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Reason and Language in Charles Taylor

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Abstract

Charles Taylor's commitment to cultural integrity is at the base of his idealization of an inclusionary discursive community, which recognizes particular expressions of the good but also asks that agents participate in the articulation of universal ethical standards centering on the dignity and autonomy of each person. This thesis examines the extent to which Taylor's 'Best Account principle' is able to reconcile the two related demands of situated freedom, as presented by Hegel: those of expressive unity with nature and rational autonomy. It evaluates the 'Best Account principle' as a hermeneutic principle of rational justification by comparing it to the rival theories of procedural liberalism, naturalism, and relativism. It then examines how the expressive theory of language effectively elucidates the intersubjective powers of Taylor's principle, before assessing how Taylor's hermeneutics, inspired by Gadamer, might meet the challenges of political recognition and incommensurability.

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This work is dedicated to my family: Ernie, Sharon, and Stephen Tchir.

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Introduction

So much of our capacity to think, to feel, and to act with purpose, that which makes us human, depends on language. This idea is central to Charles Taylor's views on language and the importance of cultural integrity in maintaining the expressive media through which individuals can exercise moral agency. The recognition and preservation of language-constituted cultural groups is at times in tension with the search for pan-cultural criteria to ensure that each person, no matter what his or her identity, be shown a minimum level of respect and recognition as autonomous moral agents. While much of Taylor's illuminating work on language, culture, and situated freedom is carried out prior to *Sources of the Self*, it is in this major work that his Best Account Principle most fully encapsulates this area of questioning.[1]

In the following discussion I will assess the extent to which Taylor's Best Account Principle is able to reconcile its commitment to two often conflicting ideals. The first ideal is the modern good of rational autonomy and the promotion of universal respect. The second is the maintainance and strengthening of the expressive integrity of culturally specific goods. Much of this analysis will be undertaken by comparing Taylor's principle with the earlier philosophy of Hegel, as well as with the principles of justification put forth by contemporary theories of liberal proceduralism, scientific naturalism, and relativism (or radical subjectivism). Secondly, I will consider the ability of the expressive theory of language, vis-à-vis the designative theory, at illuminating the moral agent's powers for intersubjectively-mediated self-reflexivity and self-interpretation, powers upon which the Best Account principle depends as a hermeneutic

[1] Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989.

theory. Finally, I will examine the viability of the principle's drive for universal validity and moral convergence, in the face of incommensurable moral views that do not all share the modern spirit of critical self-reflection.

1 Hegel and Situated Freedom

Taylor's views on language, culture, and morality are best examined through the concept of 'situated' or 'embodied' freedom, as he first explores it in the philosophy of Hegel. Situated freedom presents two essential and often incompatible metaphysical demands. The first is the demand for absolute rational freedom, reflexive self-understanding, and control of one's environment gained by an objective account of the human being and the world. The second demand is a sense of natural harmony with the necessary conditions of ordinary life, a full engagement with one's given community and its institutions, an intuitive attunement with the pulse and flow of one's environment and inner feelings, as well as the ability to authentically express this intuition through creative, symbolic media. The opposition between these two sets of goods has been articulated by some philosophers, Taylor included, as the opposition between rational freedom and expressive unity with nature. While much of modern formalist theory has skirted the situated aspect of subjectivity and freedom, it is Taylor's conviction that the philosophy of language has reflected a genuine commitment to account for it.

Hegel, as a theorist of situated freedom, attempts to synthesize radical freedom with nature in concrete rational autonomy. This depends on a conception of the subject, and indeed all knowledge, as embodied. Universal moral freedom must find its embodiment in its opposite, the finite human being in unreflective unity with nature.

Taylor presents Hegel's philosophy as a teleological historical unfolding in which *Geist*, or absolute spirit, is to become fully self-conscious of itself; however, since it is necessarily embodied in finite human beings, it is by man's continued conceptual articulation, through expressive media, institutions, and practices, that this self-clarity is reached.

Although Taylor finds merit in Hegel for his expressive conception of social institutions and his exploration of the situated aspect of subjectivity, Taylor is nonetheless critical of what he understands as Hegel's basic ontological perspective and closed conception of history. Taylor sees these as too restrictive of the individual's powers to express his or her implicit moral background. His critique of Hegel's ontology and conception of history will be addressed more deeply in the following chapter.

Taylor continues to explore situated freedom through the philosophy of language, particularly of the expressive conception, by which he emphasizes individual self-reflexivity. Taylor's concern with the expressive power of language in articulating the yet-unreflective levels of our moral intuition anticipates his Best Account principle, through which culturally-bound experiences of the good are drawn towards universality as inclusionary community.

2 The Best Account Principle

Much of contemporary moral philosophy and public discourse on ethics seeks universal, procedural determinants for moral action. This is notably the case within the multicultural political communities of Europe and North America, which are comprised of a plurality of seemingly incommensurable articulations of the good. The effort is

made in practical reason to find a categorical law, communicative framework, or utilitarian principle for maximizing happiness with which all ethical groups can identify. These give primacy to formal moral reason over and above culturally-bound, substantive ideas of happiness and ethical motivation. In terms of the opposition between rational freedom and expressive unity with nature, universal proceduralism tends to favour the former while often undercutting the latter, along with the particular life forms that situate freedom and provide the context for the deeply felt sensibilities that motivate moral action and a recognition of the good. Taylor's Best Account principle, conversely, requires the retrieval and re-articulation of particular, situated expressions of the implicit moral background on which humans form qualitative distinctions.

Taylor writes that each individual and community requires a moral framework, or background idea of the good, to make intelligible their moral rules, virtues, ethical choices, and social institutions. This background, necessary for human, moral agency, is a product of self-understanding and self-interpretation, which is an ongoing process of growth and development. These changes occur, according to Taylor, through the intersubjective clarification and correction of terms that best make sense of our human existence and are capable of motivating us to recognize and live by the good. The Best Account principle is a principle of discourse that is geared towards a rational articulation, justification, and evaluation of the moral ontology from which a moral agent structures his or her actions. By moral ontology, Taylor means the descriptive account of our spiritual nature, our moral reactions, the presuppositions of our moral predicament and human situation in the world. Important to the Best Account principle is that moral ontologies are above all seen as accounts of that which makes human beings dignified

and worthy of respect. The Best Account principle demands that communities and individuals, who, Taylor claims, all have particular pre-articulate moral intuitions, be reflexive towards these implicit feelings and attempt to articulate them clearly and authentically in order to open them up to intersubjective rational criticism. Through this process, the agents can better determine whether their respective subjective moral reactions are appropriate. This is done by comparing the rational validity of the agent's moral ontology against that of others, so that in a continual process of comparative transitions, we are able to maintain and refine the best possible account of our human, moral condition. The main standards by which moral ontologies are deemed rational by the Best Account principle are those of universality and inclusion, the respect shown to all persons. Taylor believes that these moral goods are felt universally as uncommonly deeper than others, no matter how they are shaped by the culturally-bound moral ontology of a particular agent. They therefore stand as the principle criteria by which we should judge moral ontologies.

We can see more clearly the point of Taylor's Best Account principle through the above-mentioned problem of situated freedom. The first demand for rational, self-conscious autonomy is answered by the agent's self-reflective evaluation of his or her moral ontology, as well as the intersubjective critique that his or her account receives upon articulation. The second demand for expressive unity with nature is addressed within the Best Account principle in that it begins from the engaged perspective of the individual's or community's particular moral intuitions, which are already shaped by the pre-reflective matrix of expressive symbols inherent in the languages of their culture. These expressive media, each unique in the ideas and intersubjective relations that they

have conceived historically, will shape each participant's specific moral ontological account of what it is about the human condition that commands respect. It is when these particular, language-bound moral ontologies must be rationally articulated and evaluated that we begin to see the synthesis between the two demands of rational freedom and expressive unity. Taylor admits that such transitions do not come without conflict between goods, as well as certain losses, most especially the innocence and beauty of unreflective custom and ritual in favour of self-conscious reason. However, I believe that some traditional and cultural expressions of the good can become shaped by the demands of universal respect and inclusion that the Best Account principle requires, without washing out the expressive integrity of these customary visions. Indeed, Taylor argues in *Multiculturalism*: *Examining the Politics of Recognition* that finding an improved, more inclusive account of one's particular moral ontology can be morally empowering and incite the agent to embrace his or her traditional spiritual practices with more conviction than he or she did before deeper reflection and outside critique.[2] Taylor shows that by encouraging individuals and groups to come to a more self-conscious expression of their opaque moral horizon, rather than by flushing out the differences in their articulations, the objective worth of particular visions can be made manifest and languages of common understanding can be developed. Taylor's philosophy is very valuable today, as disengaged and instrumental reason dominates public discourse and as our sources of moral judgement seem continually trivialized and uncertain.

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[2] C. Taylor. "The Politics of Recognition." *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Guttman. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

3 The Designative vs. Expressive Conceptions of Language

To best understand what is at stake in Taylor's Best Account principle, we must explore the distinction that Taylor outlines between the designative and expressive conceptions of language.[3] In the former view, Taylor writes, language confers meaning to objects and relations by directly referring to them in words and signs. The designative conception stems from Medieval nominalism and later Cartesian resolutive-compositive thought, and was essential to the modern scientific revolution as well as its epistemological and naturalist inheritors that see relevant meaning as framed in linguistic representations of an independent reality. Here language is an instrument of control and representational knowledge for an individual subject conceived as fully aware and in possession of his or her language instrument. Under this conception, the first metaphysical demand for control of one's environment gained through an objective account of the human and the world is meant to be fulfilled, albeit in a disengaged and instrumental form reached at the expense of the contrasting demand for an engaged, expressive unity with nature.

Taylor emphasizes the importance of a different conception of language and meaning, labeled as the Romantic, the expressive, or 'HHH' theory. By recognizing its merits and limitations vis-à-vis the designative or representational conception, we can see more clearly not only the value of the Best Account principle and development of situated freedom, but also potential question areas that these present.

There are important connections between the expressive conception of language, self-reflexivity, and the Best Account principle. The expressive conception

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[3] C. Taylor. *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

views language as constitutive of human reflective consciousness, self-understanding, and feeling. This is pertinent to Taylor because of his focus on moral intuition. The 'articulating-constitutive function' of language allows the subject's initially vague feeling towards a good to be rendered more intense, understandable, and reflexive by being made manifest through adequate expressive media. Also important is the idea that each language is a holistic matrix. This decenters the subject in that he or she can never stand above and fully control his or her tool of expression or representation. The revelation of meaning can never be completely articulated, as Taylor shows in his opposition to Hegel. This inability for the subject to stand over his or her language in a position of perfect control also means that he or she cannot be freed as a monological observer, but only intersubjectively, within the speech community whose agreement maintains the barriers of meaning, intelligibility, and adequate expression of feeling. Decentering also allows commonly held 'hypergoods' within the Best Account principle to command the subject's recognition as an object worthy of awe, outside of the subjective desires of the individual. Intersubjective engagement, critique, and correction of terms and meanings within the ever-shifting language matrix can serve to improve on the rationality and universality of a given ethical community's moral ontology.

Another result of the feeling-constitutive role of expressive language is that it allows for the Romantic notion, essential to modernity, of a uniquely embodied resonance of the good. Indeed, whole speech communities share vocabularies that generate their own particular ethical standards, feelings, demands, and self-descriptions. This is linked to Taylor's theory, influenced by Rousseau and Herder, of personal identity as an authentic expression of one's espousal of moral goods. The moral agent must, however,

reflect on whether his or her authentic feeling and articulation of the good is rational, or adequate as part of the best possible account of that which commands respect and benevolence towards humanity. This is how the standard of the Best Account principle calls on the agent to be reflexive of his or her unique sensibility towards the good. Language media are not only tools by which the subject can express his or her moral intuition in his or her own authentic way, but they are also constitutive of the process by which he or she can evaluate the rational validity of his or her own expression.

The expressive theory facilitates Taylor's active, engaged, and creative conception of the human being. Taylor's subject is given more freedom than Hegel's to generate meaning expressively, through the gradual transformation of the language matrix. These language media contain terms and symbols that generate a space of connotative energy or meaning between them. The potential for this space of meaning to change over time and within different contexts allows individuals and communities to move towards a deeper recognition of a given hypergood. A new space of meaning can manifest between the terms and practices of the traditional goods and those of universal dignity and inclusion. This is important to Taylor in that it allows traditional practices to become more rational over time with the embracing of the concept of universal respect.

4 Recognition and the Challenge of Incommensurability

As a result of the importance of intersubjectivity and authenticity in the articulation of moral intuition, particular expressive languages that enable cultural communities to continually articulate the good ought to be recognized and protected. However, according to the Best Account principle, the good can be felt and articulated

more or less adequately. This is essential to Taylor's conception of moral autonomy, positive liberty, and cross-cultural normative evaluation, and implies an ontological conception of hypergoods. It raises the question, however, of how such a conception might limit the necessary creative and expressive freedom of particular individuals, language communities, and cultures that do not share the same ontological view as Taylor or of the ruling forces within a given political community. Some have argued that Taylor's theistic leanings, particularly his focus on the empowering force of Christian *agape*, undermine his argument for the recognition of a plurality of visions of the good. Others have criticized that the account-transcending criteria of universalism within the Best Account principle, that by which culturally-bound articulations of the good can be objectively judged, is not a universally-valued good, but a particularly modern one unique to European and North American liberal societies. Judging other cultures by our own goods, the criticism runs, is simply exerting ethnocentric power and judgement against a community whose language is incommensurable with the modern, liberal notion of universality. In the following discussion, I will assess the validity of the Best Account principle's claims to universality in the face of these criticisms. Taylor admits that there remains a certain level of incommensurability between societies who have and have not embraced the modern good of self-reflective reason. While Taylor's principle does not pretend to solve all problems of incommensurability between modern and pre-modern or traditional and liberal communities, he claims that the expressive conception of language provides the tools to form 'languages of perspicuous contrast'.[4] These languages are meant to develop areas of fusion between moral horizons and provide the common

[4] C. Taylor. *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

understanding needed to ensure that all participants in a rational discourse concerned with evaluating moral ontologies are communicating with a shared idea of what is at stake. A language of perspicuous contrast aims at compromise, but also at constructive self-criticism, by which our own moral ontology may be rendered more rational or more appropriate to our lives as feeling beings. The respect for human dignity, the most basic value defended by the Best Account Principle, is in this way promoted as universally valid. It is Taylor's conviction that this basic respect for the life and freedom of each person should be promoted trans-culturally, despite the critics' charges of ethnocentricity. Taylor admits that this understanding cannot be achieved immediately or fully, but rather over time and in hard-won stages; such is the gradually shifting nature of language. What this rich language of contrasts is meant to avoid is the formalistic solutions that provide no animating content to moral obligation, as well as the utilitarian solutions that can leave previously marginalized communities within a given debate even more alienated. I will assess Taylor's claim that more fruitful communication might be possible by focusing on the self-reflective, constitutive, and intersubjective powers of language. I will also explore to what extent the expressive conception of language serves as a means of access to the ideas embodied in the Best Account principle.

