-creation; they also reject the liberal neutrality of the state – or what Kymlicka calls the politics of neutrality (206).

First, it is the communitarian's view that individuals are embodied beings in the world as opposed to detached and reflective (Stanford Encyclopedia) and self-determining. The self-determining claim of liberal identity implies that one's ends or commitments are never beyond critical reflection and open revision. One's background does not come into the identity definition because it can change as a result of the subjective nature of the individual. The context in which individuals exist is part of the background that informs their opinions, beliefs and reactions and parts of that background, such as the socio-economical or even cultural context in which one is born, is not – and cannot be – chosen. This is what Taylor refers to in *Sources of the Self* when he claims that it is impossible to completely detach oneself from what defines us just as it would be impossible to invent a language of one's own that would be devoid of any

reference to previously existing ones. “[T]he drive to original vision will be hampered, will ultimately be lost in inner confusion, unless it can be placed in some way in relation to the language and vision of others” (Taylor 1989, 37). Hence we cannot be entirely detached from the world and to believe that we can results in an incomplete and erroneous understanding of the world and of identity. Taylor’s critique of the autonomous construction of identity and his emphasis on the dialogical nature of humans has certainly contributed to put him on the communitarian side.

In addition, communitarians believe that sometimes the needs of a group might determine the policies the state will take – that sometimes the needs of the collective must take precedence over individual needs and provisions. Communitarians are not rejecting self-determination: rather they believe that the community in the form of the state is necessary to provide the best conditions for it. Self-determination implies the presence of plurality therefore the state must be a place where meaningful options are available to people. Decisions about these options are not made in isolation thus the collective evaluation of shared practice will inform individual judgments about the good. Finally, the necessary demands upon its citizens to provide the benefits of the welfare state requires there to be a feeling of unity (Kymlicka 1990 216). Taylor believes the community is that important and thus can be considered to be very much in line with the communitarian position.

Liberal Consensus

Taylor’s later work seems to have changed noticeably and to have reconciled with

some aspects of the liberal outlook, which he had vehemently criticized in *The Politics of Recognition*. Rawls describes the concept of the overlapping consensus in his *Political Liberalism*, as the ground of commonalities upon which a society can build some basic principles and harmonize differences. This concept is referred to in Taylor's later work as a legitimate avenue upon which to establish a multicultural society. He acknowledges that the mistrust of the other – characteristic of our multicultural society and caused by the liberal focus on individual freedom and equality – makes the overlapping consensus our current reality and the channel that allows for communication with others (Taylor 2010, 5). He views the overlapping consensus as the necessary condition for the existence of pluralistic societies like ours and mentions it frequently in the context of a theoretical approach to secularism (Warner 2010, 318) but also when discussing the practical aspect of pluralism and policies that would foster it in places like Quebec (Bouchard-Taylor 2008, 134).

Rawls' own conception of the overlapping consensus is part of his attempt to determine the fairest ground possible for social cooperation among citizens who are free and equal in a way that will last over generations (Rawls 1993, 3). As free and equal individuals, the free exercise of people's reason will inevitably yield a plurality of values and outlooks on the world. Rawls believes that those values usually can be tied together within an individual into what he calls a reasonable comprehensive doctrine (59). He understands as comprehensive doctrines the recognized values and virtues attached to what is of significance in human life with regards to personal character, friendship and familial and associational relationships within one precisely articulated system, usually in

the form of a religious or philosophical doctrine (13). Since those doctrines are associated with what is of value to individuals and that individual preferences are varied, it is plain that no one comprehensive doctrine could be shared by everyone. This plurality of reasonable comprehensive doctrines leads Rawls to ask how “may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines” (xviii). We have already established that to impose the most widespread moral outlook in a society, as comprehensive doctrine, would be to foil the freedom and equality of the citizens. Hence, the overlapping consensus is an attempt to keep what divides individuals (religious, moral, philosophical views) away from the public debate and to focus on the political aspects of such doctrines among which a consensus can be established (10-11).

Hence, the overlapping consensus is formed by values belonging to the domain of the political, which itself is not attached to any doctrine in particular but can be related to citizens’ other values in their respective comprehensive doctrines (140). This consensus involves the political aspect of life: it is not comprehensive, and therefore has no ultimate notion of truth and leaves this concern with the individuals’ own justifications to the consensus (153). The overlapping consensus must therefore be freestanding and neutral in order to be justified by different outlooks. It must also be reasonable, as are the comprehensive doctrines associated to it. It must be reasonable because it is a product of the “free exercise of free human reason under condition of liberty” (144). Comprehensive doctrines can only be reasonable if they are informed by an intelligible view of the world, if it singles out to an individual which values count as significant, and if it belongs to a tradition of thought and doctrine that, while it evolves, is relatively

stable over time (59).

The characterization of the comprehensive doctrine as rational suggests a normative view of the kind of outlook on the world is acceptable. Rawls claims that people all agree on the overlapping consensus because it can fit within their reasonable comprehensive doctrines. In contrast, those whose comprehensive doctrine is not compatible with the overlapping consensus do not allow for the use of reason in the public sphere and thus do not accept any other justification for a conception of justice than theirs. Rather, the use of human reason should lead to similar conclusions – or to a range of compatible conclusions – as far as people’s political conception of justice is concerned. Therefore, this suggests that there are sets of values that everyone share which is accessed through the use of reason. This is hinting at a universality of some values and consequently to a restriction of diversity within the liberal outlook.

The overlapping consensus focuses on equality and freedom: as long as individuals all agree on basic rules of action they are free to be and act as they want in private, granted it does not interfere with the political. Also, the overlapping consensus must be neutral and freestanding, not favouring a comprehensive doctrine over another. However, as argued above, this consensus is not as value-free as one thinks and could emphasize the otherness of those who do not share this consensus. This limits political participation and denies the worth of their values and beliefs, hence abstracting an important aspect of people’s identity.

The Rawlsian overlapping consensus exists in a liberal context and takes as its justification the focus on equality and individual freedoms as well as the neutrality of the state and its goal to maximize the principles of freedom and equality. Rawls brings forth

the overlapping consensus as a possible way to solve the tensions between those two principles. In contrast, Taylor has challenged the neutrality of the state and has rejected the claim that the principle of equality is sufficient to ensure individual freedoms. He has suggested instead a less monolithic solution, viz., an open dialogue between the state and minorities, its acknowledgment that it is not neutral and the willingness to accommodate minorities when their claims are directly related to their pursuit of an authentic life.

The concept of the overlapping consensus is nonetheless present and has a significant role in Taylor's later work. With co-author Jocelyn Maclure, he outlines secularism, for instance, as a political model, which rests on such solid liberal bases as equal respect and freedom of conscience as well as the separation of Church and State and State neutrality (Maclure-Taylor 2009, 33). They also cite Rawls directly in *Laïcité et liberté de conscience* when emphasizing the limits of rationality to provide an answer to questions about the ultimate meaning of existence. Their work however, acknowledges rationality as what is used to promote a context in which the state would both favour the development of individuals' autonomy and protect their freedom of conscience (18). Taylor's overlapping consensus looks at basic principles of political association as the consensus obtained among reasonable citizens who bracket the moral disagreement for the benefit of a harmonious and stable social life (135). In the Report from the *Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences* which Taylor co-authored with Gérard Bouchard, the overlapping consensus is referred to as "the norms of collective rights"; a minimum consensus that allows a society to function (Bouchard-Taylor 2008, 123) and nurture the collective imagination (114). The notion of collective identity is still very present in Taylor's work: his

constitution of the overlapping consensus is a result of a process of conversations at the community level among various positions based on reason and on a more emotional notion which will be discussed in the next chapter (Warner2010, 318). Taylor's overlapping consensus is therefore not a wholesale adoption of Rawls' and is indicative of a more complex position for Taylor than either "liberal" or "communitarian".

A 'Taylorian' Consensus

Taylor includes his own version of Rawls' concept of the overlapping consensus to his discussion of pluralism. His definition of it is close to Rawls's viz., as was defined in the previous section, that common principles are held as guidelines for action in the political realm and are generally broad enough that they can be attached to individuals' views for different reasons. For Taylor, this still takes into account the community and his preference for the politics of difference. Taylor's work often emphasizes the changing power of the community, which refers to the dialogical and consequently social nature of identity. He shares Rawls' idea of the flexibility and the changing power of the community through the overlapping consensus: as society becomes increasingly diverse, the state's identity will have to alter and be re-defined which, in turn, will re-define the way people will relate to others.

It remains Taylor's belief that the state cannot be entirely neutral, even if the state is both the context and the preserver of the overlapping consensus. For instance, the use of the Christian calendar and the observance of Christian holidays demonstrate this impossibility for the state to be neutral even if in any other situation the state does not

favour one religious or philosophical outlook over others. Rawls' overlapping consensus attempted to find neutral political principles that would be equally acceptable to all, which would make unnecessary the need for accommodation. Taylor holds however, that it is impossible to be neutral and that, as a result accommodations are necessary. In *Laïcité et liberté de conscience*, the authors give the example of the difficulties for minorities to be accommodated in comparison to the culture of the majority, even if the state is not actively promoting one over another. For instance, it can be difficult for vegetarians, Jews or Muslims to have access to food that is in accordance with the dictates of their conscience in places like hospitals, schools or prisons. In this case, even if the food offered is based on a neutral principle like supply and demand, there will be difficulties for minorities (Maclure-Taylor2009, 94).

Thus if it is necessary to provide accommodations for minorities, how can one determine what is acceptable to accommodate? Taylor refers back to his holistic understanding of identity and claims that conscientious convictions – positions constitutive of identity – would be close enough to a notion that is crucial in modernity to justify its accommodation. Hence, there should be a provision for diversity when it is more than mere preference because “une personne dont les actes ne correspondent pas de façon satisfaisante à ce qu'elle estime être ses obligations et ses valeurs les plus fondamentales risque de voir son sentiment d'intégrité morale atteint⁷” (97). Taylor does not limit conscientious convictions to religion, giving vegetarianism as a secular example.