To carry out this examination, I will begin by more fully analysing Taylor's adoption of the idea of situated freedom from Hegel's philosophy. I will then present the Best Account principle and evaluate how it brings participants closer to a synthesis between expressive integrity and rational universality, as well as to what degree it improves on the shortcomings of the principles of justification of proceduralism, scientific naturalism, and relativism. Next, I will take a closer look at how the expressive

conception of language, in contrast to the designative one, provides access to the self-reflexive and intersubjective power of the Best Account principle. In the fourth, I will explore the Best Account principle's limitations and potential in dealing with political recognition and the challenge presented by incommensurable moral languages. This is especially pertinent to the promoters of universal benevolence and human respect in their attempts to rationalize institutions in foreign ethical communities that fly in the face of such values, such as those practices that severely marginalize the social role of certain minority groups. Here I will assess the strength of the Best Account principle to uphold the hypergood of universal benevolence against relativist charges of ethnocentricity.

1. Hegel and Situated Freedom

In his 1975 work, *Hegel*,[1] Charles Taylor examines the concept of 'situated' or 'embodied' freedom and subjectivity. This idea, essential to Taylor's Best Account principle, presents two metaphysical demands that are often in conflict with one another. The opposition between them has been articulated by Taylor as the opposition between rational freedom and expressive unity with nature. The first demand for absolute rational freedom conceives man as rational spirit and necessitates reflexive self-understanding and the control of one's environment gained by an objective account of the human being and the world. What is primary in this demand is the faculty of understanding and intellect, the capacity for practical reason, logic, and abstract thought. This demand is propelled by a rational conception of the human being, one largely influenced by the philosophy of Kant, which imputes to the individual the qualities of being worthy of dignity. The second demand for expressive unity with nature implies human harmony and attunement with the natural conditions of production, a fully engaged membership within one's given community, an intuitive sensibility to one's environment and one's own authentic desires and passions, as well as the capacity to express one's implicit feelings through intersubjective media. The human being is conceived primarily as sensibility, while freedom is understood in terms of expression. One paradigm representation of perfect (albeit primitive) unity with nature is offered by Rousseau's conception of the pre-social individual in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*.[2]

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[1] C. Taylor. *Hegel.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

1.1 Hegel's Critique of Abstract Freedom

Hegel approaches the question of situated freedom by attempting to synthesize radical freedom and nature in concrete rational autonomy. Both Hegel and Taylor build on Kant, who, in theorizing the first demand for rational freedom, identifies practical moral freedom as the individual's radical self-rule in accordance with universal moral law. Kant is, in a way, the great theorizer of absolute freedom. He designates anything that stems not from the rational will of the subject as heteronomous. This includes irrational desires and feelings, unreflective social conventions, and even the external word of God. In Kant's conception of autonomy and free will, the quality of one's practical reason is removed from external considerations in order to be open to determination by moral insights. In this way, feelings and desires towards externalities, which he sees as arbitrary, can be avoided. Moral and rational judgement, in its complete interiority, is the expression of the subject's pure autonomy. To be autonomous, the agent must follow what Kant sees as his or her very essence: pure rational will. This is done by evaluating potential, particular maxims of action against the demands of universal applicability and justification, embodied in the categorical imperative. For a maxim to become moral law and direct or determine the rational will, it must satisfy the demands of universality. It is mankind's capacity to direct the will rationally, Kant insists, that makes it distinctly human and free. Freedom is thus grounded in the rational will of the person.[3]

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[2] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes.* Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971.

[3] Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956.

This radical autonomy emerges as the Concept in Hegel's philosophical system. In *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes : "The will contains the element of pure indeterminacy or that pure reflection of the ego into itself which involves the dissipation of every restriction and every content either immediately presented by nature, by needs, by desires, and impulses, or given and determined by any means whatever."[4] Hegel, however, senses the vacuity and negativity of this formal universalism and seeks to unite it with normative and practical substance that can bring content to the actions of the free moral will. According to Hegel, Kant's monological, absolute, and universal law fails to acknowledge the need for the grounding of freedom and reason in real, social institutions. These include historically situated relations of intersubjectivity that embody the subject with particular roles and duties. Further in the above-cited paragraph Hegel writes:

> This is the unrestricted infinity of absolute abstraction or universality, the pure thought of oneself...this unrestricted possibility of abstraction from every determinate state of mind which I may find in myself or which I may have set up in myself, my flight from every content as from a restriction...then we have negative freedom...but when it turns into actual practice, it takes shape in religion and politics alike as the fanaticism of destruction – the destruction of the whole subsisting social order – as the elimination of individuals who are objects of suspicion to any social order, and the annihilation of any organization which tries to rise anew from the ruins... such actuality leads at once to some sort of order, to a particularization of organizations and individuals alike...Consequently, what negative freedom intends to will can never be anything in itself but an abstract idea, and giving effect to this idea can only be the fury of destruction...[5]

According to Hegel, freedom must not remain absolute, revolutionary, and unsituated, but must be secured in the concrete institutions of ethical life. This idea, so essential to Hegel's project, is partly a response to the social and political instability

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[4] Hegel, G.W.F. *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1967: ¶5, p. 21.

generated by the French Revolution. As a result of the Revolution, political liberty is established as right for the first time, so that the universal subject becomes the basis of the political order based on his or her universal humanity, not on his or her membership to a particular group or his or her particular role in society. All political institutions stemming from this movement must, therefore, be rational in the absolute sense, meaning that they must actualize the right of mankind as radical autonomy. Hegel criticizes, however, the Revolution's apparent fear of differenciated social roles and concrete institutions:

> during the Terror in the French Revolution all differences of talent and authority were supposed to have been superseded. This period was an upheaval, and agitation, and irreconcilable hatred of everything particular...the French Revolutionaries destroyed once more the institutions which they had made themselves, since any institution whatever is antagonistic to the abstract self-consciousness of equality.[6]

Hegel did not limit his attention to French movements when criticizing the fever of radical freedom, as the German *Burschenschaften* group also embodied an extreme form of brute individual freedom. Hegel seeks, then, to overcome the absolute and formal moral freedom of Kant, which he contends lacks normative content. Taylor expresses Hegel's concerns thus:

> Complete freedom would be a void in which nothing would be worth doing, nothing would deserve to count for anything. The self which has arrived at freedom by setting aside all external obstacles and impingements is characterless, and hence without defined purpose, however much this is hidden by such seemingly positive terms as 'rationality' or 'creativity'. These are ultimately quite indeterminate as criteria for human action or mode of life. They cannot specify any content to our action

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[5] Ibid., p. 21-22.
[6] Ibid., (Additions) p. 227-28.

> outside of a situation which sets goals for us, which thus imparts a shape to rationality and provides an inspiration for creativity.[7]

Hegel writes that to free one's self from the infinite, negative, and abstract subjectivity of the Concept is to incorporate one's right and will in objective and external material. This follows Aristotelian hylomorphism, which holds that form requires matter to maintain and express itself, and conceives the subject and indeed all knowledge as necessarily embodied. The concept of embodiment remains essential to Herder and other important contributors to the expressive conception of language. For Hegel, moral freedom, equated with universal reason, must find its embodiment in its opposite, the finite human being in unreflective unity with nature. Here we see the logic of Hegel's dialectical reasoning. Subjective reason and unreflective expressive unity with nature are opposites, but in their opposition they depend on a kind of prior identity, so that the rational subject is both identical with and opposed to his embodiment in a naturally finite, social, situated being. This contradiction of Concept and Object finds higher mediated unity in the Idea, or, as Taylor reads it, the underlying formula of conceptual necessity by which Geist, or spirit, posits the world. Moral subjectivity enters nature in an infusion of nature by spirit.

1.2 Hegel's Qualitative Theory of Action

Taylor shows how Hegel's idea of embodiment can be understood through the concept of action. Hegel considers self-reflective human action as qualitatively superior to instinctual, semi-conscious, though observable movement. This distinction is essential

[7] C. Taylor, *Hegel*, op. cit., p. 561.

to Taylor for human beings to understand themselves as agents, capable of inhabiting actions with ends (in the Aristotelian sense) and consciously deciding which available courses of action to take. The self-reflective nature of human action creates a specific kind of agent knowledge, one that is not necessarily available to an outside, empirical observer, but that depends on situated experience. With this form of knowledge, Taylor writes, "we are capable of grasping our own action in a way that we cannot come to know external objects and events...[it is] a knowledge we are capable of concerning our own action which we can attain as the doers of this action."[8] An important point of situated, agent knowledge is that it depends, for both Hegel and Taylor, on articulating the implicit sense of our purposes and feelings in order to bring them to fuller self-conscience. These formulations are necessarily embodied in and mediated through expressive forms, such as conceptual thought and even social institutions and practices. Such articulations can be more or less rational, as we shall see in the next chapter focusing on the Best Account principle.

The qualitative view of action and the principle of embodied thought show that self-conscious human understanding is an inward reflection of what was initially an external, situated activity. This means that thought must be conceived not as mere data reception and generation, but mental *activity*. This links humanity to Geist, or spirit, which is conceived by Hegel as 'thoroughgoing activity', or *Tätigkeit*.[9] To Hegel, a clearer articulation of our self-understanding brings us to a clearer understanding of what spirit does *through* us. Clearer rational consciousness, seen as an achievement rather than a given, shows us to be, in the end, identical with spirit. For the ultimate synthesis

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[8] C. Taylor, *Human Agency and Language,* op. cit., p. 80.
[9] Ibid., p. 77.

between the finite human conscience and spirit to occur, the human must first consider itself as a part of spirit, or infinite subject. Every rational thought and activity is shown to be an extension of spirit's activity. Reality is actuality, or *Wirklichkeit*.[10]

1.3 Taylor's Reading of Hegelian Spirit

By Taylor's reading, Hegel presents his philosophical system as a teleological historical unfolding in which Geist, or absolute spirit, is to become fully self-conscious of itself; however, since it is necessarily embodied in finite human beings, it is through humanity's continued conceptual and expressive articulation that this self-clarity is reached. Geist is not capable of self-knowledge prior to its physical embodiment in the universe and in humanity. It is through the human's expression of the Concept, or subjective reason and freedom, embodied in his or her linguistic articulations and social institutions, that the absolute spirit becomes manifest. Humanity's substantive spirit, its expressed social institutions, practices, and commonly understood meanings must be rational, however, since reason, not sentiment or intuition, is the essence of Geist. Each historical community or life form, according to Hegel, represents two contradictory expressions. On the one hand, it is an effective, real, or actual pattern, consisting of objective ethical institutions and practices. On the other hand, it is a situated expression of a unique understanding of spirit and humanity. This duality re-emerges in Taylor's Best Account principle. It is the tension between the actual pattern and the expressed self-understanding that continually drives the historical movement towards the synthesis of the two. When the end of history is reached, according to Hegel, spirit will become

[10] Ibid., p. 84.

understandable to itself, while the human life-process will be clearly revealed as an embodiment of this spirit.

Hegel claims that humans cannot develop self-understanding, substantial freedom, or rational autonomy in isolated self-sufficiency, apart from the social wholes to which they belong. The idea that clear, rational activity depends on community is not entirely unique to Hegel, but one that animates the political and ethical philosophy of Aristotle and the tradition stemming from it. Although Aristotle did not speak in the modern terms of freedom, his conception of the human being was of a naturally social and political animal whose ultimate purpose or *telos* was to actively develop his or her capacity for rational reflection.[11] For Aristotle and Hegel alike, the progressive growth towards fuller rational clarity can only be achieved through an engagement with one's community. The Hegelian conception of freedom as concrete political autonomy depends on critical communication in constructing laws and relations of co-existence. It is only in ethical relationships, and thus in community, that true human selfhood and freedom are achieved. Substantive, ethical ties must be created between people conceived holistically and concretely, which necessarily includes their particular situation.

According to Hegel, intersubjectively mediated autonomy occurs in the sphere of the ethical life, which develops to increasing degrees through the family, civil society, and finally in the state, the pinnacle of substantive freedom. The other's freedom, unlike with Kant or Hobbes, must then be seen not as an obstacle to the subject's freedom, but rather its condition. It is in the ethical pinnacle of the state, the highest human manifestation of substantive reason, that Geist is most powerfully and completely made conscious of itself. Individual self-consciousness knows the state as its essence, or "spirit

objectified," for "it is only as one of its members that the individual himself has objectivity, genuine individuality, and an ethical life."[12] Hegel's state presents historical spirit as the determination missing in the abstract concept at the root of freedom. The state, and indeed all ethical institutions that embody spirit, are the conditions of its self-realization. These institutions are precisely those through which *Wirklichkeit* occurs, how the rational becomes actual. The reciprocal determination between the subjective conscience and the objective relations of ethical life produce a higher, substantive form of freedom. The state does not consist of a merely abstract amalgamation of atomic wills, but the organic collection of intersubjective relations. The concrete institutions that modern subjective freedom demand, such as property, contract, and civil society, are given ethical restraint and rationality within the larger framework of the state. This ensures that these modern achievements of selfhood do not cause the subject to slide towards pure egoism or absolute and negative freedom, but rather serve to help him or her gain more concrete and situated freedom.

1.4 Taylor's Critique of Hegel's Ontology

Taylor finds merit in Hegel for his insight that the public life of a people, its practices, institutions, and shared meanings are like a language that expresses a particular substantive spirit. Indeed, this idea is an important component of the expressive conception of language. Taylor also looks to Hegel as the most penetrating philosopher to attempt the still relevant project of uniting freedom and nature, understanding the dynamics of situated subjectivity. Taylor is critical, however, of what he reads to be

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[11] Aristotle. *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995: Book 1, Chap. 2.
[12] G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, op. cit., ¶258, p. 156.

Hegel's basic ontological view. Taylor reads Hegel's doctrine of objective spirit as a theodicy in which humanity is a vehicle of the cosmic subject, or, in Vincent Descombes' terms, a *corpus mysticum*[13] of Geist. Here, the state becomes an expression of Idea as conceptual necessity itself. Taylor argues that the Hegelian conception of objective spirit and the ultimate synthesis of autonomy with nature has become most implausible to moderns. During the Romantic period, when nature was still considered to be an expression of spiritual powers, humanity's rational synthesis with it seemed more possible. Since then, however, humanity has treated nature with such an increasingly objectified, disengaged, and mechanistic stance that we can no longer consider it as the expression of spirit, or history as the development of its self-consciousness.

Taylor first identifies Hegel as a seminal figure in the development of an expressive conception of language because the latter sees art, religion, and philosophy as actively completing the realization of Geist in increasingly adequate degrees. Hegel, in Taylor's view, however, later gives primacy to the descriptive side when absolute spirit is finally completely manifested in clear, conceptual expression. Any unarticulated consciousness at the beginning of the dialectical system is accounted for in the chain of rational necessity leading to the full self-understanding of Geist. Taylor writes: "In Hegel's case...our full understanding of the whole in 'thought' carries with it a grasp of its inner necessity."[14] As a result, to Hegel, human thought no longer relies on an ever-present background of unarticulated, unreflective understanding. By Taylor's reading of Hegel, nothing new in the embodied situation of humanity is left to be explored and expressed once it reaches the end of history: "As [Hegel's] solution fades, his far-

[13] Descombes, Vincent. "Is There an Objective Spirit?" *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, ed. James Tully. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994: p. 96.

reaching claims on behalf of conceptual thought separate him from Herder's heirs in our day, for whom the unreflective experience of our situation can never be made fully explicit, and seem to align him with those for whom the problem should never have been posed."[15]

Taylor is, therefore, critical of what he reads in Hegel as a closed conception of history. He argues that there is no final totality of meaning and no absolute, achievable state of human experience, but rather an on-going and inevitable process of self-expression and self-interpretation in relation to a more open, flexible moral framework. Taylor sees Hegel's dialectical ontology as too restrictive to mankind's creative powers of expressive articulation, too quick to close the background of meaning and to render the whole determinable, something which Taylor argues should remain beyond the reach of humanity. Taylor writes:

> What makes possible this final victory of conceptual clarity is of course Hegel's ontology, the thesis that what we ultimately discover at the basis of everything is the Idea, conceptual necessity itself. Conceptual thought is not trying to render a reality whose foundations can never be definitely identified, nor is it the thought of a subject whose deeper instincts, cravings and aspirations can never be fully fathomed. On the contrary, at the root of reality, as in the depths of himself, the subject ultimately finds clear, conceptual necessity.[16]

Taylor reads Hegel as conceiving the human as an instrument for the unfolding of rational necessity, the movement towards a complete self-clarity of Geist. It should be noted, however, that in recent scholarship we find exception to this particular reading of

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[14] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 18.
[15] C. Taylor, *Hegel*, op.cit., p. 569.
[16] Ibid.

Hegel. Williams[17], Harris[18], and Pippin[19] are examples of writers with more generous, and perhaps more nuanced interpretations of Hegel with regard to the creative freedom his ontology allows human beings communicating intersubjectively.

Although Taylor rejects Hegel's ontology, he does take up his project of theorizing the boundaries and potentialities of situated freedom. He writes:

> if the historical experience of objectifying and transforming nature in theory and practice is too powerful for it to survive as an interlocutor; then the expressivist current of opposition to modern civilization has to focus on man... But expressive fulfilment entails a certain integrity, a wholeness of life, which does not admit of division between body and soul, will and inclination, spirit and nature. If this fulfilment no longer means communion with nature and embodiment of spirit, nature must still figure in it in some fashion.[20]

Taylor sees two forms of post-Hegelian expressive attempts at this communion. The first consists in expressing our deeper, natural motivations, with an emphasis on inherent qualities such as language, culture, race, and geography. The second, which includes Marxism and Fascism in Taylor's mind, sought to transform both nature and society according to the expressive will of mankind, thus combining radical autonomy with expressive unity in a way far more anthropocentric than Hegel.[21] Absolute freedom and radical self-determination, therefore, risk not only vacuity, but also a nihilistic will to power.

Taylor's philosophy certainly shares some aspects of the first form of post-Hegelian expressivism, in the way that he relates language and culture to questions of the

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[17] Williams, R.R. *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
[18] Harris, H.S. *Hegel's Ladder.* 2 vol. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997.
[19] Pippin, Robert. *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
[20] C. Taylor, *Hegel*, op.cit., p. 546.
[21] Ibid.

good. His project, however, does not unquestionably affirm the value of inherent particularity to the same extent of the post-Romantic nationalist movements, since he calls on each people to rationally justify their self-interpretation through the Best Account principle according to standards of openness and rational inclusiveness. In this way, exclusionary practices, such as those motivated by notions of racial or gender supremacy, cannot be justified by an appeal to a natural particularity inherent to the group.

1.5 Theorizing Situated Freedom Through Language

Exploring the relation between autonomy and expressive unity with nature is still relevant to Taylor, although not in the terms of Hegel's dialectical logic. Descombes writes that Taylor has undertaken to develop a more positive version of the Hegelian notion, "freed of its theological baggage."[22] Although some of Taylor's critics would rightly argue that his philosophy does not entirely do away with theistic notions, the essence of his explanation of both situated freedom and an 'objective spirit' (as the sharing of social goods and meanings) depends much more on the modern philosophy of language.

Taylor adheres particularly to the expressive conception of language, through which he wishes to emphasize individual self-reflexivity and its role in rationally articulating human moral frameworks. The expressive conception tries to relate linguistic consciousness and explicitly articulated thought to its matrix in the yet-unreflective, implicit, and intuited sense of our human condition which, Taylor claims, can never be completed as a final experience. It sees various levels of consciousness, the more articulated levels expressed in words and symbols, making manifest the background

levels of the implicit. Here, Hegel's concepts of embodiment and qualitative action are still influential. Indeed, Taylor admits that "the contemporary attempt...to situate subjectivity by relating it to our life as embodied and social beings, without reducing it to a function of objectified nature, constantly refers us back to Hegel."[23] Since each historical culture develops different linguistic and symbolic modes to express the articulated levels, each comes to experience the good or the true in different ways. The language matrix, the various language life forms that a people expresses their implicit intuitions through, serve to form the ever-shifting boundaries that situate the space of its freedom, or rational and moral subjectivity. Particular expressive media shape the situated, normative content that Hegel sought to infuse into Kant's absolute freedom.

The mention of language life forms brings to mind the highly influencial language philosophy of Wittgenstein. He, along with other twentieth century philosophers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, sought to demonstrate how our unique, personal world (or engaged agency) is shaped by our culture, the language games that direct our everyday experience, or the fact that we perceive all phenomenon from the situated perspective of a finite, physical body. These theorists of situated subjectivity have all influenced Taylor in their own way, most notably in that they all share the notion that experience and thought depend on the finite form that they receive in each of our particular situations. In *Hegel*, Taylor describes the question of situated freedom as

> how to go beyond the notion of the self as the subject of a self-dependent will and bring to light its insertion in nature, our own and that which surrounds us...This means to recover a conception of free activity which sees it as a response called for by a situation which is ours in virtue of our condition as natural and social beings, or in virtue of some inescapable vocation or purpose.

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[22] V. Descombes, op. cit., p. 97.
[23] C. Taylor, *Hegel*, op.cit., p. 570.

> What is common to all the varied notions of situated freedom is that they see free activity as grounded in the *acceptance* of our defining situation. The struggle to be free – against limitations, oppression, distortions of inner and outer origin – is powered by an affirmation of this defining situation as ours.[24]

We will see how the above-mentioned thinkers shaped the expressive conception of language later, in the third chapter. I would agree with Descombes that it is this conception of language that allows Taylor to develop his own notion of 'objective spirit'.[25] Language serves to form the shared meanings and practices that constitute the general, public spirit of a people. Taylor writes:

> In this sense we can think of the institutions and practices of a society as a kind of language in which its fundamental ideas are expressed. But what is 'said' in this language is not ideas which could be in the minds of certain individuals only, they are rather common to a society, because embedded in its collective life, in practices and institutions which are of the society indivisibly. In these the spirit of society is in a sense objectified. They are, to use Hegel's term, 'objective spirit'.[26]

One of Taylor's main theses, adopted from Aristotle and Hegel, is that life in community can not be understood or experienced in a way that reduces community to an instrument for the fulfillment of the necessary conditions of life. On the contrary, community brings a sense of ethical meaning and purpose to individuals. Descombes writes that objective spirit in Taylor's sense can be seen as

> akin to a shareable 'state of mind' or a rule to follow, as a condition for the exercise of intelligent activity, a condition to which individuals would be subject in a manner not requiring their consent. Humboldt called *die innere Sprachform*, of an internal form, that confers a 'spirit' upon a language... An objective spirit of this kind is made up of rules and established uses, which

[24] Ibid., p. 563. Emphasis is Taylor's.
[25] V. Descombes, op.cit., p. 105.
[26] C. Taylor, *Hegel*, op.cit., p. 382.

transcend the free agency of individuals and their mutual conventions.[27]

Hegel is one of the primary philosophers on questions of communally generated and maintained ethical goods. The importance of community is inseparable from concepts of situated (or embodied) reason and freedom. It is the necessarily situated aspect of our consciousness that gives unique shape to each of our implicit moral frameworks, to use Taylor's terms. Taylor's concern with the expressive power of language is largely due to its role in articulating these yet-unreflective levels of our moral intuition so that our situated, culturally-bound experiences of the good can be drawn towards universality as openness and inclusiveness. The purpose of the above discussion was to clarify the concept of situated subjectivity and to emphasize the importance of Hegel in its development. Taylor, despite his critique of Hegel's ontology, develops much of his own philosophy based on the German idealist's thought. In the following chapter, I will assess to what extent this idea of situated freedom, with its two demands for reason and expressive unity with nature, is satisfied by Taylor's Best Account principle.

[27] V. Descombes, op.cit., p. 98-99. Emphasis is Descombes'.

2. The Best Account as a Principle of Rational Justification

In this chapter we take a deeper look at Taylor's Best Account principle, including its assumptions, ramifications, merits, and limitations. Since its conception, the Best Account principle has been engaged in polemics with a number of other principles of justification. To better elucidate Taylor's principle, I will critically contrast it with three of these principles, those of procedural liberalism, scientific naturalism, and relativism (or radical subjectivism). Through these contrasts, I hope to show that among the merits of the Best Account principle is its ability to synthesize (albeit never completely) the two metaphysical demands of situated freedom: rational freedom and expressive unity with nature. Within the context of this discussion, I will periodically articulate these two demands through the terms of universality versus particularity. We will see, for instance, that in contrast to the principles of justification of procedural liberalism, the Best Account principle affirms substantive goods that are the products of the expressive articulation of a *particular* life form. On the other hand, in contrast to the justification principles of relativism and subjectivism, the Best Account principle affirms a standard of human respect that brings particular articulations of the good in line with the demands of *universal* reason. This will be developed further below.

Taylor's Best Account is a hermeneutic principle of discourse that aims at the rational articulation and critical supercession of moral ontologies and the goods that these ontologies articulate. As we saw above, a moral ontology is an interpretive, descriptive account of mankind's spiritual nature, our moral predicament, and our specifically human situation in the world. The Best Account principle is one of practical reasoning, a dialogical evaluation of substantive differences between worldviews meant to overcome

neutral formalism, relativism, and radical subjectivism. Within this principle of discourse, interlocutors situated in a particular physical, social, historical, and moral space are asked to be reflexive towards their pre-articulate moral intuitions and their implicit assumptions imbedded in the background of their everyday understanding. They are then asked to give their best possible interpretation of that which they feel makes human beings worthy objects of respect, dignity, and benevolence. The process is hermeneutic in that it begins from the standpoint of the engaged agent's self-description, a self-description that is, like the subject, constituted socially. At the same time, however, these interpretive accounts can be superceded by more inclusionary and comprehensive ones, just as more comprehensive interpretations of a text or of a historical event can trump more exclusionary interpretations.

The critical assessment of these descriptive interpretations is carried out intersubjectively. We will see in the following chapter how this intersubjective evaluation is facilitated by an expressive conception of language and meaning. In the process of evaluation, agents compare the rational validity of one articulated (no longer implicit) moral ontology against that of others, so that they may re-articulate and refine the best possible account of the human moral predicament. The Best Account principle depends on a conception of reason that has a source in the Platonic conception of *episteme* as 'giving an account'. Within this perspective, to be engaged in rationality is to find the most perspicuous articulation of something. Taylor writes: "The best articulation of something is what lays it out in the most perspicuous order," that order which "offers a broader, more comprehensive grasp on things."[1] Taylor extends the notion of rationality past the merely formal demand of logical consistency. What is

involved in the Best Account principle's 'richer' concept of rationality is revealed, according to Taylor, in making judgements of superiority about self-interpreted moral descriptions, as well as about seemingly incommensurable cultural practices. As with Hegel's conception of practical reasoning, the Best Account principle proceeds through the comparison of accounts, directed towards error-reducing transitions. Taylor writes: "The superiority of one position over another will thus consist in this, that from the more adequate position one can understand one's own stand and that of one's opponent, but not the other way around."[2] The result, however, is never a final truth, but rather opens up to further interpretation. The room left by the Best Account for the possible falsifiability and refinement of terms is opposed to Hegel's fully self-revealing Geist, according to Taylor's reading of the German philosopher.

According to the Best Account principle, the primary normative standard by which interpretive accounts are deemed appropriate or rational is that of universality as inclusion and the respect of all persons. However, while the Best Account principle defends the modern goods of rational autonomy and the promotion of universal dignity and respect, I argue that it still strengthens the expressive integrity of culturally specific goods. Both demands of situated freedom are taken into consideration. This is achieved by starting from the perspective of agents engaged in a particular moral horizon and by demanding that the agent reflexively evaluate and articulate his or her position from within this space. The assumptions and implications of the Best Account principle shall be more fully developed below, through its comparison with the principles of justification of procedural liberalism, scientific naturalism, and relativism.

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[1] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 137.
[2] Ibid., p. 53.