Whereas Rawls advances that conscientious convictions can be grouped under a

⁷ “A person whose actions do not correspond satisfactorily to what she considers her obligations and her most fundamental values could see her sense of moral integrity injured” (my translation).

unifying principle he calls his comprehensive doctrine, for Taylor such doctrines are not always comprehensive. In fact, there can be some coherence between a person's values without grouping them under a doctrine that englobes all aspect of one's life such as vegetarianism. Rather, he believes that people look to doctrines partially comprehensive or to a group of values that are more eclectic rather than trying to fit every one of their values under one system of thought (119). This means that people do not all see their values as obligations or unconditional rules of action nor are they neatly ranked in order of importance within the comprehensive doctrine. It is more plausible for Taylor that conflicting values are a structural reality in an individual's life which are emphasized when a choice must be made between two equally important values (such as professional life, family or social involvement). Yet all choices do not always have crucial implication, as they would for those who have a comprehensive doctrine. People with partially comprehensive doctrines have more flexibility and therefore less need for accommodations in different circumstances (119). Yet, when conflicts concern something they hold as essential, accommodations will be necessary (for instance when a new father who will want to spend time with his new family without quitting his place of work will ask for a paternal leave).

The need for a clear demonstration that the demands for accommodations are attached to a conscientious conviction is not enough to ensure the quantity of such requests remain within the reasonable limits of freedom of conscience. The sovereignty of the agent sometimes must be limited when the predictable effects of the accommodation will have on others' rights and on the attainment of the state's own interests (128). The individual is therefore free to carry out the practices that reflect his

profound convictions as long as they do not enter in the public sphere, in which case the state determines whether it can make provisions for the continuation of the practice or if it causes undue hardship or if it challenges compelling state interests (128). In other words, here Taylor and Maclure demonstrate how the politics of equal dignity and the politics of differences can work together.

Conversation is clearly emphasized as constitutive of Taylor's overlapping consensus. The same strong connection is not there with Rawls. With Taylor, the minimal moral politic – or the overlapping consensus – serves as a basic ethics for a dialogue and the freedom of conscience and of speech and makes sure society will open itself to the unfamiliar and avoid stagnation. Taylor and Bouchard carry this call for dialogue and openness in the *Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences* Report. They offer the conditions that would make propitious the interaction from which a consensus on horizons and reference points that nurture the collective imagination can take shape. The integration model they propose is one based on participation, where equal citizens take part in civic life; interaction which will lead to changes to all cultures from their reciprocal contact; and finally on protection of rights (Bouchard-Taylor 2008, 114). This exercise – while framed by empathy and sensibility for others' fundamental convictions – will challenge people's moral positions and force them to let go of stereotypes. It will seek to avoid reverting to an excluding focus on one's own fundamental moral position and turning away from otherness (Warner 2010, 319). Dialogue for Taylor does not threaten one's beliefs but enriches and strengthens them by allowing an open attitude to those of others. Such experience also clearly shows that the overlapping consensus is only the starting point for Taylor, which

will be discussed below.

Taylor's claim is not necessarily that community must come before the individual or that equality must predominate over individuality but rather that both freedom and equality must be taken into account. As he often reminds us throughout his work, we are dialogical beings and as such the community and the context in which we live cannot be bracketed out when trying to make sense of how to balance freedom and equality. Liberal society does not have to be seen merely in terms of atomistic or communitarian outlook where either individuals or the community always comes first and trumps any challenges to its primary characteristic. This contradictory vision makes dialogue almost impossible if we see things in an all or nothing approach.

I believe Taylor is not willing to ultimately declare himself either as a liberal or a communitarian. Rather, he appears to be taking from both views to formulate a solution that fits with his understanding of humans as both dialogical and autonomous and not with mere ideological categories. He aims to find a balance between freedom and equality with a minimum of restriction on the individual, yet within some principles that are agreed upon as being necessary to enforce for the benefit of the greater good. He wants minorities to have a similar kind of opportunity to follow their fundamental principles as the culture of the majority has but he will hold that such opportunity is better achieved with a more defined notion of the good and state intervention if necessary. Finally, Taylor does not let go of the embedded character of the individual in the world.

In *The Politics of Recognition* Taylor points out that the liberalism of rights,

which is procedural and “suspicious of collective goals” is not the only possible version of liberalism. There are models that are “willing to weigh the importance of certain form of uniform treatment against the importance of cultural survival and opt sometimes for the latter” (1997, 248). Taylor holds that a society with strong collective goals does not necessarily preclude a liberal outlook, as long as it can respect diversity, especially with those who do not share those common goals and as long as it protects fundamental rights (247). He sees that tensions are inevitable with conflicting objectives but does not see the management of such tensions as impossible.

In his essay *Liberal-Communitarian Debate* Taylor goes into more details about his view of liberalism and how accounting for the importance of the community does not have to mean a denial of individual freedoms and autonomy. He holds that the liberal-communitarian debate is polarizing because of a binary approach to the problem but he understands it on two levels, which allows for a great deal more positions between an atomistic liberalism and an identity-denying communitarianism.

In this essay Taylor defines liberal society as having two separate yet mutually influencing levels, viz., the ontological and the advocacy level. The ontological aspect describes the understanding one has of one’s context or “what you recognize as the factors you will invoke to account for social life (1997, 181)” – or the terms one accepts as ultimate in the order of explanation. Taylor, in this level, differentiates two views, i.e., atomistic and holistic: we are individuals at our very core or we are dialogical beings. As for the level of advocacy, it has to do with the role of the state in terms of what it deems worthy of defending (182). Those two aspects of liberal society are important

because Taylor feels that in acknowledging the possibility of a variety of positions between atomism and holism, what was once perceived as conflicting can actually be seen as complementary – or at least not entirely incompatible. Taylor looks at the possibility that these two levels could be informed by different views: a society can view itself as holist, but it does not mean that it will necessarily be leaning toward socialism. Likewise, a society does not need to be atomistic to its very core. Often it is argued that it must be a choice between the two but for Taylor, if one merely acknowledges the dialogical and therefore social aspect of individuals, a notion of unity and perhaps of solidarity can be kept as part of our framework and can raise new kinds of questions and restructure debates on a more nuanced basis. “Taking an ontological position doesn’t amount to advocating something; but at the same time, the ontological does help to define the options it is meaningful to support by advocacy” (183).

Whereas, according to Taylor, a procedural liberalism that is focused on an atomistic view of individuals can seem incompatible with a holistic ontology, it in fact opens the way for a new kind of question (202-3): it can outline the problems of a social order but it does not mean that it will lead to the push for an alternative (183) – it puts things in perspective. A more nuanced view of liberal society, in putting less emphasis on the conflicts between an atomistic and a communitarian view, could address issues in a redefined way: perhaps the notion of a community will lead to a less antagonistic view of otherness when in dialogue with new elements arising in a society (Taylor). In line with what Taylor calls the framework or the social imaginary, the understanding of ourselves influences the way we act and make our world but it does not mean that a change in the conception of the world will influence policies only in one way. Perhaps,

an ontological acknowledgment of holism would provide a sense of solidarity that would change the atomist outlook at the advocacy level without having it disappear entirely.

Ruth Abbey is not convinced that Taylor merely is a communitarian ontologically but espouses a liberal approach at the advocacy level. She claims that despite the “many features of the liberal tradition that Taylor is willing to endorse or advocate, [...] his analyses of these goods are, however, typically conducted from a communitarian standpoint” (Abbey 2000, 148). To label Taylor so would be too simple and would not take into account the liberal goods he rejects and the communitarian goods he endorses (148). Taylor does reject some aspects of liberalism but there are other aspects he would like to bring back to the fore such as participation and deliberation. However, he still believes in the dialogical nature of the individual and in the importance to accommodate differences, and so he adapted the liberal concept of the overlapping consensus to fit with his own view of the world. I believe it would be too simple to assign Taylor to either of those positions: Rather, Taylor loves subtleties and no position of his is overly simple. He is comfortable in complexity and he tries to avoid outlooks that might be too rigid for fear of falling into fetishism of that position (Taylor 2009, 1156).

Taylor supports his hope for the reconciliation of apparently incommensurable values with a call for authenticity where all sides must be expressed distinctly and must remain pressing and in view, in order for the solutions to truly be a synthesis between all sides and not merely one side winning out (Tully 1994, 214). He emphasizes the need for dialogue and interactions among various cultures in as authentic a way as possible so a sort of a neutral position could be attained – where living together could change every

group involved into something that all can share, where “real judgments of worth suppose a fused horizon of standards where we have been transformed by the study of the other, so that we are not simply judging by our old familiar standards” (Taylor 1997, 255). In time as Taylor seems to believe, a synthesis could be found as a result of sustained interactions and of the dynamism for which a pluralist society can give space, whilst keeping cultures free and genuine. In time, through trial and error, through dialogue and coexistence, values and positions can gradually shift towards something closer to one another or find a solution that would be suitable to everyone.

Taylor’s more recent work on pluralism aims to explore what could make such dialogue, reconciliation and transvaluation possible. Commonalities could lay the ground for dialogues and interactions in the hope that it would eventually lead toward reconciliation in time and a possible synthesis between values that are currently in tension. But what could prompt solidarity towards others in a way that would facilitate dialogue and alleviate tensions among conflicting views? Taylor believes that institutions can encourage feelings of solidarity and everyday interactions among citizens can also promote their occurrence – solidarity cannot be a feeling that is forced or imposed through laws but must come naturally and take its unique shape with regards to the workings of a society in order to be sincere and genuine (Maclure-Taylor 2010, 138).

Laïcité et liberté de conscience shows Taylor’s contribution to the deliberative and institutional view of plurality in Maclure’s work, viz. a notion of living together (“vivre ensemble”), decency towards others, the need for a dialogue among groups, which is clearly important in Taylor’s work. Thus, unity and balance are intimately linked to the dialogical conception of individuals for Taylor. Dialogue, in addition to

regulations based on secular principles and reason, can possibly inspire a feeling of solidarity in the community. “Un certain degré de stabilité politique et de cohésion sociale peut bien sûr être atteint par l’institutionnalisation de règles collectives justes et efficaces, mais l’effet de ces dernières ne pourrait qu’être renforcé par ce que l’on peut appeler une éthique du souci de l’autre, qui invite à l’empathie et au décentrement⁸” (Maclure, Taylor 2010, 138). Thus for Taylor, the laws within a state, the policies, etc... are not enough to foster a notion of solidarity. The overlapping consensus is a good beginning but not the only thing that is necessary. The community for Taylor, both as a political unit and in its particular cultural instances, must play a crucial role in promoting a sense of solidarity.

Charles Taylor and Gerard Bouchard have emphasised the need for closer and more positive interactions between cultures in their recommendations at the end of the report for the *Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences*. They encouraged the increased political participation of cultural minorities and their presence in the public sphere; more interaction across cultures, through festivals and other gatherings; and also called for more cultural diversity in the media (Bouchard Taylor 2008, 266). The purpose of such recommendations was to make those who are viewed as ‘other’ less alien because more familiar. The point of the exercise would not be to iron out or undermine differences but rather to emphasize similarities. This, in time, would hopefully result in the weakening of a sense of otherness towards other cultures through promoting a sense of commonalities so we look at each other with

⁸ “A degree of political stability and social cohesion can of course be achieved through the institutionalization of collective rules fair and efficient, but the effect of those rules could only be reinforced by what might be called an ethics of concern for others, that invites empathy and decentering” (my translation).

curiosity rather than with fear or anger.

Thus for Taylor, the overlapping consensus is not an end but a means toward a changed society. The overlapping consensus emphasizes similarities, decreasing otherness, leading to closer dialogue, interactions and to eventual changes on all sides as a result of living together and learning from one another. Taylor has claimed that in time the solutions to our current social dilemmas will come to us, as has happened in the past when we were faced with dilemmas we thought unsolvable. The overlapping consensus could be a probable avenue for finding such solutions.

A preview for a change of language

Even if he focuses on freedom and finds the clashes resulting from its exercise inevitable, Berlin believes that cultures can never be completely foreign to one another. There is always the possibility to relate to another culture, even on a very fundamental level because the very fact that humanity is in common is enough to provide a minimum of intelligibility. Whereas this basic common trait among cultures is enough to adopt an approach framed in the certainty that other cultural groups can be intelligible, it does not guarantee approval of the practices or values specific to those groups (Berlin 1990, 11). Such basic commonality for Berlin does not mean that tensions will be removed but rather that, whereas people can disagree with other cultures, they however “cannot pretend not to understand them at all, or to regard them simply as subjective” (11). People can respect the feeling communicated in another person’s desire to preserve something that is of value to them and which, while we might strongly doubt the worth,

we can nonetheless understand as being important and moving for someone else. This requires some degree of empathy that would otherwise make a dialogue over conflicting values impossible.

Such common notions echo his claim that the basic knowledge of possessing common human traits is enough not to be entirely unintelligible to others: it allows for the sense that a dialogue can take place over incommensurable goods, giving people the feeling that, at the core, humans can always be intelligible to one another. Berlin holds that :

“if we did not have any values in common with these distant figures (Plato, medieval Japanese novels...) each civilization would be enclosed in its own impenetrable bubble and we could not understand them at all... intercommunication between cultures in time and space is only possible because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them... we are free to criticize the value of other cultures, to condemn, them but we cannot pretend not to understand them at all, or to regard them simply as subjective, the product of creatures in different circumstances with different tastes from our own, which do not speak to us at all” (Berlin 1990, 11).

However, to keep in mind one another’s humanity as grounds for sympathy in the description of Berlin seems either too broad a notion and something that would fall short in stirring up feelings of unity, or it would need a further characteristic to truly stress a meaningful connection.

Taylor seeks more than Berlin’s dynamic, and perpetually tentative model and more than Rawls’s consensus based solely on public reason. He hints in the afterword of *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism* that he seeks a synthesis. The community, in its various cultural entities, is understood as that from which the solution to the challenges of value pluralism will come. Taylor calls for interaction and communication among the various groups, thus living side-by-side with the ‘other’ could be a way to minimize the

differences. Hence, the overlapping consensus will come in as an emphasis of the connections across cultures or beliefs without suggesting those connections are universal characteristics. Taylor's approach to value pluralism, takes from both liberal and communitarian thought. He aims to find a way to harmonize the inevitable tensions among the competing and conflicting values hence the solution he seeks must take into account both the embedded and the self-defining nature of human beings.

However, such goal is difficult to reach when group interactions are impeded by feelings of mistrust, especially with regards to matters of conscientious conviction. Modern society is autonomous, self-creating, emancipated from what it views as superstition and is thus unwilling to revisit what it considers backward, old-fashioned and no longer relevant to the current context.

While the overlapping consensus is a good beginning to initiate dialogue between conflicting groups, the secular context and its rejection of the language of faith however restricts the introduction of open and free dialogue across cultural and religious groups. The target of the overlapping consensus is to establish rules and values linked to the practical aspect of living together and which are defined through public reason. Whereas it attempts to mitigate the tensions across cultures or faiths by focusing on values that everyone share but for different reasons, the overlapping consensus does not account for the antagonistic approach a secular context will have toward visions of the good that are informed by the notion of a beyond. Rawls believes that one can bracket one's background when in the public space and adopting the overlapping consensus but Taylor does not agree and wants the overlapping consensus to go beyond attempts to focus on common values simply based on public reason. The subsequent chapter will show that

Taylor furthers the notion of the overlapping consensus by looking at an emotional basis in the attempt to establish a deeper connection across the rift between faith and unbelief.

3 Chapter: Uncovering the Unspoken as Locus of Meaning in Secular Modernity

The modern predicament then is one where what used to be taken for granted has turned into an option – and one that is not the most convincing. The shift of transcendence as a framework has meant a decrease in social cohesion and therefore of social unity. However, the individualistic aspect of the new spiritual landscape (a decrease in church attendance, a largely secular public sphere, a societal focus on immanence, etc...), while symptomatic of the change of place of the transcendent, is not indicative of a disappearance of religion – at least not according to Taylor, who sees belief in a beyond as something that is not about to disappear. Rather, he sees in the new conditions of belief humanity's grappling with the tensions particular to modernity and a possible way to reduce such tensions. That way is a reconnection with transcendence and it can only happen with a new articulation of the transcendent that will largely remain outside of a traditional use language.

Taylor's personal religious beliefs have often been used as an excuse to question his objectivity, especially when discussing the modern secular context. All of Taylor's work is connected and one cannot bracket his religious affiliation when reading his work. However, one must not hold his religious belief against him either and seek the sentence in his work that will finally uncover his ambition of leading humanity back to church. Rather, as one reads Charles Taylor carefully one sees that his particular understanding of religion permeates the entirety of his work and rather than bringing the dialogue back to a discredited past, his unique perspective might in fact provide avenues that have not been

explored to approach the dilemmas in modernity. Taylor is not calling for a simple return to a past understanding of transcendence. Such a misconception demonstrates a lack of understanding and an ignorance of the undeniable influence some aspects of Hegel's work have had on Taylor's thought. This influence has meant that Taylor cannot call for a return to a previous kind of understanding: the simple fact that we no longer hold that understanding of the cosmological order means that it has ceased to provide an adequate explanation for our lives and our world. The past as it was, can no longer resonate with us in our modern context. However, Taylor, as Hegel, believes that the past is nonetheless constitutive of the present. The beliefs, values, explanations of the world and of ourselves that we currently hold are a result of all those that were held before (Taylor 2007, 772). Some beliefs are still held even if they no longer have the same justification they had in the past. The direction a culture takes over time is partly a result of the refutations, interpretations and re-articulations of that which came before it. Yet the refutation of an interpretation or version of something should not be confused with the refutation of the thing itself. This is what Taylor attempts to flesh out and that is often misunderstood about his work.

Secular modernity tells a narrative that predicts religion will disappear in time: as more people come to their senses, they will leave a naïve picture of the world and enter the adulthood of humanity. Modern language makes a view of the world that is predicated on the belief in a beyond seem childish and backwards. Taylor acknowledges that the previous articulation of the transcendent is no longer adequate to explain the world in our modern context. Yet he suggests that discrediting the religion we have known in the past is not a reason to reject every notion of the transcendent in our lives.

He argues that transcendence can and should become a valid alternative to explain the world and our lives. However, to be opened to this possibility, an encounter of the transcendent outside of the descriptive and limiting modern secular language will necessitate the presence of a new way to access it. This point of entry might have to be through emotions and the sensory – what I understand by the ‘experiential’ – since the intellectual and rational aspects of our being is entangled with language and discourse that have made such relation with the transcendent distorted and almost impossible in the first place. Taylor points at art, literature – or poetry – as well as common experiences – or the festive – as possible avenues to gain entry into a renewed notion of transcendence.

The Obstacle of Discourse

The current secular framework – what Taylor terms the immanent frame – presents us with a model of society concerned with liberty, mutual benefit, empowerment and reason (2007, 577). We picture ourselves as autonomous, self-determining individuals living in a secular age. Taylor defines this secular age as one in which political organizations are no longer informed by any connection to some faith, or notion of reality, or adherence to God. In addition, a secular context is also a place where religion has become a largely private affair (1). The place of transcendence has shifted and thus allows for a “move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace” (3). Framed in the vocabulary of Sources of the Self, as argued in chapter 1, transcendence is no longer part of the framework: it is

now a constitutive good.

While one can argue that the shift to private worship allows for a neutral public context within which everyone can practice his or her religion, modern secularity frames previous perspectives in which transcendence had a crucial role in society as the dismissed vestiges of a naïve past. “The frameworks of yesterday and today are related as “naïve” and “reflective”, because the latter has opened a question which had been foreclosed in the former by the unacknowledged shape of the background” (13). Modernity allows us to put into question what was once unchallengeable. This narrative involves both the courageous entrance into adulthood and a subtraction of illusions (575) where the move away from religious faith is viewed as the shedding of the superstitious beliefs in supernatural forces and the childish need for the notion of being looked after by a paternal god. Not only are humans free from illusions in the immanent frame but their entry into the adulthood of humanity indicates an awareness of the pure objectivity of the world: their values are their own construction; they are living in a world of their own making. This is best illustrated by the secular humanist outlook that is behind our inability to conceive of suffering and death in any other way than as enemies to be avoided or fought (Taylor 1999, 176). Such a context makes any articulation of the spiritual, the transcendent or a beyond stand in stark opposition to the modern picture that, as autonomous agents, we have made of the world and of our self. Any need for higher meaning is a sign of weakness and of an inability to deal with reality without the reassurance of a higher order.

Taylor sees a danger in such an unchallenged picture because the more prominent its existence, the fainter what it covers become to us. Attempts to articulate the divine are

restricted by a language of immanence, which results in a distortion and misinterpretation of what is communicated. Thus interpretations of the world framed in secular terms become so familiar and omnipresent, that we cease to notice them and they become “part of the unquestioned background, something whose shape is not perceived, but which conditions, largely unnoticed, the way we think, infer, experience, process claims and arguments” (Taylor 2007, 565). As a result, there is an increasing intolerance toward articulations of the transcendent as a refusal to revisit something that was thought to have been discredited with the Enlightenment and the subtracting powers of modernity (Taylor 1999, 25).