2.1 BA Principle vs. Principles of Justification of Procedural Liberalism

As was stated in the introduction, much of contemporary moral philosophy and ethical debate seeks universal, procedural justifications for moral action. Particularly within modern, multicultural societies, which hold a plurality of seemingly incommensurable goods, practical reason seeks either a categorical law, a set of discursive rules, or a utilitarian principle for maximizing happiness with which all groups can identify and upon which universally applicable legislation, norms of distributive justice, principles of social integration, or cross-cultural dispute mediation can be based. These primarily neo-Kantian formal principles, developed notably by Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, give primacy to universal moral standards above particular, culturally-bound conceptions of the good life. Taylor argues that this tendency is a modern one, as the dissolution of the ancient Greek conception of an inherently rational Cosmos, as well as the post-Enlightenment marginalization of the theistic vision of a providential order, has left (in Weber's terms) a 'disenchanted' public space. Within the modern, disenchanted world, the vast plurality of articulated ethical visions is often either regarded as lacking an authoritative and demonstrable foundation or as unjustly restrictive to the negative freedom of the individual. In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas writes that in pre-modern societies, validity (the binding force of rationally motivated beliefs) and facticity (the imposed force of external, institutionalized sanctions) were fused, so that religious and political bodies enjoyed a relatively unquestionable authority. He writes:

> A...fusion of facticity and validity that...stabilizes behavioral expectations appears...at the level of knowledge that has already passed through communicative action and is thus thematically available, namely, in those archaic institutions that present themselves with an apparently unassailable

> claim to authority...The authority of powerful institutions encounters actors *within* their social lifeworld...The lifeworld, of which institutions form a part, comes into view as a complex of interpenetrating cultural traditions, social orders, and personal attitudes...In this case, the *fusion of facticity and validity* occurs...in the mode of an authority that imperiously confronts us and arouses ambivalent feelings...an antecedent, intrinsically *compelling* and at the same time *bonding* authority. Social sanctions borrow their deontological meaning, so to speak, from this authority.[3]

2.1.1 Habermas' Communicative Action and Discourse Ethics

The problem that emerges in modern societies, according to Habermas, is "how the validity and acceptance of a social order can be stabilized once communicative actions become autonomous and clearly begin to differ, in the view of the actors themselves, from strategic interactions."[4] How, in a modern, disenchanted society, can we achieve a convergence of particular, self-interested action with the universality of a binding normative order? Habermas writes that where communicative action has been cut from the ties of sacred authorities and archaic institutions, the risk of dissension grows. Both Taylor and Habermas are concerned with the modern re-articulation of the problem of reconciling the particular with the universal. This question is not new to our century, however, as it was approached both by Rousseau's concept of General Will, as well as by Hegel's conception of the state as a unifying institution that transcends a divided civil society that is ruled by self-interest. In a similar vein as Hegel, Habermas writes that social integration is especially necessary with the growing spheres of functionally necessary strategic interaction, for instance, the market economy. However, in view of what he calls "the morally justified pluralism of life projects and life-forms,"

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[3] Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996: p. 23-24. Emphasis is Habermas'.
[4] Ibid., p. 25.

Habermas claims that "philosophers can no longer provide on their own account *generally binding* directives concerning the meaning of life. In their capacity as philosophers, their only recourse is to reflective analysis of the procedure through which ethical questions *in general* can be answered."[5] Habermas starts from the "modern situation of a predominantly secular society in which normative orders must be maintained without metasocial guarantees. Even lifeworld certainties, which in any case are pluralized and ever more differentiated, do not provide sufficient compensation for this deficit."[6] One reason that Habermas offers as to why modern lifeworld certainties do not provide sufficient compensation for traditional sources of normative authority is that at the level of implicit, pre-reflective understanding and moral intuition, facticity and validity are fused: "the counterfactual moment of idealization, which always overshoots the given and first makes a disappointing confrontation with reality possible, is extinguished in the dimension of validity itself."[7] Before agents articulate their understandings through the utterance of validity claims, they make everyday, pre-reflective use of this background knowledge. Habermas' conception of background understanding is, on this level, quite similar to Taylor's. Habermas writes that humans exercise such knowledge pre-reflectively, without the awareness of the possibility that it might be false. This, he claims, is why such background understanding is not a *constitutive* feature of articulated knowledge. He writes: "As background knowledge, it

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[5] J. Habermas. *Justification and Application*, trans. Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993: p. 75-76. Emphasis is Habermas'.
[6] J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, op.cit., p. 26.
[7] Ibid., p. 23.

lacks the possibility of being challenged, that is, of being raised to the level of criticizable validity claims."[8]

To Habermas, norms suitable for socially integrating constraints on strategic, self-interested interactions must "bring about a willingness to comply *simultaneously* by means of de facto constraint and legitimate validity. Norms of this kind would have to appear with an authority that once again equips validity with the force of the factual."[9] Habermas' theory of communicative action is meant to offer a guide for the modern reconstruction of the network of opinion-forming discourses from which democratic authority can be developed. It provides a critical standard against which the legitimacy of actual institutions and practices can be measured.

What is primary for Habermas, as a neo-Kantian, is that the *procedure* by which individuals and groups come to practical, ethical, or moral consensus be transparent, inclusionary, and just. Social integration in a modern society, according to Habermas, depends on the communicative achievements of actors. In his discourse ethics and communicative action theory, Habermas applies communicative intersubjectivity to Kantian practical reasoning and lays out the guidelines of illocusionary language that must be followed if a participating agent is to deliberate rationally. Habermas argues that Kant's monological rational law fails to acknowledge the intersubjective nature of collective will formation. The goal of his discourse ethics is to appropriate the Kantian notion of autonomy and vindicate its cognitive and universalistic claims within a dialogical framework. This detranscendentalizes Kant's noumenal realm and brings the

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[8] Ibid., p. 22.
[9] Ibid., p. 27. Emphasis is Habermas'.

rational force of context-transcending validity claims down to the level of the pragmatic presuppositions of everyday communicative acts.

Habermas writes: "Discourse ethics puts collective will formation to the plane of institutionalized procedures and communicative presuppositions of processes of argumentation and negotiation that must be actually carried out."[10] To Habermas, communicative reason is inscribed in the linguistic telos of mutual understanding and comes with a collection of illocutionary conditions that enable it. Habermas provides his ideal communication situation for collective assessment of both universal morals and more particular ethical norms, through which groups can openly and critically determine the best course of action in the case of conflicting ideas. Justice resides in the communicative procedure, not in the particular content of goods being defended. He explains: "The neutrality of the law vis-à-vis internal ethical differentiations stems from the fact that in complex societies the citizenry as a whole can no longer be held together by a substantive consensus on values but only by a consensus on the procedures for the legitimate enactment of laws and the legitimate exercise of power."[11]

By gaining the consent of all those affected by a given norm and by taking into consideration all points of view that have potentially been affected by an awareness of the norms of a larger universal community, the debated guides to ethical action can claim more legitimacy and justification. All speech acts are directed to the "ideally expanded audience of the unlimited interpretation community that would have to be convinced for the speech act to be justified and, hence, rationally acceptable."[12] Communicative reason,

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[10] J. Habermas, *Justification and Application*, op.cit., p. 16.
[11] J. Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State." *Multiculturalism*, op.cit., p. 135.
[12] J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, op.cit., p. 19.

in this way, makes an acknowledgement of validity claims, or rationally motivated beliefs, possible. It pertains to criticizable insights and utterances that are made available to intersubjective clarification.

Participants in argumentation must follow a set of discursive rules, called universal pragmatics. These rules include that every participant be allowed to express his or her views, that each be allowed the same time to explain reasons and objections, that each have equal access to complete information and consultation, that each participate in an environment of non-coercion, that each engage in discussion with the goal of reaching normative justice for all, and that each can accept the norm that is finally agreed upon. Thus, the universal pragmatics compose an ideal speech situation to strive for that presupposes these conditions of illocutionary language. Here, the ends of language are to indicate intention, to engage in open and honest interaction, and to reach mutual understanding. Thus, that which is agreed upon receives its normative sense not by an *a priori* moral content, but rather by a rational, and therefore legitimate, procedure. In this way, it is ensured that the potentially constraining social norms of traditional communities do not exclude any potential participants. This demand for the inclusion of all perspectives is, as we saw, also a primary tenet of Taylor's Best Account principle. In both theories, everyone is invited to openly contribute to the reconstruction, justification, and legitimization of ethical and moral norms.

Habermas acknowledges that all participants come to the arena of interlocution with a substantive idea of the good that will serve to motivate their action; however, the historical, social, and concrete conditions that determine identity are meant to be incorporated within the intersubjectivity of rational deliberation. He writes: "For the

theory of rights in no way forbids the citizens of a democratic constitutional state to assert a conception of the good in their general legal order, a conception they either already share or have come to agree on through political discussion. It does, however, forbid them to privilege one form of life at the expense of others within the nation."[13]

Following Kant's universalization of particular maxims, the only concern that is categorically binding to Habermas is the universal rationality of the performative process by which substantive goods are evaluated. Habermas makes a clear deontological distinction between the sphere of good and the higher sphere of right, justice, or morality. Habermas writes that in deontological approaches, "morality is set apart from the beginning as a social phenomenon and is delimited from individual aspirations to happiness, existential problems, and sensuous needs."[14] Based on the universal ideal of mutual respect for persons, this secularized morality transcends the situated moral frameworks of any given social ethos. The discourse ethics intersubjectively test the generalizability of norms so as to exclude prejudice and demand the coordination of pluralistic societies. Habermas develops a system that appropriates ethical knowledge in a critical fashion and renders it reflective from the perspective of the participants. In response to Taylor, he writes: "When a culture becomes reflexive, the only traditions and forms of life that can sustain themselves are those that bind their members while at the same time subjecting themselves to critical examination and leaving later generations the option of learning from other traditions or converting and setting out for other shores..."[15]

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[13] J. Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," op.cit., p. 128.
[14] J. Habermas, *Justification and Application*, op.cit., p. 70.

2.1.2 Rawls' Theory of Justice

Like Habermas, Rawls believes that the only viable conception of justice would be a general political and procedural one that could be agreed upon by all holders of diverse conceptions of the good. His political liberalism tries to conceive the most appropriate conception of justice for determining the terms of social cooperation between free and equal citizens. Rawls' eligibility criterion asks what socio-political arrangement people would choose if suitably positioned to make the choice. Like the Kantian agent who universalizes particular maxims according to a formal moral law, the Rawlsian agent must evaluate principles according to general considerations of fairness, while masking out self-interest. This is carried out in Rawls' initial position, where the agent acts under a 'veil of ignorance'. Under this hypothetical veil, man is unaware of his social status, fortune, strengths, weaknesses, or his particular conception of the good. It is taken for granted that the agent is rational, random, free, and equal to all others. Under the veil of ignorance, agents try to find a political arrangement by balancing competing claims and interests under enforced impartiality, which Rawls claims would give these arrangements a good claim to fairness.[16] Agents decide the way major social institutions fit into a single system that assigns rights, duties, political constitution, legal property, the organization of the economy, and the social advantages that arise through cooperation. People are motivated by the protection of their own capacity to form, change, and pursue their own private conception of the good life, while the public space is neutralized of any substantive conception of the good. Rawls presents two principles of justice he believes would be chosen in the initial position:

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[15] J. Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," op.cit., p. 130-31.
[16] Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971: p. 136-7.

a. Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all; and in this scheme the equal political liberties, and only those liberties, are to be guaranteed their fair value.
b. Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.[17]

2.1.3 Taylor's Communitarian Critique of Proceduralism

Both Habermas' discourse ethics and Rawls' theory of justice have been categorized as formalistic, universal cognitivist, and deontological. Because of these characteristics, both have been objects of criticism from communitarian writers in the Aristotelian tradition. It is in this tradition that Taylor's thought, which focuses on the contextuality of practical reason, takes shape along with that of Alasdair MacIntyre,[18] Michael Sandel,[19] Michael Walzer,[20] and Bernard Williams.[21] Some communitarians, Taylor included, have argued that the principles of justification of liberal, universalist rationality both neglect the importance of particular life stories within the community and also, as a result, suffer problems of application and motivation in particular cases. These criticisms have been considered a modern echo of those levied through Hegel's *Sittlichkeit* against Kant's conception of morality. For Taylor, as with Aristotle, ethics is the content and substance of the good life, not simply the form of rational deliberation. To Taylor, it is this particular ethical content which inspires humans to act towards the

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[17] Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993: p. 5.
[18] MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.
[19] Sandel, Michael. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
[20] Walzer, Michael. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality.* New York: Basic Books, 1983.
[21] Williams, Bernard. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy.* London: Fontana, 1985.

good and to intervene in the real world around them. Man's ethical action consists in recognizing, evaluating, and intuitively responding towards goods whose worth lies exogenous to the individual. Taylor, however, sees the modern identity as prey to an unreflective and false self-understanding that obstructs the sources of motivation for the good. According to Taylor, philosophy should, therefore, persuade individuals of the importance of their orientation to hypergoods. This is impossible, according to Taylor, if one makes the deontological separation of moral action from its motivational sources and practical reason from the desires and intuitions that propel us towards such sources.

Taylor charges that both the Habermasian and Rawlsian focus on procedure masks the qualitative distinctions that actually propel their liberal formalist theories. He writes: "Impelled by the strongest metaphysical, epistemological, and moral ideas of the modern age, these theories narrow our focus to the determinants of action, and then restrict our understanding of these determinants still further by defining practical reason as exclusively procedural."[22] Taylor argues that one of the basic normative premises of modern liberalism is that different individuals, driven by a vast plurality of ethical goods, should be free to pursue their own vision of the good life without encroachment by other individuals or by the state, while social practices that facilitate free economic cooperation can be developed. Another particularly moral justification of proceduralism, again offered by Taylor, is that it removes from the sphere of public enforcement any demanding conceptions of virtue that, if not attained, might cause individuals to feel inadequate or underdeveloped. According to Taylor, proceduralist justifications rest on an 'ethic of ordinary life', as well as a normative focus on reducing human suffering. They focus on human fulfillment stemming from everyday production, or a commitment

to family and friends, while rooting out ethical systems such as that of the warrior or the religious crusader that, in their pursuit, can lead to internalized feelings of inadequacy or even cause harm to others. Evidently, Taylor sees proceduralist justifications of rationality as in fact driven by particular ethical distinctions, but as hypocritically rejecting any official commitment to these or any other substantive goods. Taylor writes:

> Rawls, for instance, seems to be proposing in *A Theory of Justice* that we develop a notion of justice starting only within a 'thin theory of the good'... But this suggestion is on the deepest level incoherent. Rawls does, of course, manage to derive...his two principles of justice. But as he himself agrees, we recognize that these are indeed acceptable principles of justice because they fit with our intuitions. If we were to articulate what underlies these intuitions we would start spelling out a very 'thick' theory of the good...we have to draw on the sense of the good that we have in order to decide what are adequate principles of justice.[23]

Although Taylor is right in highlighting the liberal focus on the strictly procedural justifications of validity, I find that he tends to underestimate the extent to which these theories overtly recognize the need to situate communicative reason in social lifeworlds. Will Kymlicka, similarly, feels that most communitarians overstate the criticism that liberal theories negate the importance of social contextuality. In his defence of liberalism, Kymlicka writes: "The individualism that underlies liberalism isn't valued at the expense of our social nature or our shared community. It is an individualism that accords with, rather than opposes, the undeniable importance to us of our social world."[24] Habermas, for example, admits that "[c]ommunicative reason...does not itself supply any substantive orientation for managing practical tasks...and thus falls short of a practical