Of course Taylor is well aware that not everybody has turned away from all conceptions of transcendence: however he argues that the secular discourse has become so prominent that hesitation to challenge the primacy of life argument permeates our culture, which in turn shapes the way we encounter reality. A context of constructs built around “disengaged reason, the courage to let go of comforting illusions, the reliance on one’s own reason against authority” (Taylor 2007, 566) makes any discussion of a higher order very difficult. It is Taylor’s impression that we live in something like a post revolutionary climate, which manifests itself in a strongly antagonistic reaction towards any mention of transcendence. It is felt that such consideration would come at the cost of the victory obtained against it (176). Such is the current context and why the attempt to rehabilitate some notion of transcendence within a language that has discredited it proves nearly impossible. “The condition of secularity... has thus to be described in terms of the possibility or impossibility of certain kinds of experience in our age” (14).

Thus, the modern outlook makes it difficult to approach our world other than instrumentally. The deeper meaning of realities surrounding us, “the background in which they exist, the higher reality which finds expression in them, remain ignored and invisible.” The modern secular context comes up short in its ability to name things in their higher reality and this inevitability expressed in an “incapacity of being”, a feeling that our lives are reduced or flattened (761). A consequence of the immanent order is the centrality of the individual as subject in the world. Taylor’s characteristic example to illustrate this shift in identity within the cosmological vs. the immanent order is the shift from a porous to a buffered identity. Briefly, the porous self could be more open to the influence of outside forces, especially the supernatural, which made the individual vulnerable to elements outside of their control. If there was the notion of a boundary between the inside (thought) and the outside (nature, the physical), then it was one that was porous and not clearly delimited. In contrast, “Living in a disenchanted world, the buffered self is no longer open, vulnerable to a world of spirits and forces which cross the boundary of the mind, indeed, negate the very idea of there being a secure boundary” (Taylor 2007, 300). The buffered identity has a clearly defined boundary between itself and the outside world. This distancing of the inner from the outer could only happen with a turn inward and leads to the impression that the individual is at the core of his or her world. Yet, while the buffered self, has the advantage of disengaged reason and of its resulting secure inner mental realm (300), it is nonetheless accompanied by a feeling of uneasiness. With the anthropocentric turn, the godlessness experienced puts all meaning and all order upon humans. There is no outside reflection of ourselves and of our creations: the world is lived entirely in immanence (376). Since the disenchanted world

has negated the dominance of any universal kind of meaning, the individual can determine what it can be for him or herself. It is important to note however, that Taylor attributes unmistakable fragility to this self-determining freedom: whereas the choice of answers to what is meaningful is unlimited, doubt inevitably calls into question the worth of such answers (308). Thus, if the only authority is individual choice, then all that distinguishes the superiority of a source of meaning from another is the subject's mere act of choosing. It follows that the worth of an answer to what is meaningful would get very close to being purely relative. This is what Taylor terms the 'malaise of immanence', which he summarizes with the title of a Peggy Lee song: "Is that all there is?" (311). The malaise can be summed up by three points: a sense of the fragility of meaning and the subsequent search for an overarching significance; the felt flatness of our attempts to solemnize our rites of passages; and the utter flatness and emptiness of the ordinary (SA 309). Thus we find ourselves grappling with meaninglessness: "...as a result of the denial of transcendence, of heroism, of deep feeling, we are left with a view of human life which is empty, cannot inspire commitments, offers nothing really worth while, cannot answer the craving for goals we can dedicate ourselves to" (717). Humanity only encounters itself in the world it makes (Heidegger 1977, 27). Human creation is no longer challenged by external sources, it can fashion the world in a way that is knowable, predictable, quantifiable, and the world thus created reflects its own image back to it. With this empowering, yet one-dimensional outlook, one can only see what one expects to see.

Also particular to modernity is that the forces that were thought to be destroying human happiness – in reducing existence to a restrictive life of meaning that rejects

anything outside its parameters – have been dispensed with. No longer having anything against which to fight to achieve it, this happiness loses its meaning and will no longer inspire anything but ennui (Taylor 2007, 717). The boredom and the sense of flatness in the immanent order are symptomatic of the cross-pressures that people feel in the modern context. On the one hand, “those who want to opt for the ordered, impersonal universe ... feel the loss of beauty, meaning, warmth, as well as the perspective of transformation beyond the everyday.” On the other hand, those who lean towards “at least some search for some spiritual meaning” still have a nagging feeling that there might not be any higher meaning to the world after all and that it might just be “as meaningless as the most reductive materialism describes” (593). Such dissatisfaction with the modern secular outlook has led to the emergence of a multifaceted search for a third position between unbelief and orthodoxy. Taylor calls this phenomenon the nova effect - the always increasing gamut of positions between belief and unbelief that arises as modernity and the stronger focus on authenticity take more space in our social imaginary and lead individuals to come up with their own take on a solution to the cross pressures (303).

It is clear to Taylor that the persistence of such cross-pressures in spite of the gamut of options available between the two extremes indicates that previous attempts to solve that conflict might have been inadequate. What Taylor labels the secular age is still populated by a great range of religious denominations and spiritual movements, which while it does not mean that the ‘secular’ characterization is wrong, means that the belief that religion will eventually disappear is misled. Taylor points to human reaction towards death and suffering to support his claim that we are *Homo religiosus* (1999, 28). I

believe this term emphasizes for him not only the need for the presence of the divine but also – and especially – for the community of believers associated with religious groups. For him, the need for religion is an intrinsic part of humanity, even if it can sometimes be predicated on a force of habit exemplified in the need to solemnize rites of passage and important stages in one’s life in spite of a self-declared unbelief (Taylor 2007, 309). The importance of transcendence in one’s life is neither reflected by the degree of one’s involvement in a church nor by the nature of that relationship. For instance, the reduction in church attendance does not necessarily indicate that religion itself is in decline: many people attempt to find a way in which the church can fit into their lives and as a result, identify themselves as “believing without belonging” or use terms like ‘diffusive Christianity’ (829 n 39) or “vicarious religion (522) to describe the degree and nature of their involvement with traditional spiritual channels. While this distance outlines a tendency to alter religious practices to suit individual lifestyle, it also shows a reluctance to turn away from religion entirely, perhaps because of the hesitation to leave something familiar or the feeling of having something within which to frame significant life events.

Furthermore, Taylor holds that “religious longing, the longing for and response to a more-than-immanent transformation perspective ... remains a strong independent source of motivation in modernity” (530). Meaning in one’s life can be rooted in immanence and limited to individual choice when it comes to everyday existence. Some people can even live a life that is entirely godless or devoid of any thought of a beyond. However, when facing an ending, especially a death, the sheer senselessness of the event gives rise to the desire for meaning one thought one did not feel. Any “meaning seems denied by certain kinds of ending. That’s why the greatest crisis around death comes

from the death of someone we love” (Taylor 2007, 721). The fear of death in modernity is a fear of the loss of meaning in one’s life, or having to confront the complete absence of meaning in the case of the death of a loved one. Taylor grants that remembrance and a focus on the happy time with the departed can give a sense of something that will last, in which the person will “live on”. But he also sees modern life as involving the struggle “to hold on to the meaning... built with the deceased, while (unavoidably) letting go of the person” (722). With no more certainty that the loved one is in a ‘better place’ or “in sure and certain hope for resurrection”, people nonetheless turn to religious funerals, even those who are no longer sure they believe or who do not practice, thus supporting Taylor’s contention that people feel the need to turn to the beyond when their own capacities fail to make sense of something that shakes their resolve at its core.

Yet for Taylor, the unmistakable human need for meaning beyond human flourishing does not necessitate a return to a time when transcendence was not in a tug-of-war with secular immanence and held a hegemonic position for the interpretation of our lives. Those who do wish for a return to some form of communion with a larger order look to the past, to early Christendom, or to what Taylor calls the axial age where they felt there was no conflict between the two orders. Such misled view of the past intimates that the present is the result of having strayed from a time without tensions, even without a rigid boundary between the profane and the sacred. However, for Taylor such visions of former times are fanciful renditions of the sacred, which had always been separated from the profane, even when the divine order held a prominent place in the past social imaginary. Christian life was often only accessible to those whose existence was dedicated to a life of renouncement – ecclesiastical life was separated from profane life –

the desire to a return to a time when transcendence eliminated tensions is unrealistic. The modern context is one of constant traveling within a space of dialogue and tensions between the existing order and the higher order; between immanence and transcendence; between sacred and profane. Secular modernity has defeated the cosmological order and thus rejects critiques of modernity coming from it and refuses to validate attempts to address the possibility that transcendence and immanence are equally important in one's life. Forgetfulness has accompanied the modern order and as the profane replaced the sacred, the ground from which secularity grew has been forgotten. Taylor warns of the forgetfulness of a past social imaginary because it makes it impossible to learn from it and to fully understand the current one as a result. The modernity of secular immanence would perhaps be less reactive around religious discourse if renditions of the past were no longer limited to a distorted vision of a discredited alternative.

Taylor claims that even if we try, we cannot escape our past and our link to faith. Our relationship to transcendence, Taylor tells us, is an identity-defining issue and consequently, it must be understood as a crucial contributor to the making of identity over time. Faith, even through one's rejection of it, is therefore inevitably connected to one's ethical predicament or moral motivations – as well as one's self-definition (2007, 592). Our notion of the good is informed by our position in the range between belief and unbelief. Thus even in rejection of faith or religion, one cannot escape it – a rejection of the sacred being an acknowledgment of it. It follows that the argument that subtraction stories hold that we have shed our naïveté, our childish need for meaning to enter into the adulthood of humanity forgets that “faith has to remain a possibility, or else the self-valorizing understanding of atheism founders” (591). If the presence of the sacred is

unavoidable as claims Taylor, his contention that religion will not “flag” (515) does not mean that religion will continue to rear its nagging head in secular modernity to highlight the latter’s shortcomings, exacerbating the cross pressures particular to it. Rather, it suggests that this inevitable presence can either be a source of tension and malaise or it can be an opportunity to find new articulations of transcendence that could enrich the modern outlook. One of Taylor’s central aims in *A Secular Age* is to define a possible space where both sacred and profane can coexist in a dynamic and balanced relationship. He begins with the Romantic attempt to open this way to a renewed notion of transcendence by attempting to circumvent the problematic use of modern language: a discussion to which I will now turn.