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[22] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 89.
[23] Ibid., p. 88-89.

reason aimed at motivation, at guiding the will."[25] But, he does not underestimate how "[t]he inarticulate, socially integrating experiences of considerateness, solidarity, and fairness shape our intuitions and provide us with better instruction about morality than arguments ever could."[26] Although Habermas rejects pre-reflective lifeworlds as constituents of validated knowledge, he argues that these normative lifeworlds *intersect* with universal communicative reason in the justification of moral insights. The validity that supports illocusionary speech-acts is also embodied within the life forms reproduced through communicative action. He writes that lifeworld contexts, with their set of familiar and unproblematic beliefs, provide the necessary background for consensus oriented towards social integration. Without them, he admits, communicative action is impossible. Habermas writes: "The lifeworld forms both the horizon for speech situations and the source of interpretations, while it in turn reproduces itself only through ongoing communicative actions...the background of communicative action can be described as a more intense yet deficient form of knowledge and ability."[27]

The deficiency of pre-reflective understanding is something that both Habermas and Taylor admit. I argue that Taylor's Best Account principle indeed shares Habermas' modern aim of self-reflexivity and rational evaluation and justification, the demand of situated freedom that transcends pre-reflective harmony with one's social and natural environment. Taylor, however, makes a much larger effort to recognize and re-articulate substantive goods, as well as to emphasize how these goods provide the situated frameworks that motivate human moral agency, make this agency intelligible, and make

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[24] Kymlicka, Will. *Liberalism, Community, and Culture.* Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989: p. 3.
[25] J. Habermas, *Between Fact and Norms*, op.cit., p. 23.
[26] J. Habermas, *Justification and Application*, op.cit., p. 76.

it constitutive of individual and community identity. Taylor's project defends the modern good of autonomy by offering a discursive principle for rationalizing the moral frameworks that provide the situated backdrop of human agency. Like Habermas' communicative action theory, which "starts with the socially integrating force of rationally convincing,"[28] the Best Account principle rests on the republican rationale that presents universal respect and equal moral autonomy as its ultimate standard. However, it does this while still recognizing the importance of pre-reflective intuition, as well as the traditional articulations of this intuition. The universalist side of the Best Account principle will be further highlighted at the end of this chapter, when compared to relativist and subjectivist justifications. Here, in contrast with primarily procedural justifications, its concern for the particular will come to fuller light.

2.1.4 The Best Account Principle's Focus on the Particular

As we have seen, for both Kant and Habermas, the moral sphere categorically binds the rational will. Taylor, conversely, argues that rational obligation is not actually what drives moral action. Like Hegel and the Romantics, Taylor is critical of the formalism of the Kantian categorical imperative, which leaves open the question of motivation by remaining alien to the individual. They argue that a general, rational rule that dictates how to recognize moral law fails to motivate moral action in each individual's particular, situated context. Taylor extends from Rousseau and the Romantic tradition with his focus on moral intuition, the deep feelings residing in the individual that resonate in response to the good. To him, moral intuition, as prior to rational

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[27] J. Habermas, *Between Fact and Norms*, op.cit., p. 22.
[28] Ibid., p. 6.

evaluation, is constitutive of the will's engagement with the good. Taylor writes: "Our subject-referring emotions open us up to a sense of what it is to be human, and this sense...involves our interpreting some of our feelings as offering valid insight into what really matters and others as shallow, or even blind and distorted."[29] Sentiment, therefore, is seen by Taylor as something that should not be objectified, disengaged from, or conceived as heteronomous to the will, as Kant argues it should. Moral intuition is, rather, like Rousseau's natural attributes of *amour de soi* and *pitié*,[30] that which gives us access to the greatest goods that comprise our humanity. To be in touch with our true feelings, therefore, is to be unified with the directive voice of nature. Following Iris Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts*,[31] Taylor conceives the feeling of love as the mediator between the subject and the good. Virtue requires that one desire the good, feel it, rather than just recognize it.

Following Rousseau's and Herder's notions of expressive freedom as authenticity, Taylor holds that each individual feels the good in his or her own way, so that the manner in which one loves and, in turn, expresses the good cannot be substituted by the way of another. This is reflective of Rousseau's expressive conception of freedom, along with his critique of modern society, which, Rousseau argues, creates false and homogenizing standards of social recognition. Freedom conceived as authenticity places much faith in the subject's sentiment as a moral faculty, prior to and deeper than reason. A feeling of love or awe towards a good, awoken before any explicit, rational evaluation of it, is what motivates the subject to act according to the good, since it is experienced in a way that is

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[29] C. Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, op.cit., p. 65.
[30] J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, op. cit.
[31] Murdoch, Iris. *The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

authentic to the unique individual. Much of Taylor's project rests on the important link he highlights between identity and morality. He argues that humans always act within a moral horizon within which we know where we stand, what has meaning for us, and who we are. The human condition of being situated in physical space, the significance of which has been shown by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, can be paralleled by our being situated within a moral space. This moral framework is comprised of substantive goods constituted through strong qualitative distinctions. Without the recognition of these substantive goods, those through which humans actually make the qualitative distinctions required for full human agency, the subject remains, in Hegel's terms, at the level of abstract, unembodied individuality.

Taylor is conscious of the difficulty that people experience in feeling love for human kind in general without first identifying with a description of what makes humans deserving of such benevolence. In response to Nietzsche, Taylor acknowledges the difficulty in mobilizing a universal imperative without encouraging the articulation of self-interpreting moral visions that allude to the substantive goods that actually stimulate a more general universal benevolence. A commitment to universal respect for humanity is developed by the Best Account principle from the starting point of situated, substantive goods. It is through the experience and articulation of these goods that humans might develop a recognition of their own worth and potential for higher acts and emotions. Taylor writes:

> We agree surprisingly well, across great differences of theological and metaphysical belief, about the demands of justice and benevolence, and their importance...To the extend that we take these standards seriously...how are they experienced? They can just be felt as peremptory demands, standards that we feel inadequate, bad, or guilty for failing to meet...Or perhaps we can get a

> 'high' when we do sometimes meet them, from a sense of our own worth...But it is quite a different thing to be moved by a strong sense that human beings are eminently *worth* helping or treating with justice, a sense of their dignity or value. Here we have come into contact with the moral sources which originally underpin these sources.[32]

Taylor also argues that in maintaining a recognition of substantive goods, we avoid the suppression of the particular that is a risk when the free will is conceived as that which identifies perfectly with the universal. Within the Best Account principle, identification with the universal, albeit necessary, does not suppress particular identity. It is through a deep rational evaluation of our particular identity (or moral framework) that we come to recognize it as being composed of goods worthy of our best account. Taylor starts with the re-articulation of substantive goods, shaped by culturally-bound practices, traditions, and institutions, and then asks that these goods be evaluated by the universal standards of the Best Account principle. He does not begin, as Habermas and Rawls, from the perspective of a hypergood-neutral procedure. The best rational account of our moral predicament is composed organically, from the recognition of the traditional and modern sources of our qualitative distinctions. Focusing on intuitively-constituted qualitative distinctions as the starting points for moral action does not sit well with Habermas, however:

> [Taylor] regards an autonomous grounding of morality in reason to be impossible. A morality that rests solely on a rational procedure of impartial judgment must, in his view, alienate itself in a subjectivist manner from sources of motivation and relinquish the possibility of illuminating the background in terms of which alone the existential meaning of moral life becomes comprehensible...Then the justice of morality of justice and the rationality of rational morality are not ultimate

[32] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit, p. 515. Emphasis is Taylor's.

> but derive their inspiration, impulse, and pathos from antecedent commitments and affective states...[33]

The Best Account principle, with its openness to a plurality of potential hypergoods, escapes the vacuity of Kant's formalism, as well as utilitarianism's all-encompassing measure for good action. This inclusion of a number of substantive goods is more in line with Aristotle's community of goods and the ancient philosopher's conviction that it is better to recognize a plurality of virtues and goods, than to focus on a formal definition of virtue as correct action. Taylor's recognition of a plurality of goods is also reminiscent of Hegel's differentiated manifestation of Geist. Taylor writes: "The universe is...at once the embodiment, the realization of the conditions of existence, of *Geist*, and its expression, a statement of what *Geist* is. In this latter respect, there is no doubt about the superiority of a world in which the differences are maximally deployed. It is fuller, clearer as a statement."[34] The Best Account principle allows for a plurality of intersubjectively shared moral intuitions, so that there will never be complete convergence or unanimity. Those who seek complete, transcultural agreement would see this as a limitation; though Taylor, a defender of cultural diversity and integrity, is aware of the risk of homogenization inherent to any attempt at complete convergence. Taylor argues that substantive goods, although often in tension, should not be subtracted from practical reasoning, as they are the product of intersubjectively generated moral intuition, embodied in the social practices of particular societies, and constitutive of the moral frameworks of individuals within these societies. By encouraging individuals and groups to come to a more self-conscious articulation of their moral background, rather than by

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[33] J. Habermas, *Justification and Application*, op.cit., p. 71.

glossing over the conflicting substantive goods that comprise this background, the objective value of particular worldviews can be made manifest and languages of common understanding can be developed.

2.1.5 Substantive Goods and Public Space

The constant re-articulation of substantive goods within the Best Account principle is also reflective of Taylor's view of the purpose of the state. The state, for him, does not exist as merely an instrument for the protection and distribution of material accumulation, but to provide the social conditions necessary for learning, loving, and expressing the plurality of modern goods. Taylor is receptive to the Hegelian and Aristotelian idea that a constitution or collection of institutions will be shaped by elements in its participants' character and self-understanding. To learn, feel, and evaluate the substantive goods that animate a community, these goods must be made objectively and publicly available. Therefore, according to Hegel and Taylor, the Enlightenment project of designing a completely new social order, motivated by the utopian promise of radical freedom, is shallow in its disregard of this real factor. This is, I argue, another reason why the articulation of culturally-bound best accounts are of such importance. It brings to light individual and collective self-understandings so that ethical and legal deliberation can take better account of them, over and above a universal system of individual rights. In this way, the Best Account principle can potentially empower citizens as self-reflecting interlocutors in public space, capable of articulating their moral horizons. Differentiated articulation avoids strictly utilitarian solutions that risk marginalizing the legitimate claims of minorities and over-simplifying the terms of a

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[34] C. Taylor, *Hegel*, op.cit., p. 91.

given debate. Like Aristotle, Taylor sees the common good as a weaving together of different groups' just claims, a compromise, rather than one overriding, exogenous good. One can attribute Taylor's anti-utilitarian and anti-formalist view of practical reason at least partially to his political experience within his own country. He has been a critic of the way in which Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms attributes political recognition on a uniform, individual basis, while downplaying the specific cultural, legal, and historical particularities of the country's Francophone and Aboriginal peoples.

2.1.6 Proceduralism and the Two Demands of Situated Freedom

In terms of the opposition between the two metaphysical demands of situated agency, those of rational freedom and expressive unity with nature, universal proceduralism tends to favour the former over the latter. To repeat, the demand for expressive unity with nature implies that the subject feel a sense of harmony and identification (non-alienation) with his or her natural environment, with the social institutions, practices, and modes of interaction that direct his or her action, with the spiritual forces that he or she feels resonate within, and with the symbolic media available to him or her to express to others his or her own particular experience of these feelings. The demand for expressive unity should include, I argue, what Taylor refers to elsewhere as mankind's symbolic attunement with nature,[35] a form of uncalculating wisdom set apart from the separate demand of disengaged, rational control. Because each individual is born to and educated through a finite, culturally-shaped human situation, the languages that this situation makes available over the course of one lifetime will partially determine the conceptual and linguistic space in which the individual can

express his or her subjective, rational thought and most deeply felt moral intuitions. Each individual's and community's particular moral intuitions get shaped in the languages of their culture. These expressive media, each unique in the ideas and intersubjective relations that they have conceived historically, will shape each participant's specific moral ontological account of what it is about the human condition that commands respect. The Best Account principle, in its recognition and re-articulation of situated expressions of moral horizons, clearly stands in opposition to the Cartesian disengaged cogito. It must be, as a result, understood within the expressive, rather than designative, theory of language. This will be argued in the following chapter. The point here is to show that language-bound articulations of what commands our moral respect take shape, in large part, through the unreflective life forms that we are born into and which, I argue, are recognized within the expressive-particular side of the situated subjectivity dichotomy. The focus on life form, rather than on the cogito of a universally-conceived subject, is important to what Taylor sees (following Hegel) as the historical advantage of modernity. That is the spirit of free self-reflection carried out by a particular individual situated in his or her community, but also reflective about his or her identity with this community and the goods that it expresses.

Ruth Abbey notes that Taylor never actually abandons the *formal* requirements of reason, such as non-contradiction and logical consistency, that justify validity for proceduralists. He rather widens the demands of reason to include the most appropriate articulation of self-interpreted experience.[36] Some critics of Taylor, notably promoters of

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[35] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Humans Sciences*, op.cit., p. 142.
[36] Abbey, Ruth. *Charles Taylor.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000: p. 168. Emphasis is mine.

scientific naturalism, have questioned the validity of ontologizing these self-interpretations. Let us now turn to this set of critiques.

2.2 BA Principle vs. Principles of Justification of Scientific Naturalism

Throughout most of his intellectual career, Taylor has been engaged in a polemic against a current of thought that he groups under the term 'naturalism'. Taylor characterizes naturalist theories as those that take the disengaged, objective, and value-neutral perspective upon which the epistemological tradition is based and which is the grounds of research in the natural sciences. Taylor recognizes the worth of this view-from-nowhere perspective within the natural sciences, but opposes the ontologizing of such a perspective, as well as its often inappropriate application to the social sciences. According to Taylor, scientific naturalism tends to reduce substantive goods and terms of self-interpretation to mere anthropocentric projections of value onto an otherwise neutral physical world, tending to relativize the moral weight of these goods. When applied to the particularly human world of intentionality and moral agency, naturalism undercuts the distinctions of worth that actually motivate both human action and self-interpretation. According to Taylor, naturalism relies on the premise that "the terms of everyday life, those in which we go about living our lives, are to be relegated to the realm of mere appearance."[37] Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein, who all wrote on the engaged nature of subjectivity, are referred to by Taylor in order to show that the disengaged and neutral stance of naturalist epistemology should not be privileged as the most appropriate in making sense of the human world, but rather considered as one perspective among other possible ways of experiencing 'being-in-the-world'. The

influence of these writers on Taylor's situated conception of subjectivity will be developed further in the following chapter on language.