A Thousand Words is Reductive

“Subtler languages” is a term introduced by the romantic poet P. B. Shelley and Taylor borrows it to designate a range of ways to reintroduce the transcendent into modern life. The subtler languages originating from the Romantic period called for a turn to such aspects as beauty in an attempt to bring back a notion of the divine but without associating it with traditional ideas of the religious (Taylor 2007, 356). Such an attempt came as a reaction to a world that seemed flat, disenchanted and defined in mechanistic terms (357) and a search for the presence of the beyond without reverting to traditional religions which no longer articulated the reality of their world adequately (355). The desire to recover the aspect of life that could contain the sacred and the imaginative led the Romantics to turn to the aesthetic. Artistic creation became the

definition of the highest realm of human activity (359) and thus to be open to and to live in beauty was to aim towards a more complete existence. Art and the aesthetic were to provide a way to reintroduce a vision of the world outside the descriptive: as subtler languages, they could circumvent traditional use of language by their use of symbols, hence creating, defining and manifesting something all at once (353). The symbol is essential in the Romantic endeavour in that it “only gives access to what it refers to” and even that access is never completely clear since “what has been revealed is also partly concealed” (Taylor 2007, 357). Unlike an allegory which has clear and familiar referents, the symbol has no such clarity and lives as much in the ‘subtext’ surrounding the symbol as in the symbol itself. This explains why what the symbol represents “cannot be simply detached from the symbol, and be open to scrutiny as the ordinary referents are in our everyday world” (357). What subtler languages provide can be likened to the Heideggerian ‘clearing’⁹. Subtler languages thus use emotions, aesthetics and the senses to give us a window into that which language on its own fails to capture and convey.

Taylor views the above-mentioned attempts to come up with subtler languages to step out of the ‘buffered identity’ as an indication that there is a need to use such

⁹ The unexpected, the symbolic, even that which is presented to us as a visceral experience can give us a “flashing glance” of the world that had until then remained concealed behind the enframing language of efficiency (Heidegger 1977, 45). To use Heidegger’s own terminology: to glimpse the essence of Being, its concealedness must be unconcealed, which itself is the saving power that conceals Being. In other words, to see past the interpretation of something (Being) into its true representation, one must acknowledge that it can only be viewed as an interpretation and this realization is the glimpse of that thing’s true essence, while at the same time an interpretation that keeps that thing from being truly known. In the case of subtler languages, the use of ways other than secular discourse to connect with something beyond human existence emphasizes that this ‘beyond’ can only be accessed through interpretation and allows individuals to give it the interpretation they find most significant to them.

'premodern' aspects of language (Taylor 2007, 361). Their turn to the aesthetic provided a way to move people to a notion of a beyond but without identifying an ontic commitment involved with it. Aesthetic as the highest good immanentized that good but it did not deny the existence of God altogether. Individuals were free to determine what explanation made sense to them. God could still be behind the beauty of the world but one did not have to believe it to get a glimpse of the higher (359). Art provides a glimpse of the transcendent through emotions, and separates such emotion from the religious in which it was embedded before. First, the experience of aesthetics does provide a glimpse of something beyond life but it is nonetheless divorced from practices such as worshipping God, or honouring heroes and their attached meaning. In depicting religious scenes for contemplation and meditation or heroes to praise, art becomes the source of the emotions triggered in us, and thus this source of emotions is no longer found within us in our own relation to saints or heroes. Moreover, with time – and Taylor rightly associates this phenomena with music – emotions are triggered by songs and music that are known to produce such emotions and the audience is moved by the music itself, and not by that which it depicts, since it depicts nothing other than that emotion. Taylor calls it “the essence of the response, without the story” (2007, 355). Yet as forms of art move away from the figurative, their ontic commitments prove to be indefinite and thus it can be used to provide an entry into profound truths that would otherwise be lost to the individual. As there is no unique and precise definition of such truths, the subtler languages in art can stand as a middle ground between materialism and religious belief. One can give them root in the divine, in secular immanence or one can decide not to name their essence, which gives a place for the modern unbelief to go (360). Moreover,

this ambiguous space where art resides puts it in a unique position where it is experienced as something of importance, however neither sacred nor entirely profane but quite significant. The romantic period has outlined that reason alone cannot provide a satisfactory understanding (picture) of our world. The subtler languages associated with the aesthetic come in to make the divine manifest in ways that resonate to both the creator of such languages and her audience.

Literature, and more specifically poetry emphasize subtler languages' focus on the constitutive aspect of language that has been neglected for the use of the more designative aspect of language. The designative aspect of language is that which makes renditions of transcendence lack credibility since it refers essentially to that which is beyond language, something one cannot use descriptive language to define. Yet to attempt to articulate transcendence can be perceived as a defiance of the boundaries that establish what is generally accepted as a regular use of language (Taylor 2007, 732). Pushing the boundaries of descriptive language tends to result in a depiction that lacks credibility in modernity because that which is articulated seems either to refer to something discredited in modernity (such as terms like 'good' or 'evil' that recall a more naïve outlook on the world) or to something that, while it can give a glimpse of something beyond immanence, lacks a consensus as to what its referents are (732). Subtler languages make it possible to use words to create symbols through which something can be made available for our reflection and consideration in an indirect way. This emphasizes the world-making character of language that poets tap into. Symbols open the way to a perception of the world that Michael Polanyi calls the "tacit

dimension” where one has knowledge of something in a way that one cannot explain with language (1966, 4). Yet some things could never exist for us if it were not for their having a name. Taylor gives the example of ‘spirit’, which without a name to refer to it cannot be referred to otherwise. Moreover, the infinite, God, or the expression of deepest feelings cannot be expressed directly either: only through associating words to them, in naming them, can they be communicated. Since, for instance, Spirit cannot be physically demonstrated, the use of the word ‘spirit’ constitutes itself a symbol that makes possible the encounter with such a notion by giving it a name. In providing new symbols with which to approach the world, subtler languages thus create new meanings (Taylor 2007, 756). As such, poetry, just like art, opens the individual to a range of experiences that not only would have been lost on them otherwise but that does not dictate the exact meaning of such experience – leaving enough room for the individual to bring her own meaning of those symbols to the table. This is what Taylor understands by a reflexive move. One can view poetry as the product of a mere search for the right word, without having any aim at articulating something higher and thus outside of language, or one can view it as a genuine attempt to articulate a reality that exists beyond words. Such interpretations are possible, as well as many others which emphasize the “indeterminacy of the ontological commitments” (Taylor 2007, 757) that makes subtler languages so important for articulating a modern transcendent. Poetry as a subtler language attempts to join the immanent and the transcendent in the everyday and the mysterious by outlining both the designative and the constitutive aspect of language, showing that neither is sufficient alone to paint an accurate and complete picture of the world. With literary style, both aspects are represented yet, neither is determined to be the truth: designative language is

necessary in the realm of immanence, where clarity and simple interpretations are needed; and the constitutive is necessary to articulate notions that cannot be directly demonstrated, that manifest themselves in a space beyond language. The interpretations and the ways that makes one's life significant are thus quite varied from one person to the next: being moved by an interpretation as the unique criterion of its validity. However, such an interpretation of poetry as subtle language makes it a possibly fragile window into transcendence in that symbols that appeal to one person may not appeal to another. Thus, different things will move different poets and their work in turn will appeal to different people. The frailty of subtler languages also means that they will not always resonate with their audience. With time, poems may fail to reach readers on a deeper level and they may lose the power to articulate the beyond that they once had. Taylor warns about the deadening of language when poems or prayers become routine and people encounter them as repetitive or cease to value them for their revealing qualities and focus on their attachment to it as to a tradition. The modern demand for authenticity means that new forms of language will need to arise or new contexts, new ways to enter into a dialogue with great works will have to arise to avoid their fading into banality (759).

Practice and human interaction can be another way to access the transcendent and Taylor discusses this aspect of subtler languages as an avenue that takes one closer to an experience of the religious. He refers to early Christian and pagan cultures, where rituals and spiritual practices were constitutive of the way to worship. The body and its importance in worship was characteristic of one's faith. Taylor, uses a discussion by Ivan

Illich (Cayley 2005) about the loss involved in codifying the gospel's way of living together into rules, which can be enforced by institutions, to illustrate how, from Reformation to the "disciplined" (Taylor 2007, 158) secular world, the body has been marginalized as religion has become more inward. As a result, the collective has been downplayed and the practices that once were part of a communion with God through the 'neighbour' have ceased to hold the same meaning and have changed in their essence as a result. A disembedding of the religious justification and the corresponding actions has occurred, turning actions of benevolence, for instance, into rules devoid of their original context. Illich gives the example of the practice at the core of the story of the Good Samaritan, which was at the root of early association of church and institutions such as hospitals and hospices (2005, 50). The early Christian church was "heavily engaged in practical works of charity" (Taylor 2007, 737), informed by *agape* or the notion that everyone is connected as God's enfleshment. Illich's discussion sets the tone of Taylor's description of the loss of this network to inform charitable behaviours. Rather, institutions, rules and responsibilities arise that aim to normalize such activities and the justification behind those activities is now rooted in reason. As a result, laws and ethics are no longer connected to anything greater. Modernity builds a whole edifice to solidify the move away from lived experience, which Taylor associates to Illich's notion of the corrupting of Christianity: it "incorporates (a) a code or set of rules, (b) a set of disciplines which makes us internalize these rules, and (c) a system of rationally constructed organizations (private and public bureaucracies, universities, schools) to make sure that we carry out what the rules demand" (742). This turns into 'code fetishism' (Taylor 2011, 353) where rules have authority because they are rules, we

refuse to see conflicts that may arise between such rules and we expect such rules to be followed by rational people because the rules are themselves based in reason. Yet, to cling to a code as a crutch or as the truth, is to be misled – to reject complexity and tensions between interpretations leads to forgetting that the code was once an interpretation, not the ultimate truth.

This description of the disembedding of social codes and rules from higher meaning is aimed at emphasizing what Taylor calls excarnation. Modernity has transferred contacts with the divine from “embodied, ‘enfleshed’ forms of religious life, to those which are more ‘in the head’” (Taylor 2007, 554). Feelings and reactions to things are no longer based on a higher notion that informs us about the good or the bad: they are based on reasons or emotions that remain particular and consequently, cannot give any kind of information about any authoritative definition of what is the good (554). Excarnation restricts one’s view of the world and Taylor believes that a renewed value on the body could help reconnect with the experiences and the practices which make possible an encounter with the transcendent. However, the ‘disenchanted reduction’ mentioned above would not be resolved by a mere rehabilitation of sensual desires: the body must be understood as a mode of contact with a notion of fullness, or of what moves one and gives meaning to one’s life (766). Taylor suggests that the festive could be a way to renew that contact.