2.2.1 The Best Account as a Hermeneutic Principle

For Taylor, the goal of the social sciences should not be limited to scientific, disinterested objectivity, but should grasp what self-interpreted meanings signify for agents, since the dialogical nature of agency makes it imperative that "a science of human beings must strive for an ideal of expanded intersubjectivity between agents who interpret themselves and others."[38] The Best Account principle, in promoting the intersubjective critique of self-interpretive accounts, is thus hermeneutic in essence. The hermeneutic sphere is usually considered too anthropocentric for an objective science; however, Taylor argues that it is the particularly human capacity for self-interpretation that first attributes the normative dimension to human action and identity.[39] For Taylor, our radical reflexivity is an ontological characteristic of humans, for it establishes who we are as self-interpreting agents. Hiley, Bohman, and Shusterman refer to this radical reflexivity as double-interpretation, for we engage in the double-hermeneutical exercise of finding the best possible interpretive account of our traditional or pre-reflective interpretations.[40]

As Tully and others have observed, "[i]n granting ontological status to the activity of interpretation Taylor acknowledges his debt to the famous argument of Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method.*"[41] Knowledge is conceived by Gadamer through the

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[37] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 57.
[38] *The Interpretive Turn*, ed. David R. Hiley, James F. Bohman, & Richard Shusterman. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991: p. 6.
[39] C. Taylor, "Self-interpreting Animals," *Human Agency and Language*, op.cit.
[40] D.R. Hiley et al, op.cit., p. 5.
[41] Tully, James. "Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection." *Political Theory*, 17.2 (1989): p. 192.

'conversation' model of speech partners who come to a mutual understanding by comparing and contrasting their own party-dependent perspectives. By party-dependent perspectives, Gadamer means that any description of a common human nature is mediated by the self-interpretations of engaged agents who depend on their own particular, pre-reflective understandings of everyday life. Knowledge conceived as mutual understanding is, thus, dependant on the identification and undoing of facets of our pre-reflective understanding that might distort the reality of the other. Taylor's acknowledged debt to Gadamer's hermeneutics will be explored more deeply in the next two chapters.

Attributing ontological status to the best self-interpretations of human moral experience is a difficult task within the modern, disenchanted world. As we saw above, the recognition of the objective worth of substantive goods is counter to the main stream of modern and post-modern thought, whose foundations are largely based upon a rejection of ancient Greek ontology and various forms of revealed religion, based on a divine subject. Within the Platonic tradition, moral truths are seen as embodied within the rational order of nature, so that substantive goods are ontologically grounded. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, goods are seen as revealed by the divine will of God, taken as independent of human reason, will, or interpretation. In modernity, emphasis is placed either on the procedural fairness of human-constituted contractual agreement (as shown in the last section), human moral reason as inseparable from the ideal of freedom, or human sentiment as an intuitive guide for the attainment of harmony with nature. What is usually rejected in modernity is the idea that what is good or true can be discovered by looking to a natural cosmic order or by bearing witness to the revealed word of God.

Taylor recognizes, therefore, that the ontological status of substantive goods cannot be convincingly revived by reverting to the Platonic embodiment of moral ideas within the physical world. However, Taylor argues that simply because the natural sciences cannot intelligibly articulate the objectivity of moral goods does not mean that these goods have no ontological foundation within the human world.

2.2.2 Strong Evaluation and Qualitative Distinctions

Taylor writes that humans are, by nature, strong evaluators. He argues that if we were to do away with all of our qualitative distinctions of good and bad, just and unjust, or beautiful and mundane, we would lack the required background for any degree of human agency. We would have denied the ideas of worth and objects of affection that effectively drive and make intelligible our most important judgements and actions. He writes:

> it doesn't follow...that moral ontology is a pure fiction, as naturalists often assume. Rather we should treat our deepest moral instincts, our ineradicable sense that human life is to be respected, as our mode of access to the world in which ontological claims are discernible and can be rationally argued about and sifted.[42]

Taylor does not conceive qualitative distinctions instrumentally. Some naturalists might argue that humans create systems of ethics as instruments to ensure safe social conditions for the re-production of the human genetic code. Ethics here become a projection of distinctions in response to a strictly instinctual, subconscious, and natural will. Such theories owe much to the Hobbesian mechanistic view of nature and human action. Hobbes reduces human reason to an instrumental faculty for calculating which

objects should be appropriated or avoided in order to preserve one's own vital (and increase one's own voluntary) motion. Classical ideas of an overarching good are rejected outright, so that the good is particular to and mechanistically determined for each individual, fixing the will to objects in physical space that will ensure self-preservation.[43]

Although many moral distinctions certainly involve ensuring the survival of future generations, this vision ignores important moral motives that go beyond questions of mere survival. Following Aristotle, Taylor includes in the moral sphere questions focused on that which gives life a sense of higher significance and, reflecting the Romantics and MacIntyre, that which gives one's unique life story a sense of fulfillment. I submit that the question of self-fulfillment would still be asked even if, hypothetically, the survival (and even minimum level of material comfort) of future generations was of no doubt, so that ethical systems were of no import to mere genetic reproduction. Questions of strong evaluation and moral orientation are continual and inescapable for human agency. Taylor rejects naturalist perspectives because they downplay these qualitative distinctions and, at least in theory, put all human goals on relative footing. In reducing our complex ethical and moral distinctions to strategic plans for safeguarding the conditions for reproduction and longevity, much of what really motivates people is overlooked, such as our appreciation for aesthetic or technological greatness and innovation, various forms of love for others, a sense of publicly recognized virtues, historical or particular narratives of remarkable human action, as well as the largely implicit feeling of connection with spiritual forces extending beyond our physical world. Taylor convincingly argues, as against the proceduralists, that even the supposedly

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[42] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 8.
[43] Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. London: Penguin Classics, 1968: Part 1.

'value-free' perspective of naturalism is implicitly driven by its own view of the good, for example, the value of reduced human suffering and ordinary welfare, as against a demanding citizen virtue or warrior ethic based on rigorous self-cultivation.

2.2.3 Rorty's Naturalism

One of Taylor's most notable naturalist opponents is Richard Rorty. Rorty writes that the main question that Taylor is concerned with is: "what happens to our sense of moral agency once we cease believing in that mini-Deity, the Cartesian ego, and begin to think of the self as a self-reweaving, and thereby self-creating, web of beliefs and desires?"[44] Although both Rorty and Taylor seek to overcome traditional epistemology, their respective approaches remain opposed. Rorty is a self-professed defender of naturalism with whom Taylor has maintained a continued, intense debate. Rorty defines naturalism "as the claim that there is no occupant of space-time that is not linked in a single web of causal relations to all other occupants; and that any explanation of the behaviour of any such spatio-temporal object must consist in placing that object within that single web."[45] Where Taylor sees the human's relations with the world, with other selves, and with his or her own self as too complexly constituted by self-interpretation to reduce them to mere relations of representation, Rorty sees "no break between non-linguistic and linguistic interactions of organisms (or machines) in the world."[46] Contrary to Taylor, Rorty argues that the distinction between the natural and human sciences has

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[44] Rorty, Richard. "Taylor on Self-Celebration and Gratitude." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54.1 (March 1994): p. 201.
[45] R. Rorty. "Taylor on Truth." *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, op.cit., p. 30.
[46] Ibid., p. 31.

"outlived its usefulness."[47] To him, the difference between these two realms of study is merely sociological, not ontological, as Taylor insists it is. As Marvin Stauch explains,

> Taylor believes that the actions, practices, and institutions of humans are what they are by virtue of the intentions and purposes of those that act them out...[Rorty, on the other hand] denies that the constitution of actions, practices and institutions within a field of conceptual interrelations distinguishes the objects of the social sciences from those of the natural sciences.[48]

Rorty rejects any 'realist' theories of truth on the grounds that, as he understands them, they "need to have criteria for the adequacy of vocabularies as well as of statements, need the notion of one vocabulary somehow 'fitting' the world better than another...because they represent reality more adequately."[49] As an anti-essentialist, Rorty argues against the very idea that there is a correct interpretation, or 'meaning realism', on which hermeneutic, error-reducing moves might be built. Rorty is also suspicious of any universalist or ontological premise presented as the basis for understanding morality, and therefore rejects Taylor's hypergoods, which he sees as dependent upon these premises. Rorty complains that "the only thing that Taylor seems willing to count as a transaction between the world and ourselves is something which the world initiates – a response to a call from something already there in the world."[50]

2.2.4 Mackie's Naturalism and Moral Scepticism

Taylor identifies J.L. Mackie as another 'uncompromising' naturalist. Mackie writes from the context of the modern, empirical conception of scientific truth and

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[47] D.R. Hiley et al, op.cit., p. 4.
[48] Stauch, Marvin. "Natural Science, Social Science, and Democratic Practice." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 22.3 (Sept. 1992): p. 344.
[49] R. Rorty, "Taylor on Truth," op.cit., p. 22.

theoretical description. This perspective is made possible by the designative theory of language, which will be explained in the next chapter. Mackie believes that an account of the world can be given in strictly empirical terms, and that "[i]f some metaphysical necessities or essences resist such treatment, then they too should be included, along with objective values, among the targets of the argument from queerness."[51] Mackie's argument from what he calls the 'queerness' of objective values states that the idea that moral goodness is a non-natural quality perceived by moral intuition logically demonstrates the strangeness of these moral values. Mackie's thesis is that there are no objective values, a position he calls moral scepticism. Here, he makes the distinction between *objective* values and *intersubjectively* generated values supported by widespread agreement. Even the universalizability of moral truths is not tantamount to objectivity, he claims. To Mackie, it is possible to be a moral sceptic while still accepting that one's judgements should apply to all similar cases. Mackie offers what he calls an 'error theory' which holds "that although most people in making moral judgements implicitly claim...to be pointing to something objectively prescriptive, these claims are all false."[52] Mackie explains the human need to falsely objectify moral truths as a need for regulating relationships and making moral judgements authoritative. Mackie's argument from relativity, as interpreted by Gary Kitchen,

> begins from the observation that there is a great deal of variation in moral codes from one society to another and often between different groups in the same society...This descriptive premise provides indirect support for moral subjectivism insofar as it makes it difficult to treat moral judgements

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[50] R. Rorty, "Taylor on Self-Celebration and Gratitude," op.cit., p. 200.
[51] Mackie, J.L. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong.* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977: p. 39.
[52] Ibid., p. 35.

as perceptions of objective truths.[53]

Mackie is, for Taylor, an example of a viewpoint that tries to assimilate moral reactions to visceral ones, and thereby denies the possibility for rational deliberation over the fitness of objects of moral response. For Taylor, on the other hand, moral reactions are "implicit acknowledgements of claims concerning their objects."[54] He argues that modern naturalism has, along with proceduralism, mistakenly discredited the ontological accounts that articulate these reactions. According to Kitchen, however, Mackie's theory is more persuasive than Taylor gives credit. Kitchen argues that in addition to considering human-articulated hermeneutic accounts, our best account also needs to be consistent with hypotheses concerning the natural world: "we cannot bracket off natural science and refuse to deal with what it tells us. In order to avoid this sort of dualism, we need to interpret the BA principle so that it takes what we know to be true of the natural world as a background constant."[55] Kitchen's critique that Taylor's Best Account ignores hypotheses concerning the natural world seems to underestimate the scope of considerations that Taylor actually intends his Best Account to include. Taylor explicitly states that "[t]he connections are in fact close between scientific explanation and practical reason: to lose sight of one is to fall into confusion about the other."[56] Elsewhere he asserts that "given the beings that we are, embodied and active in the world, and given the way that scientific knowledge extends and supercedes our ordinary understanding of things, it is impossible to see how it could fail to yield further and more far-reaching

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[53] Kitchen, Gary. "Charles Taylor: The Malaises of Modernity and the Moral Sources of the Self." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 25.3 (May 1999): p. 41.
[54] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 7.
[55] G. Kitchen, op.cit., p. 45.
[56] C. Taylor. *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1995: p. 60.

recipes for action."[57] It is not that Taylor discounts scientific hypotheses as essential constituents of our best possible understanding of the human condition, it is that he opposes the idea that this account should exclude the self-interpreted, subject-referring articulations that an empirical epistemology must exclude from purely scientific study.

Kitchen also argues that Taylor's mere opposition to the naturalist projection theory is not enough to prove moral realism, especially when one defends the existence of a plurality of legitimate moral codes, as Taylor does. Kitchen claims that the link that Taylor makes between identity and strong moral judgement cannot prove moral realism, if this is taken to include a truth claim. Kitchen admits that identity is both descriptive and evaluative, "but it has no justificatory force in moral argument...the stress on identity does little to bolster moral realism and seems to be quite compatible with scepticism about moral knowledge."[58] In making such a claim about identity, however, I argue that Kitchen underestimates the extent to which it rests on descriptions of objective value. Giving the best possible account of one's identity, according to Taylor, requires a rational justification for the agent's espousal or rejection of certain (objective) goods. From the disengaged and empirical perspective of Rorty, Mackie, and Kitchen, however, the fact that human agency depends on such distinctions is not enough to call moral values 'objective'. The most that a value can hope for, according to them, is 'universal, intersubjective' acceptance. Kitchen doubts, however, that Taylor's practical reasoning can even attain this. As we have seen, the Best Account principle strives to make epistemic gains by comparatively adjudicating between moral positions, so that errors can be picked out by self-interpreting interlocutors in a series of hermeneutic transitions.

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[57] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 147-48.
[58] G. Kitchen, op.cit., p. 39.

Kitchen, however, is sceptical that it is possible to rationally adjudicate hypergood claims at all. He argues that "nothing in this picture suggests that there is likely to be any intersubjective agreement on what makes a correct moral intuition or an account of a fully human life."[59] There seems to be no hope of convergence, according to Kitchen.

2.2.5 Taylor's Response to the Naturalist Critique

In his response to the above naturalist scepticism, Taylor clarifies the humble boundaries of the Best Account principle's aspirations of reaching any final, convergent truth or telos. At the same time, his critique of naturalism in general provides the context for an argument for the ultimate importance of such a hermeneutic principle of increased intersubjective clairvoyance. Taylor states: "There's no finite task, performance of which amounts to setting out the 'criteria' of rightness...The argument I try to make...against anti-realism depends not on the thesis that some particular account of the good is correct, but rather on the inescapability of some understanding of good in anyone's moral horizon."[60] Clearly, the Best Account principle does not hope to reach any final truth or overarching good in the sense sought by Plato or a Taylor-interpreted Hegel. Taylor explains: "This way of underpinning our hermeneutics of history with an ontic dialectics is utterly unconvincing. We have no such total confidence, nor can we have. But there are certain issues where our sense of having made a positive step can be rationally grounded..."[61]

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[59] Ibid., p. 47.
[60] C. Taylor. "Reply to Commentators." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54.1 (March 1994): p. 206.
[61] C. Taylor. "Comments on Jurgen Habermas' 'From Kant to Hegel and Back Again.'" *European Journal of Philosophy*, 7.2 (Aug. 1999): p. 162-63.