He defines the festive as feasts, pilgrimages, and large gatherings outside of the everyday life of individuals, a way to get in touch with something deeper or higher than themselves. In modernity the festive can take many shapes that can range from gatherings with more religious undertones such as World Youth Day to more profane

ones such as rock concerts or raves. Each event however give a sense of tapping into something beyond: “what’s happening is that we are all being touched together, moved as one, sensing ourselves as fused in our contact with something greater, deeply moving, or admirable, whose power to move us has been immensely magnified by the fusion” (Taylor 2007, 482). Such experience goes counter to the modern tendency to downplay the collective. Common experiences, such as the festive describes, could open the way past this individualizing direction and offer a reconnection with a sense of community and belonging. Moreover, regardless of the degree of religious undertone involved in such gatherings, the festive is still a way to have transcendence erupt into one’s life, even when living in immanence (518). How this experience of transcendence is interpreted is once again particular to the individual, according to their view of what moves them.

Taylor includes art, poetry and the festive (through the body) in what he calls subtler languages. These languages are really a collection of triggers that operate on emotions and sense perceptions in a manner where the tendency to analyze, rationalize and define become largely inefficient and thus are temporarily relegated to the background. Having a physical or emotional experience emphasizes the inadequacy of the rational part of our brain to render such experience in an accurate manner. What Huxley meant when he referred to human groups as “a community of island-universe” (Huxley 1972, 13) emphasized the infinite gamut of possible experiences one individual can have but also the clear impossibility to truly share such experiences with others in the exact same way one has lived it. Taylor’s subtler languages not only trigger such experiences of strong emotions and feelings of something beyond, they almost have the role of keywords, communicating the context for an experience that will probably be

similar for most people: Chopin's "Raindrop Prelude", for example, will most likely elicit feelings of nostalgia, of melancholy or perhaps of longing, but the emotion rising in each person will have a unique object. This is why Taylor emphasizes the complex character of subtler languages in that their interpretations cannot be clear.

Thus, subtler languages are an alternate form of language: they may use words, but if they do it is no longer as they are regularly used. In fact, their form is a language, whether it would be visual, poetic or physical but their object is an experience altogether outside of language that once translated back into a language should ring true to the person articulating it, whether in religious terms or not. The festive gives a lot of room for such different interpretations. It also gives believers and the whole gamut from agnostics to the vicariously religious a place to go and find an experience of the transcendent that makes sense to them. Thus, instead of a religious decline, Taylor suggests that the transcendent will take new shapes, as a result of the new avenues made available by subtler languages. Now our notion of the religious itself is what needs to be revised to accommodate these new articulations of transcendence.

The Broad Horizon of the Catholic

Taylor claims that the re-introduction of the experiential alongside a secular context will not challenge the secular and will not necessarily lead to exclusively religious articulations of its context. However, the religious, as a once again valid explanation for reality will be among the possible language available to articulate transcendence. In line with the modern desire and search for authenticity that "accords a

crucial moral importance to a kind of contact with [one's] own inner nature" (Taylor 1991, 29), the way one is receptive to the experience of the transcendent and communicates this experience will find an outlet in the language that one finds deeply moving or significant. Authenticity posits that there is a way of being human that is unique to each person. To act according to one's definition of what makes a life truly fulfilling is to be true to oneself, to be in contact with one's true nature (29). This individual quest for fulfillment, especially when it comes to the interpretation of the experience of some form of transcendence may seem like a typically modern tendency to 'customize' and a superficial search for authenticity. However, putting aside the possibility for self-indulgence, authenticity can be understood as "higher selfishness" or "self-culturation": going towards something that is spiritually fulfilling, something beyond mere self-gratification (Taylor 2007 477).

Such quest for one's own spiritual path would also lead to a "breaking down of barriers between different religious groups" in an increased range of middle positions between belief and unbelief, in ways of worship, and a multiplication of new modes of practices (513). Some will move away from traditional religions, others will gravitate towards them, yet others will look to a more humanist option: people will find the place where they feel their experience of transcendence has taken them. The quest for authenticity will mean that they will have other options than to go to a popular religion, although some people will still choose that avenue. Yet an individual affiliation to a church will rarely last into the next generation since one's own notion of fullness is likely to find its source in an interpretation of transcendence that will reflect one's identity and autonomy and consequently one might not find fullness in the same outlet as one's

parents.

The modern search for authenticity, coupled with the new avenues to experience something higher and deeper will mean that the very conception of religion will have to change to account for the nova. Common experiences will now be the entry point for individual spirituality towards adopting a particular group for religious practice (516) where people will be drawn to an activity or group before the spirituality attached to it.

All these new points of entry to a beyond thus challenge the traditional manifestations of religious dogma and we may see them shift to a new and broader interpretation of their system of belief. All these new points of entry towards a beyond re-emphasize what Taylor feels has been lost in western Christianity, and which he proposes we recover again. In Taylor's most heartfelt essay *A Catholic Modernity?*, he deplores the path to uniformity that Catholicism has taken: "our great historical temptation has been to forget the complementarity, to go straight for the sameness, making as many people as possible into "good Catholics" – and in the process failing out of catholicity" (Taylor 1999, 14). Taylor has always been clear about his Catholic faith and that essay is one of the rare instances where he explicitly describes his own understanding of religion. For that reason, it is important not to dismiss it. For him, the diversity of modes of worship is beyond mere self-cultivation: it is rather the demonstration of the many facets of God's work. He gives a description of what to him is the "catholic principle": there should be "no widening of the faith without an increase in the variety of devotions and spiritualities and liturgical forms and responses to incarnation" (15). Incarnation is where the divine can be experienced with others, "the weaving of God's life into human lives" (14). Thus there cannot be any imposition of

one proper way to worship God: should a church broaden its inclusion of new members, then the ways to be in contact with the divine should also be broader. Thus ‘church’ would no longer be distinguished by a list of practices and rituals but would represent the collection of the many paths to God. “[W]hat really matters is the continuity, and not the new paths broken” (Taylor 2007, 765).

This openness to all the various itineraries that can lead to God can almost seem like the beginning of a number of contradictions or of a loss of meaning. Yet, according to Taylor, it is the quest for God and not the religious practices themselves that are important. The full variety of itineraries, what Taylor likens to what a communion of saints (751) accomplish can only come to light if we “... see the unity of the church as stretching into eternity across all time” (765). Hence, it is clear that Taylor’s goal in his discussion of what a ‘catholic modernity’ would look like is intended to reshape the manifestation of religion – or the sacred – in individual lives, trying to find a solution to the current cross pressures between the alienation underneath self-determination and the quest for authenticity in the religious that occur in trying to reject one for the benefit of the other. Taylor’s *A Catholic Modernity?* posits that Catholicism and modernity can join under openness: supporting and making possible and positive the myriad pathways to transcendence Taylor envisions arising from giving a more important place to subtle languages.

There is in this section of Taylor’s work very little mention of the non-believers and their relationship to transcendence, or about how they could fit within his notion of “Catholic modernity”, except that he claims that they would find their own way to find fullness within the experiential (2007, 766). Taylor attempts to include the secular

immanentist position to his account of the new shape of transcendence in catholic modernity in the notion of fullness. Fullness intends to “capture the very different ways in which each of us ... sees life as capable of some fuller, higher, more genuine... form. ...the positions we may adopt have no finite limit” (Taylor 2010, 315). It is an umbrella term to illustrate individual moral sources or one’s object of belief – what sustains one, what gives one’s life a meaning, whether informed by the higher or the existing order. Yet, in Taylor’s description of a new transcendent in openness and diversity, there seems to be no room for unbelievers, except in his off-hand mention that such renewal with subtler languages and the common experiences would satisfy the beliefs of both believers and unbelievers alike and everybody in between the two positions. It is Taylor’s position that the richest life is a life that includes a love of life and a love of what is beyond life. He also proposes a way to possibly reconnect with the mystery – or that which is beyond language, in other words with a notion of the beyond – a part that has been increasingly difficult to tap into with the current language, thus restricting its articulation. The goal of the reconnection with transcendence will then be to bring back this richer picture of life a way that can be acceptable to modernity, which means that the individuals who do not articulate their notion of fullness with the transcendent will either come to their senses – the constitutive language of transcendence being intelligible now – or they will remain on the sidelines with their poorer vision of life and experience of the world. In this case, what does either alternative mean for the kind of solution Taylor proposes? First, if the unbeliever turns toward the transcendent, since it can make sense to him with both the rehabilitation of the language to articulate it and his newfound openness to the infinite that resonate in him, then Taylor’s ‘catholic modernity’ does not need to be as broad as

first appears, since it does not have to include the non-believer's trajectories. On the other hand, if the unbeliever remains untouched by the love of what is beyond life, then Taylor's 'catholic modernity' must include the outlooks of the unbelievers – their very existence being part of the works of God. Yet, whereas the varieties of fullness informing the ways of worship can be seen as constitutive of all the motions toward God in eternity (so the differences among them become irrelevant), can the positions outside of belief be included under it as such without being viewed as a path to God in the making (atheism is a false start but they will come around)?

I might be tempted to attribute to Taylor the position that atheists, if part of God's work, must be included in the catholic understanding of the church as a constitutive part of the wholeness as such and as being a path to God in its own right. Yet, if it was his contention, those who do not see God and who do not believe in it would be living a life that is missing part of the picture and because Taylor has denied having such purposes in the past (Taylor 2010, 318), I believe there is more to it.