In response to naturalism's projectivist conception of moral standards, Taylor argues that "[t]he best accounts we can give of our own actual use of moral terms, in deliberating, or in describing, judging, explaining our own and others' actions, will all treat these goods as not projection-dependent."[62] Taylor argues that what is required to make sense of our lives is to achieve the best orientation to the good and to understand the actions and feelings of myself and others. This can't be achieved by the objectivist, behaviourist standpoint that dispenses with non-explanatory terms like 'freedom', 'dignity', and 'equality'. So, although Taylor avoids the Platonic grounding of moral truths in the natural Cosmos, he does, nonetheless, attribute ontological (or 'real') status to the most appropriate terms by which humans makes sense of their lives. He writes:

> What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms which on critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives? 'Making the best sense' here includes not only offering the best, most realistic orientation about the good but also allowing us best to understand and make sense of the actions and feelings of ourselves and others...These requirements are not yet met if we have some theoretical language which purports to explain behaviour from the observer's standpoint but is of no use to the agent in making sense of his own thinking, feeling, and acting...What we need to *explain* is people living their lives; the terms in which they cannot avoid living them cannot be removed from the explanandum, unless we can propose other terms in which they could live them more clairvoyantly. We cannot just leap out of these terms altogether, on the grounds that their logic doesn't fit some model of "science" and that we know a priori that human beings must be explicable in this "science"...The result of this search for clairvoyance yields the best account we can give at any given time, and no epistemological or metaphysical considerations or a more general kind about science or nature can justify setting this aside. The best account in the above sense is trumps.[63]

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[62] C. Taylor, "Reply to Commentators," op.cit., p. 207.

2.2.6 The Naturalist Critique of Transcendental Arguments

Abbey notes that "[t]here is a strong convergence between Taylor's use of Kantian-inspired transcendental deduction and his advocacy of the 'best account' approach to knowledge...In both cases, the centre of theoretical gravity is how ordinary life is lived and what concepts are useful in making sense of this."[64] As we have seen in comparing the Best Account principle to the reductivist approach of naturalism, Taylor indeed depends on ontologizing the dialogical, situated, and self-interpreting nature of humans as a means of defending the objective value, necessity, and authoritative weight of particular accounts of the good. There are critics in addition to Rorty, Mackie, and Kitchen, however, who question the validity of this connection and just how far Taylor actually advances from a Classical doctrine of normative Forms. Geneviève Nootens, for example, considers that Taylor uses a Kantian-style transcendental conditions device for providing the basis for his moral ontology and for giving weight to his thesis that the exigencies of goods are valid independently of subjective desires.[65] Transcendental arguments, according to Taylor, "start from the feature of our experience which they claim to be indubitable and beyond cavil. They then move to a stronger conclusion, one concerning the nature of the subject or the subject's position in the world."[66] These transcendental conditions are seen by Taylor as central to human moral experience and constitutive of the intelligibility of human action. They include a conception of the human as dialogical, rooted in a language community of shared meanings that provide significance and intentionality for his or her actions. The human is also seen as an agent

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[63] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 57-58. Emphasis is Taylor's.
[64] R. Abbey, op.cit., p. 188.
[65] Nootens, Geneviève. "Ontologie, philosophie et politique: la critique de la tradition épistémologique chez Charles Taylor." *Dialogue*, 35.3 (1996): p. 554.

incarnated in a specific physical body, at a certain time and place, with a particular set of expressive media at his or her disposal, so that his or her consciousness is always particularized to this extent. Finally, the human is conceived as situated within a moral space of diverse goods and his or her orientation towards these goods is considered constitutive of his or her identity as a moral agent. We will see in the following chapter how Taylor roots all of these transcendental conditions in the very nature of language.

Nootens perceives an unjustified transition from presenting these conditions of intentionality to attributing ontological status to the human awareness of the sense or purpose of action. She writes: "l'ontologie censée soutenir la philosophie politique de Taylor risque de se réduire à un simple ensemble de considérations normatives, dépouillées de la force argumentative nécessaire pour démontrer les insuffisances 'existentielles' du libéralisme déontologique et pour fonder un modèle alternatif."[67] In arguing thus, Nootens explicitly refers to Owen Flanagan and James Tully, who question the transcendent status of strong evaluation, articulation, and interpretation. Flanagan charges that Taylor exaggerates the faculty of strong evaluation and the articulation needed to sustain this evaluation.[68] Tully offers a critique of Taylor's hermeneutics by challenging his ontologizing of human interpretation. His critique is developed via Wittgenstein's analysis of interpretation and understanding within language games. Tully claims that Taylor makes the mistake of conflating interpretation and understanding. He writes:

> Interpretation is an activity that we engage in when we are in doubt about

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[66] C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, op.cit., p. 20.
[67] G. Nootens, op.cit., p. 563.
[68] Flanagan, Owen. "Identity and Strong and Weak Evaluation." *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Owen Flanagan & Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Cambrige, Mass: MIT Press, 1990: 37-65.

> how to grasp or to understand a sign that is in question...interpretation begins when our conventional self-understandings break down and we do not know how to go on...To interpret a sign is to take it *as* one expression rather than another. In contrast, to understand a sign is not to possess a sedimented opinion about it or to take is *as* something, but to be able to grasp it; that is, to act with it, using it in agreement with customary ways.[69]

In defence of Taylor, I submit that self-understanding as "grasping the connection between a sign or rule and its use" or "using [a sign] in agreement with customary ways" can only be reached within a particular language-game lifeworld that determines the rules of appropriateness. These language rules that provide the possibility for understanding and intelligibility are, I argue, a result of the above "conventional self-understandings" that are, in turn, the product of human self-interpretation. To say that interpretation is only needed when understanding breaks down is to underestimate the prior and constitutive role that interpretation plays in first establishing "conventional self-understandings" and language rules. The Best Account principle, in beginning from the perspective of engaged agents, goes beyond a concept of reason as merely understanding, since the latter implies an objectification of the human, his or her intuitions, and his or her moral framework. The picture of the human as limited to the passive faculty of understanding cannot make intelligible any questions concerning his or her purpose. I agree with Taylor, despite Tully's and Flanagan's challenges, that interpretation and evaluation remain along side the human's essentially dialogical nature as a transcendent condition of his or her agency.

In the face of the moral scepticism presented above, Taylor admits that there are ontological questions that lie beyond the scope of transcendental arguments. He admits

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[69] J. Tully, "Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy," op.cit., p. 195-97. Emphasis is Tully's.

that indeed the ultimate *objective*, ontologically-grounded existence of moral values can never be proven beyond human criticism once one separates them from an ontological grounding within the natural system of Platonic Forms. This is part of why they must be continually re-articulated in modernity through symbolic media. He writes that "[w]e have to innovate in language, and bring the limits of experience to clarity in formulations that open up a zone normally outside our range of thought and attention."[70] Taylor admits that transcendental arguments, paradoxically, "prove something quite strong about the subject of experience and the subject's place in the world; and yet since they are grounded in the nature of experience, there remains an ultimate, ontological question they can't foreclose..."[71] However, even if transcendental arguments that show human experience as embodied cannot prove any ontological thesis concerning the unquestionable nature of mankind, they can, Taylor argues, "show the form that any account must take which invokes our own self-understanding."[72] A transcendental argument that conceives agency as embodied shows that a sense of ourselves as embodied is necessary to any *intelligible* human experience, any articulation about the *point* of our activity. The activity Taylor refers to is the being aware and grasping of the world around us. Taylor admits that "the conclusions of transcendental arguments are apodictic and yet open to endless debate."[73]

More such challenges to the ontological grounding of the Best Account principle will now be addressed by contrasting it with the principles of justification of relativist and subjectivist critiques. Through the course of this last section of the chapter, I will begin

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[70] C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, op.cit., p. 32.
[71] Ibid., p. 33.
[72] Ibid., p. 27.
[73] Ibid., p. 32.

to highlight the Best Account principle's claim to universalism, as well as the way it satisfies the metaphysical demand for rational autonomy within the terms of situated freedom.

2.3 BA Principle vs. Principles of Justification of Relativism & Subjectivism

Taylor sees the problem of relativism as arising particularly after Hegel, and more generally in the aftermath of the historicizing turn of the 18th and early 19th centuries. He writes: "Once we cut loose from seeing our moral-political ethos as grounded in the order of things, in an ontic logos, and see it as arising in historical evolution, then this question comes to the agenda."[74] Some rightly argue, following Foucault's genealogy, that the historical intersubjective generation of substantive goods often occurs within relations of domination and are, therefore, distorted or illegitimate. Hoy asks the important question of how to defend Taylor against the deconstructionist challenge, put forth by writers such as Foucault and Rorty, that moral evaluation, rather than being a claim to universalism, is in fact the reflection of mere historical contingencies, power, and ethnocentricism. Taylor also raises this very question. He asks: "how do we know that our local standards of reason, truth, right, are not just local concoctions, with no more justification than any other different set which we might come across in contact with another culture?"[75] This is also one of the driving concerns for Habermas, who believes that if we continually bind moral judgement to the ethos of a particular place, then we must "be prepared to renounce the emancipatory potential of moral universalism and deny so much as the possibility of subjecting the structural violence inherent in social conditions characterized

[74] C. Taylor, "Comments on Jurgen Habermas' 'From Kant to Hegel and Back Again'," op.cit., p. 159.
[75] Ibid., p. 158.

by latent exploitation and repression to an unstinting moral critique."[76] We are presented with a challenge. How can we recognize and maintain the substantive goods that situate human agency, while rooting out the irrational practices of those communities who live according to these goods? What exactly constitutes irrational practice? Is there a way of mediating moral intuition and sensibility with the more universal demands of reason? This is what Taylor tries to answer with his Best Account principle.

As we saw above, Taylor's hermeneutic ontology, which focuses on engaged subjects with self-interpreted experience, does not fit with an objectivist view. It is, however, not simply subjectivist, since to describe an import is to make a judgement about the way things are. Taylor begins *Sources of the Self* by stating that moral reactions have two facets, intuition at the level of the subject, and a given ontology of the human.[77] Images of the good are language-related, but Taylor denies that this makes them mere subjective projections. Finding insightful articulations of the good "is in the order of discovery...It is not just made true by being felt to be true."[78] We have seen above that Taylor's 'interpretive view' of what constitutes a best social account must be constituted by the self-interpretations of agents. Beginning from the engaged perspectives of agents sets Taylor's hermeneutic account against the objective perspective of naturalism. Taylor's view is also opposed, however, to what he calls a 'false ally' of the naturalist perspective, one which falsely conceives interpretation as an uncritical adoption of the agent's point of view. Taylor calls this the 'incorrigibility thesis'.[79] In trying to explain the individual or community in question strictly by their own terms, Taylor argues, there

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[76] J. Habermas, *Justification and Application*, op.cit., p. 125.
[77] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 5.
[78] C. Taylor, "Reply to Commentators," op.cit., p. 211.
[79] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 123.

is no possibility of showing that this agent's account might be deluded or irrational. Interlocutors are left with no transcultural, critical standard by which to judge the objective worth of individual desires or culturally-bound practices and normative claims. These practices and accounts are thus relativized.

2.3.1 The Ethic of Authenticity

Taylor's vehement rejection of relativism and radical subjectivism is apparent, at the level of individual self-fulfillment, through his ethic of authenticity. Taylor is very much aware of the danger of rejecting reason and relying on pure subjective feeling to determine the will. He does not see reason as repressive, as more radical expressivists do, but rather demands that we articulate our sentiments with a view to it. Our identity is not composed of the arbitrary desires and subjective whims that remain unformed by reason. It must reflect, rather, one's authentic stance towards the good, which implies a rational evaluation of one's initial feelings and desires. Through critical self-reflexivity, Taylor argues, the individual recognizes which moral distinctions truly drive his or her action or comprise his or her identity. Distortive, immoral, or self-defeating feelings and desires are seen as such when one is called upon to justify them rationally. The articulation of our moral framework is not always a fully accurate account of those assumptions on which we truly depend. Taylor emphasizes that "there may be…a lack of fit between what people as it were officially and consciously believe, even pride themselves on believing, on one hand, and what they need to make sense of some of their moral reactions, on the other."[80] Both the Best Account principle and the ethic of authenticity, however, strive for increased clarity, albeit with the understanding that this

manifestation can never be fully transparent, since much of our moral intuition remains implicit, partly due to the paradoxical nature of language.

Taylor points to Frankfurt's distinction between first and second order desires as an illustration of the strong evaluation of goods that human agency and identity formation entails.[81] Agency involves the desire to have appropriate desires, which requires both qualitative distinctions and enough self-discipline to pursue them. Taylor implies in strong evaluation those "discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged."[82] Taylor's philosophy reflects the Aristotelian notion of each person possessing moral faculties, the virtues of which can be developed over the course of one's life. Mankind is conceived with a nature that can be realized through a process of growth. In *The Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle writes that "the function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle."[83] Taylor's raising of subjective fulfillment up to the level of rational autonomy, through the idea of authenticity, reflects this demand for reason. Like Aristotle, Taylor's focus is on appropriate moral sentiment as the redirecting, rather than the suppression of desires.

Authenticity as a moral standard demands that one's self-fulfillment imply more than a hedonistic pursuit of pleasure or a relativist affirmation of any given life-story as being as valuable as the next. If self-fulfillment were to be conceived merely as such, the political consequence would be a democracy reduced to a liberal perspectivism that

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[80] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 9.
[81] C. Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, op.cit., p. 15.
[82] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 4.

relativizes all ethical frameworks and substantive goods. Taylor claims in *The Malaise of Modernity* that this moral relativism does, indeed, threaten to gradually pervade Western, modern society. To combat this 'slide to subjectivism',[84] Taylor argues that true authenticity demands first that one's unique identity be a composite expression of the various moral goods that one feels intuitively resonate within. Secondly, it demands that we be able to rationally justify our love for a good as somehow recognizing the dignity of humanity universally. While Taylor is sympathetic to some goods that prevail in traditional communities, he still argues that the modern culture is the most rational in its characteristic plurality of available hypergoods. While this plurality offers individuals the freedom to pursue a variety of goods that they more authentically feel resonate according to their particular intuition, the difficulty is that the demands of certain goods can come in conflict with each other. Following his ethic of authenticity, Taylor argues that the modern self must synthesize the goods that he or she loves and express them in his or her own way. This synthesis and expression is what comprises one's identity and helps the individual transcend the everlasting tensions between hypergoods.