In his response to the essay in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, Taylor states that he is not trying to find a middle solution but that what he is doing is all about reconciliation (Taylor 2010, 320). Reconciliation, as a Hegelian term, implies the realization of two equally inevitable aspects of reality and the blend of forgiveness and reconciliation comes with the acknowledgment of possible tensions but also of the importance of such tensions for both aspects to be what they are. In Hegel's case absolute Spirit comes to be in the reconciliation of universality and particularity (trans. Miller 1977, 408). Similarly, for Taylor reconciliation means that two apparently opposite aspects of one thing can each come to be accepted as necessary for the full

comprehension and appreciation of the other. For him, immanence and transcendence are both opposite yet necessary to the other in order to have any significance. Thus, if with the help of the experiential, transcendence and immanence are found to be two sides of the same coin, the question as to which moral source informs the notion of fullness of each person ceases to be relevant: if such reconciliation occurs, both aspects of reality will need to be included in any notion of fullness. However, whereas Hegel underscores the inevitability of what the culmination of his dialectic will be, Taylor's Hegelian influence does not go this far. He believes that the past is constitutive of the present but that, as such, was not inevitable since events of the past could have happened differently. He characterizes what he presents as merely a new avenue to evaluate the particular conditions affecting us in the secular modern. Thus in this vision of a rearticulated transcendent through the experiential and based on openness, the transcendent could once again be a part of the collective framework defining a society. Unlike its former manifestation as a framework, however, modern expressions of transcendence would still remain an individual preference, something that can be unique to the individual or shared within a group. It is the presence of something beyond life that would be part of the framework, in conjunction with modern outlooks, with the tensions and dynamism that it would entail.

All Experiences Must Come to an End

The purpose of this chapter has been to outline Taylor's position towards transcendence in the modern context as a possible avenue to reduce the cross-pressures

that causes a move too far on the spectrum of fundamental convictions. The place for that which falls outside of the descriptive aspect of language, that which cannot be demonstrated clearly nor understood universally with one clear definition, has become the realm of the private. However, with the public discourse and the modern context, by which we cannot help but be affected, that private space has also gotten smaller. Taylor argues that we are going too far into the disengagement characteristic of the modern buffered self. As a result, the rich existence that comes from the diversity and the associated complexity of a world that is not always predictable is losing ground. We find ourselves having the sense of living a flattened existence, and attempts at reconnecting with meaning end up leading to a shallow search for authenticity.

The modern predicament is the tension we feel when reason, knowledge and predictability that offer a safe and knowable world begin to run hollow and meaningless, without purpose other than to forward human flourishing. Taylor feels that reintroducing that diversity and complexity we have lost is crucial to the richness of our life. He holds that the ‘transcendent’ aspect of the world is one that we need and furthermore that we cannot escape, not only because of the many attempts throughout modern history to regain it, but because our very society remains in dialogue with it, even if it is only for its rejection. The experiential aims to circumvent the current use of language by emphasizing its shortcomings. Art, poetry and common experience – or the festive – all provide emotional and sensory responses that remain impossible to describe unequivocally without considerable vagueness or reduction of the experience. The festive “wrenching us out of the everyday” (Taylor 2007, 482), for Taylor is not merely about describing its unusual character but he also refers to the reversal of order in

collective events like Carnival. Exposure to the unfamiliar and the disorderly would accentuate the inadequacy of turning to standard interpretations for such encounters, thus leading to the possibility to become more receptive to something outside the walls constructed around the modern buffered identity. With a renewed receptivity, the subtler languages might open one to the possibility of finding meaning, a sense of purpose, of being part of a whole.

However, articulating the experience of transcendence will be inevitable in a society of dialogical beings. Even if the experience occurs in a public gathering, the way individuals will be moved by their contact with that which is higher – and their own interpretation of what that is exactly – will be deeply personal. However, when such experiences leave the private to be shared with others or even in order to translate them through a religious (or spiritual) practice, the reductive aspect of modernity that Taylor had tried to avoid would appear to be a concern once again. ‘Catholic modernity’ is introduced as the broad place where particular interpretations of transcendence would be constitutive of the whole of God’s works and proposes this avenue to preserve the uniqueness of experience in discourse. I have argued that Taylor’s proposed avenue for reconnecting with transcendence suggests that the very notion of transcendence itself will either have to be so broad as to include all positions in the nova, from atheism to religious orthodoxy, or will in fact reveal that all humans believe in some notion of something higher, beyond human flourishing.

This aspect of Taylor’s work can be viewed as something of the order of the private realm, something that has rather limited consequences on the secular modern society, especially if the interpretations and practices springing from such a definition

remain in the realm of the private. However, it is Taylor's belief that a reconnection with transcendence is not merely limited to a realm outside of the political: rather, a renewed contact with transcendence would not only affect one's relation to that which gives one a sense of fullness but it would also provide a newfound basis to conversations and harmonized social interactions to ideally mitigate the tensions between conflicting values in a pluralistic society. Taylor wants to use fullness as a common ground from which to feel connected to others. He does not believe however that the overlapping consensus in a Rawlsian sense can attenuate the tensions between belief and unbelief and across faiths, which the modern secular context brings about. Rather, that overlapping consensus largely serves as a veritable *modus vivendi* and does very little beyond providing a set of values and mode of action for living together to inspire openness and a feeling of unity towards others in the community as a whole. Without solving or mitigating tensions between values, beliefs or practices, the overlapping consensus that acknowledges feelings of fullness to determine what has special significance to someone is a way to get that solidarity to the fore by appealing to common emotions. A reconnection to the transcendent based on Taylor's "catholic modernity" and its expression into the notion of fullness aims to open one to the religion of others because they are not so different if one focuses on the fact that everyone feels the same kind of attachment to fundamental convictions. Hence Taylor aims to open the current framework to the notion of transcendence without looking to turn the transcendent into a framework again and thus labeling it with a rigid definition. The transcendent is still a constitutive good, something that can be challenged, changed, re-interpreted but that remains significant to individuals who give it the shape of what is meaningful to them. Subtler languages and the turn to

the experiential could be a setting of the stage for future reconciliation, hinting at the possible beginning of a change in our own modern social imaginary where the beyond will have a room as important as secularism, the reconciliation being up to the individual's determination of how best to have it happen.

CONCLUSION

Taylor's view of our modern context is one where individualism and the search for authentic life is widespread and where societies are no longer held together under one predominant framework, rooted in an unchallengeable notion of the transcendent. Rather, what was once held as a framework is now a constitutive good that is chosen by the individual instead of being part of the culture and outlook to which one belongs. Hence, the autonomy of the individual as subject and the exercise of agency to define oneself and one's life have become central to a definition of modernity. Such individualistic focus on human flourishing results in an inevitable plurality of ways of life, outlooks, values and beliefs, all reflecting one's agency and independence in their very choice. Equality and freedom therefore arise as crucial factors in the autonomous and authentic pursuit of one's own notion of the good life. This picture of modernity appears atomistic to Taylor, especially because people feel frustrated in their own liberty when an idea of the good that is not their own is imposed upon them. Consequently, when comes the need to accommodate a group or individuals whose way of life necessitates some special provisions, such demands are received as a threat to equality and freedom and is understood to mean imposing restrictions on some people or giving special rights to others. Modern society emphasizes individualism and leads to a weakened notion of solidarity where people are not inclined to empathize with others nor to act as a community to find solutions to tensions over conflicting ways of life and values. Bouchard and Taylor gave a detailed account of the tensions among cultural and religious groups (2008, 45-60), which were spurred by what appears to be a suspicious

outlook towards other (usually minority) cultures and the assumption that accommodating them would directly threaten one's own way of life.

It is Taylor's claim that while such tensions can be managed with rules, true solutions can only occur with feelings of solidarity held among the various groups living together (Taylor 2010). His strong conviction that humans are deeply embedded in the world means they have a crucial need for a context of dialogue and interactions to fully develop their identity. The importance of the social aspect of one's life is thus clear and should not be ignored for a focus on individual freedoms. Moreover, solidarity is central to any kind of common project or cohesion within a state but it is established that the current individualistic context discourages such feelings. Thus the tensions caused by conflicting values and practices necessitate a way to trigger feelings of unity without compromising individual freedom. Taylor uses the Rawlsian concept of the overlapping consensus to establish common principles that could be general enough to be compatible with, and justifiable by, most people's own set of motivations. Taylor's consensus gives more emphasis to the role of the community in shaping the overlapping consensus through conversation. As conversations among cultural or religious groups lead to learning about one another and to mutually absorb aspects of other cultures that prove valuable, a fusion of horizons can occur, which will eventually refine the overlapping consensus and likely provide the possibility that a solution for conflicting values will be found in time, as Taylor's suggests in the afterword of *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism* (1994, 214). Taylor's overlapping consensus is largely about providing a propitious environment where exchange and interactions can take place and where people from all cultures, moral backgrounds or religious affiliations can interact, learn from one another

and dissipate sentiments of otherness with which some minorities are labeled and because of which they are disadvantaged.

However, it is Taylor's suggestion that the overlapping consensus as a set of principles acquired by using public reason does not adequately account for the tensions emerging on the basis of emotionally infused religious beliefs. Taylor proposes to use the concept of fullness to serve as an extension of the overlapping consensus, since everyone has a notion of something that makes his or her life richer but which is different for everyone. Fullness would serve as a common ground for various cultures and religions, encouraging dialogue and reducing feelings of otherness towards more marginal groups. However, Taylor's concept of fullness as an addition to the overlapping consensus involves problematic implications that are similar to those associated with the above discussion of transcendence. The two concepts of fullness and transcendence are closely linked and I believe that fullness attempts to stimulate unity and solidarity in a community on the basis of a common emotionally held concept, such as that which the discussion of transcendence aimed to establish. Thus, as transcendence proved to be problematic in its articulation as a common ground for dialogue, so does fullness, which raises some concerns over possible contradictions that must be addressed.

The tight connection between transcendence and fullness is made even more explicit in that the definition of the concept of fullness and its role in mitigating tensions between conflicting values depend on Taylor's view of the place of transcendence in individual lives. More precisely, Taylor's position towards the transcendent depends on his treatment of the non-believers. As discussed in chapter three, his view of transcendence can be read as widely inclusive of all possible positions between belief and

unbelief or it can be understood as a more restrictive notion which either rejects atheists or turn them into latent believers. Hence, depending on whether Taylor holds that atheists' unbelief is part of a catholic modernity or that they are simply mistaken, fullness may prove to be either too vague to foster feelings of solidarity, or to be homogenizing and thus to delegitimize any other convictions. While both readings have shortcomings, the latter interpretation of the transcendent as inevitable is an inadequate reading of Taylor's work. This reading would portray the transcendent as a clearly defined – and thus normative – concept, which would not be consistent with Taylor's unvarying avoidance of such definitions. The first interpretation however points to an incomplete analysis of the place of the modern transcendent in Taylor's work and its directly related consequences on his project to find a version of an overlapping consensus based on emotions.

Taylor's suggestion that we all need the transcendent has implications that do not fit with the rest of his work where he usually avoids the imposition of any normative outlook, attempting to remain in a good measure of neutrality or to avoid giving a final and unnecessary interpretation of a concept lest it should be restrictive. His discussion of the overlapping consensus, transcendence, fullness, and of his hierarchy of goods remains largely over the terms themselves, and he avoids attributing them specific characteristics. Rather Taylor leaves these definitions to be completed by the individual or the community at large (in the case of the overlapping consensus or of concepts such as the framework) in a way that makes sense and is significant to them. His statement over the universal need of transcendence suggests a normative description of humans as needing some notion of a beyond, which by the same token restricts the diversity of human

experience by making out those who do not share this need for the transcendent as either unconscious of its inevitability or deluded in their belief that there is nothing beyond immanence. In such reading, the true essence of atheism is one of latent belief.

Carrying such discussion over the universal need for transcendence to the concept of fullness would then suggest that a source of fullness that is not informed by such a universal need would be incomplete or misguided. This makes fullness homogenizing and thus contrary to Taylor's desire to protect both equal dignity and differences, especially in protecting the rights of minorities. Taylor attempts to find a solution for tensions between conflicting values but he does not attempt to reduce the range of such values. Hence, since a normative outlook would derogate from Taylor's aims, attributing to him a reading of fullness as informed by an imperative notion of transcendence is inadequate and restrictive.

In contrast, Taylor's discussion of a catholic modernity takes him closer to a solution to inspire feelings of solidarity among various cultural and religious groups, without reverting to a reduction of diversity. As the last chapter described, Taylor views the plurality of beliefs and convictions – or what he calls the Nova – as the many parts of God's creation. Consequently, each position between belief and unbelief has as much importance and legitimacy as every other part and fullness can take whatever form one may find significant.

Hence fullness is understood as a unifying concept that does not have to be based on transcendence and which does not include in its definition the source of that notion of fullness. The specific values or beliefs or strong evaluations behind fullness are not as important as the sense of fullness itself. Taylor's conception attempts to get around its

particular instances and focus on commonalities. However, unlike the Rawlsian overlapping consensus, which involves commonly held principles, fullness is a commonly held emotion. It is the feeling that something is indeed making one's life richer, more complete, or meaningful. It is nothing other than the very attachment and association of identity with one's significant convictions and it carries no other justification. This deep attachment to the source of one's own feeling of fullness aims to be the starting point for beginning a conversation with people whose convictions are different and perhaps conflicting with our own but who nonetheless feel a similar attachment.

This reading of fullness is closer to Taylor's politics of recognition in that diversity is encouraged and so are interactions and the horizon-altering conversations that the modern context will occasion. However the concept of fullness, as Taylor understands it, cannot provide an adequate setting to stimulate the feelings of solidarity he seeks. Since it is a concept that refers to a feeling that everyone experiences but that few people will feel toward the same thing, fullness is so broad and general that, as a concept, it becomes vague to the point of losing any clear definition and appears to provide a flimsy basis to stimulate feelings of solidarity. For instance, one can experience fullness in the conviction that one's life is part of God's love or is in harmony with nature, just as one can feel it in the fulfillment and meaning involved in being a parent. In fact, fullness is a broad notion that equally acknowledges everyone's own definition of it. Thus Taylor bases his idea of solidarity on a concept that everyone has but that is only significant for personal reasons.

The broad notion that is equally legitimate no matter what its object, is

comparable in its potential to spur solidarity to Berlin's claim that people, on the basis of their shared humanity, can never find themselves entirely incapable to relate to other humans. Whereas Berlin's notion is important as a basis for dialogue across cultures, Taylor however is not satisfied with such a rudimentary common ground for dialogue (1994, 214) and seeks a basis for a deeper connection, which could not only go beyond deliberations over conflicting values but could actually provide solutions. However, if Taylor's idea is to supplement the overlapping consensus with a feeling that everyone has, whilst bracketing the very object that leads one to have that very feeling, the result might not be very different from Berlin's and one can wonder whether a feeling, even if it is one that is deeply held, will be enough to inspire a sense of communion with others, especially if the feeling of fullness as separated from that which inspires it is the starting point. Fullness establishes a common ground that is based on a feeling everyone has and that abstracts the very reason for that feeling's existence. If we look at what Taylor holds the fullness-based consensus to be, – viz. a broad, all-encompassing notion that makes life richer and more significant, whether inspired by transcendence or not – such concept is so vague that there is very little over which to rally people or from which to base feelings of solidarity or to motivate common action.

Thus one can wonder whether the fact that a stranger has a notion of fullness – which everyone else have – is a reason to feel more open to his or her beliefs and to feel closer to them. More likely, what causes divisions, skepticism and even fear between some cultural groups or religious affiliations is not a failure to understand that people of other cultures may feel devoted to something to a similar degree as one's own devotion. Rather, the tensions lie in that for which this strong connection is experienced, which can

be baffling or scary or incomprehensible to others in spite of the presence of a shared feeling of attachment towards a source of fullness. For instance, even if both the religious fundamentalist and the secular immanentist have a sense of fullness, that which informs this fullness is extremely different and in no way means that they could feel sympathy and openness for one another's position. Rather they might feel baffled by the other person's attachment towards some notion one finds strange, misled or simply wrong.

In his afterword to *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, Taylor speaks of the importance of openness and of conversations among faiths as a way to solidify one's own convictions without feeling threatened by those of others. He sees as a weakness the refusal to understand different notions of fullness and likens it to hobbling around on crutches. According to Taylor, "you don't live by what's powerful in your own faith unless you throw away the crutches that keep you from facing that, and the crutches are deprecating stories about others" (nebulous2010, 319). Hence it is Taylor's goal to get such challenging conversations going where one can appreciate others' understanding of the world for the power and attraction it has without jeopardizing one's own faith. One ought to approach other understandings of the world with what Taylor calls elsewhere a 'presumption of equal worth'. However, it is again worth asking whether such a broad and non-descript conception as fullness can be a starting point for such openness between drastically opposite positions. Could fullness be significant enough to get one past the radical differences and the beliefs that seem unacceptable to others: could it be grounds enough to bridge the fundamental disagreement between a fervent believer and an atheist and open a space of dialogue between such positions? Taylor attempts to bridge the gap

between fundamental convictions but the extreme positions are what is problematic and what makes any attempt to find a notion that will encompass every position between those extremes vague and consequently so broad that they lose any meaning.

In its role as a consensus, fullness is flawed and nebulous. In a similar vein, transcendence, as inclusive of the entirety of fundamental convictions (as part of a catholic modernity) also takes a vague character. Yet, as a notion that remains personal – both in terms of that which is the source of fullness and as something that makes one feel some degree of affinity with others who do not share one’s understanding of the world – the particular explanation for the importance of fullness can be made to mean something to others. Subtler languages in the case of the transcendent can open individuals to a connection with something greater without necessarily describing what form it will take. Taylor seeks a way to trigger solidarity in a society where self-construction and individualism is central. He looks to the emotional and the constitutive aspect of language to trigger a sense of affinity that is rooted at the very core of the human desire to connect to one another.

Such experience, when not hindered by the modern tendency to categorize, would seem to have the potential that Taylor believes it has. Yet, trouble appears as soon as the need arises to share or explain those experiences – such matters being inevitable in a society of dialogical beings. Following Taylor’s holistic view of individuality, it is clear that the openness to ambiguity and to possibilities that can only take place within the individual will influence the interactions among various religious and cultural groups within the community. When personal experiences, such as a connection with something greater than life, leave the non-verbal realm of experience to be shared with a

community, or even when they are translated through a religious (or spiritual) practice, the reductive categorizing aspect of modernity that Taylor had tried to avoid will be a concern once again. Notions such as 'transcendence' or 'fullness' are introduced as broad concepts whose particular interpretations become a constitutive part of the whole of God's works. Taylor uses such vague conceptions in an attempt to preserve the particular uniqueness of all the range of experiences without forcing them under a restrictive label that would reduce the richness and complexity of one's personal conception of what makes one's life meaningful. However, not only does such broad definition affect the credibility of the umbrella term, it also trivializes its particular manifestations by labeling them under the same term that does not take account of their very personal significance which is what makes them meaningful in the first place. Both transcendence and fullness as unifying concepts carry out this reduction.

The diversity of cultures in our modern globalized context and the autonomy of the individual to define his or her own identity means that there is very little authority upon which one can rely to impose one's values or way of life upon others. The certainty that one's convictions are right is necessary to avoid falling into nihilism but the source of these convictions is no longer unequivocal and universal. Taylor suggests that the renewed openness to transcendence brought about with subtler languages could be considered as a possible direction to introduce dialogue among cultures but any articulation of such attempt enters it into the designative aspect of language, turning it into a conception that is too broad to have any meaning or too restrictive, as the discussions over transcendence and fullness have demonstrated.

The transcendent is no longer a framework and Taylor, in his attempt to find some way to inspire unity in modern society, appears to insist on approaching it as though it still was. As I have established in Chapter 1, transcendence is no longer homogeneous, since it is no longer a framework. However, as Taylor does not explicitly translate the secular turn in terms of his hierarchy of goods, he fails to see the consequences of the shift that he describes. Chapter 2 has clearly shown that Taylor seeks a unifying trait for modern society and, whereas the overlapping consensus as Rawls describes it is rooted in a secular liberal framework, Chapter 3 demonstrates that Taylor's attempt to find the equivalent of that framework in the transcendent – which no longer is a framework – is bound to be unsuccessful. His attempt to articulate transcendence with subtler languages attempts to make it so broad as to suggest that it could have the appearance of a framework once again – while remaining a constitutive good.

However, constitutive goods cannot be unified under one theme like a framework. Modern society is respectful of the right to have different notions of the good and the modern context gives a great deal of importance to living an authentic life and to following one's own path. Consequently, any attempt to reconcile all views of transcendence under one concept can only frustrate certain exercises of freedom, undermine authenticity or lose any meaning and credibility as a unifying concept. Modern transcendence can no longer be used as representative of the whole community and Taylor's attempt suggests a misgiving that this present work has made manifest.

Nonetheless, Taylor's introduction of the open and ambiguous nature of the non-verbal in art and the rich subtlety found in common experiences has proposed a new way

to approach pluralism and its inevitable tensions. Getting around language to emphasize shared emotions and experiences may sidestep prejudices and stereotypes. However, as the discussion in Chapter 3 demonstrates, the articulation of such experiences in the attempt to reproduce them or to trigger the emotional response without the experience itself, as Taylor proposes in his separation of the notion of fullness from its object, distorts the experience and frames it within a restricting language that loses any of the complexity and richness of the experiential.

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