The power to transform one's moral framework according to the Best Account principle requires the understanding of life as a narrative, a moral appropriation of Heidegger's temporal structure of being. Such a conception of life as a meaningful and unified narrative is demonstrated by MacIntyre through his illustration of life as a 'quest' by which we continually seek the good life. MacIntyre writes: "Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human

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[83] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980: Book 1, Ch. 7, p. 13.
[84] C. Taylor. *The Malaise of Modernity*. Concord: Anansi, 1991: ch. 6.

actions."[85] Considering life as narrative implies that it has a *telos*, or purpose. We can trace this conception again back to Aristotle's organic view of the good life as the pursuit of happiness and the constant development of virtues. Aristotle insists that the good must be sought "'in a complete life'. For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy."[86]

2.3.2 The Rationalization of Social Institutions and Communal Goods

Taylor goes beyond the level of individual authenticity to extend the demand of reflective self-evaluation to communities. In historical communities such as the ancient Greeks, Hegel argues, individuals experienced harmony with nature without being able to step outwards to an objective standpoint and reflect upon whether their way of life was rational. Some moderns argue that certain peoples are still at this stage, a stage that carries little sense of self-reflexivity. The demand for rational autonomy within the terms of situated freedom is in this case not met. Although Taylor does not believe that the mediated synthesis of these two demands can ever be complete, his Best Account principle does allow for the two sides to come continually closer through time. The principle provides the referent of a higher moral outlook by which particular substantive goods can be evaluated. By reaching this standard through the rational justification of practices that express substantive goods, the relativity of these goods is reduced and the ontological or objective value of them is more deeply grounded. The Best Account principle attempts to bring the distortions of irrational practices to light and, in turn,

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[85] MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981: p. 208.
[86] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, op.cit., Book 1, Ch. 7, p. 14.

eliminate them. The standard of this higher moral outlook is the universal right to equal respect of personhood. Taylor writes:

> Perhaps the most urgent and powerful cluster of demands that we recognize as moral concern the respect for life, integrity, and well-being, even flourishing, of others...We are dealing here with moral intuitions which are uncommonly deep, powerful, and universal. They are so deep that we are tempted to think of them as rooted in instinct...this 'instinct' receives a variable shape in culture... inseparable from an account of what it is that commands our respect. The account seems to articulate the intuition.[87]

Ontological claims show human beings as capable of some kind of higher life and, therefore, worthy objects of respect. As Taylor writes, "[t]he various cultures that restrict this respect do so by denying the crucial description to those left outside..."[88] Human life and integrity is shown as sacred or valuable, worthy of immunity from encroachment. Our conception of immunity changes with changing frameworks, but the Best Account principle demands that all interlocutors justify themselves as promoters of universal respect for the dignity of human life. The demand for rational autonomy is met by the agent's self-reflective evaluation of his moral ontology, as well as intersubjective critique upon articulation. Taylor, like Habermas and Gadamer, writes that reaching clarity in the articulation of our moral frameworks is a challenge that must be met intersubjectively, by engaging with others and confronting our thought and language with theirs. It is when particular worldviews must be rationally articulated and evaluated that we see the approaching of rational freedom and expressive unity. Because each generation of a community is born into slightly different forms of the languages that the previous generation expressed themselves through, it is possible that the new generation

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[87] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 4-5.

practice traditional rites in a way slightly transformed and renewed by a language of universal respect, but with as much authentic expressive identification to these practices. This is dependent on an ever-changing language matrix, crucial in the expressive conception, which will also be addressed next chapter. It is also an admittedly idealistic picture of perfect synthesis between reason and expressive unity, a state of harmony never actually, perfectly reached. This difficulty will be treated in the fourth chapter on political recognition and incommensurability.

2.3.3 The Modern Goods of Universal Respect and Rational Autonomy

Taylor writes that the standard of universal respect, like Kuhn's hegemonic scientific paradigms, has arisen through the historical supercession of less adequate views and, therefore, now serves as the modern standard by which contemporary ethical views are evaluated. This image of gradual supercession has Hegelian roots, however, judging by Taylor's critique of Hegel's ontology, it is never complete and, therefore, requires continual re-articulation. These standards risk dying out if not consciously upheld intersubjectively.

The primary modern articulation of universal respect is in terms of liberty conceived as moral and political autonomy. In the Republican and civic humanist traditions, this demands the active participation of equal citizens in public deliberation, so that everyone plays a part in the development of the laws and social institutions that govern their lives as members of the political community. Even among the liberalist tradition, with its focus on the legal protection of a negative space of private, personal activity, the richest philosophical justification of this protection is based on the

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[88] Ibid., p. 5.

individual's natural right to posit his or her own goals and laws of action. This idea is paradigmatically expressed by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*[89] and is implicit in the more materialist work of Hobbes and Locke. Although these two streams of modern political thought disagree on important issues, what they share is the notion that arbitrary hierarchical relations of power cannot be rationally justified and must, therefore, collapse under the demands for equal human respect. Taylor writes:

> The moral world of moderns is significantly different from that of previous civilizations. This becomes clear, among other places, when we look at the sense that human beings command our respect... What is particular to the modern West among such higher civilizations is that its favoured formulation for this principle of respect has come to be in terms of rights.[90]

As both Rousseau and Foucault have shown, conventions inspired solely by particular and private interests can only be maintained by forms of force that constrain human freedom. Modernity's critical spirit has tumbled many of these arbitrary arrangements, as mankind's autonomous conscience now sees reason as that which gives humans the source of authority for their own norms of interaction.

Taylor remains very much a modern in that his Best Account principle demands the rational justification of substantive goods, so that no matter what the expressive power and integrity of a culturally-bound practice, it cannot be accepted as a part of our best possible moral account if it cannot be justified rationally. In this way, his principle escapes mere relativism. The moral good that serves as the rational standard is, again, that of universal respect for humanity and the integrity of self-hood. Within the modern

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[89] Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. London: Penguin Books, 1974.
[90] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 11.

demand of rational autonomy, Taylor includes the demand for the recognition and protection of the integrity of the moral self. It is not enough that a person be protected from physical violence; he or she must also be given the opportunity to develop his or her own authentic relationship to the good. For example, the most radical patriarchal practices that impede women of certain communities from making any important life decisions for themselves do not satisfy the modern standard of personhood and, as a result, could not be rationally justified according to the Best Account principle.

But what does it mean to rationally justify a substantive good? Taylor suggests that this has to do with the Greek *episteme*, which demands an intelligible account that is geared towards universality, objectivity, and non-contradiction. Here, Hegel's first metaphysical demand for disinterested reason is evident. The universality of an account implies not only that it *apply* to people in common, but also that it be *produced* intersubjectively, in exchange with other rational agents. A rational articulation or justification of a good must also demonstrate what it is about the good that promotes the perpetuation of the conditions for reason itself to flourish. This idea stems from Hegel's view of rational self-consciousness affirming itself, and explains why Taylor extends the Best Account standard of human respect to include the respect for moral autonomy.

The equation of reason and autonomy to the universal respect for each person is an idea articulated by Kant. Kant writes that each moral agent must be respected as an end in itself because of its dignity as an embodiment of what he sees all humans as being in essence: pure rational will. Kant places freedom and reason in the seat of mankind's reflective will. According to Taylor's Best Account principle, no moral ontological account that does not respect the dignity of all people can trump an account that does

show this respect. Taylor does not, however, limit the possible justification for this human-deserved respect to Kant's conception of the human as rational will; indeed, Taylor is willing to include theistic accounts as well which would defend universal respect by the premise that all people are children of a loving God. What does remain from Kant's philosophy, however, is that whatever account might be rationally argued as more appropriate than another must answer the demands of universal inclusion and respect. Despite Taylor's criticism of neo-Kantian proceduralism, there is an affinity between the Best Account principle and Kant's practical reasoning, in that the agent evaluates his or her particular intuitions (or maxims of action in Kantian philosophy) by a more universal standard. The evaluative standard of universal respect can be seen as a sort of parallel to Kant's and Habermas' deontological identification of a moral sphere higher than that of situated ethical life forms.

2.3.4 Taylor's Moral Anthropology

In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor writes that the modern understanding of respect can be divided into three general historical sources. The first is the above Kantian-based respect for the moral autonomy of the human being possessing a rational will, which, following the Romantic movement, includes the respect for individual authenticity or self-fulfillment. The second source, most popular after the weakening of the notion of a cosmic moral order, is the desire to lessen human suffering, including that suffered in the name of a higher moral ideal. This is promoted not only in the utilitarianism of the Enlightenment, but also within the Christian Reformation. A third source of the modern understanding of respect is what Taylor calls the 'affirmation of ordinary life', with its

focus on the goods of family life, production, labour, and sustained economic welfare. This idea also powered the Reformation, much of bourgeois politics, as well as some aspects of Marxist thought.

To complete his picture of historical articulations of moral intuition, Taylor outlines another, broader typology of three interrelated frontiers of moral explanation into which the above typology overlaps. The first of the three frontiers is the theistic one. This is the predominantly Judeo-Christian outlook that conceives of an interlocking, providential order governed by the will of an authoritative God. Also important to the theistic perspective is the notion of *agape*, the love that God gracefully bestows upon humans and that should be, in turn, spread by humans unto each other. The affirmation of ordinary life is reflected in the theistic frontier primarily as the Protestant work ethic, the pursuit of one's vocation in a subjective spirit that glorifies the super-human and inexplicable power and goodness of God. The second frontier of moral explanation shows people as worthy of dignity because of their potential for autonomy, control of their environment, and powers of rational articulation. This is both Descartes' and Kant's terrain. The third view focuses on nature as a source of the good, whose principles we can search for and find in the depths of our own spirit. This Romantic perspective is reflected by Rousseau's conception of the pre-social human being.

This brief outline of Taylor's tracing of the sources of the modern identity is admittedly inadequate, since Taylor dedicates four of five parts of *Sources of the Self* to developing his picture of moral anthropology. However, to provide a detailed outline of this picture is not the aim of this discussion. For a deeper critique of Taylor's own historical interpretation of modernity and pre-modernity, please refer to Skinner, Morgan,

and Elshtain in Part II of *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism.*[91] The purpose of this outline is to set the backdrop for two sets of critiques levied at Taylor's aspiration to combat relativism. The first critique accuses Taylor of relying too much on traditional goods that lie exogenous to the subject as the sources of universal standards for moral judgement. The second critique claims that Taylor's historicism prevents him from retrieving the most appropriate trans-historical and trans-cultural goods by which to judge social practices.

2.3.5 Two Critiques of Taylor's Moral Anthropology

As a main articulator of the first critique, Habermas criticizes Taylor's ontological mode of theorizing the 'constitutive Good',[92] and blames Taylor's Catholic scepticism for his denial of the "self-sufficiency of a purely secular, proceduralist ethics..."[93] Habermas writes that Taylor counters the "posttraditional level of moral judgment"[94] with an appeal to "supreme goods transcending all particular forms of life. The examples he proposes, however, derive from Plato, the Stoics, and Christianity, that is, from traditions that appeal to the authority of reason, universal natural law, or a transcendent deity."[95] Since these are grounded, according to Habermas, in cosmological and religious worldviews, they are difficult to reconcile with postmetaphysical thought. Frederick Olafson, in a critique that echos Habermas' concern, writes that Taylor's account of moral sources,

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[91] *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, op.cit.
[92] J. Habermas, *Justification and Application*, op.cit., p. 73.
[93] Ibid., p. 72.
[94] Ibid., p. 125.
[95] Ibid.

which are "in no way constituted as such by us,"[96] remains guided primarily by his Platonic model of an ontic logos.

Olafson, however, is also critical of Taylor on the second front, suggesting that there are unresolved tensions between the philosophical stands that Taylor takes in the first part of *Sources of the Self* and the historical account he gives in the second. Olafson writes:

> if the self and thus human nature are just the creatures of the language we use to describe them...then the historical story Taylor tells would be the only story there is and no real philosophical issue would remain...he seems to have given so many hostages to historicism that the status of any contribution that constructive philosophy might make to the understanding of what a human being is becomes highly problematic.[97]

Both Ronald Beiner and John Dunn see a similar tension in Taylor between "the enterprise of cultural interpretation that is contingent on the history of the modern self and...the intimation of a larger moral order that could furnish standards of transcultural judgment."[98] Beiner and Dunn criticize Taylor for making the historicist presumption that if we make an effort to understand the modern identity and its moral sources, these will automatically prove to be rational and worthy of aspiration.[99] Dunn believes that this tension arises from Taylor's commitment to both "the project of post-Romantic self-exploration and to the premodern quest for an objective human good..."[100] Beiner suggests, rather, that this tension is linked to two opposing conceptions of social theory

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[96] Olafson, Frederick A. "Comments on *Sources of the Self* by Charles Taylor." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54.1 (March 1994): p. 194.
[97] F.A. Olafson, op.cit., p. 196.
[98] Beiner, Ronald. *Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997: p. 156. Beiner is citing Dunn.
[99] Ibid., p. 155.
[100] Ibid., p. 166.

identified by Taylor. The first, exemplified by Plato's political philosophy, is labelled by Taylor as 'revisionist'. According to Beiner, Plato "confronts [the] lived experience of the polis with an utterly revolutionary vision of human life and the human good."[101] Within this conception, social theory is meant to find trans-cultural and trans-historical standards of good by which to critique and transform existing social and political conditions. The second 'comprehensive' conception of social theory is paradigmatically espoused by Plato's own student, Aristotle. Beiner writes that "Aristotle's critique of Plato...is labelled 'comprehensive' in the dual sense that it *encompasses* the full range of existing goods, and seeks to *understand* why these goods are experienced as good...Taylor, in his own practice of theory, is very much slanted to the Aristotelian model of comprehensive theory."[102] Beiner's argument implies that in remaining at the level of merely understanding existing goods, Taylor is unable to provide an ultimate, transhistorical standard by which to judge all contingent, culturally-bound ethical practices.

MacIntyre, in a similar vein, criticizes that with the range of alternative, historical goods identified by Taylor, we are left with no rational standard by which to evaluate their relative worth:

> [Taylor] leaves it bereft of criteria, confronting a choice of type of life from an initial standpoint in which the self seems to be very much what Sartre took it to be...His philosophical account of the modern self and the continuities of its development is presented as if deriving support from those narratives. But those narratives are interpretive, and the interpretation which informs them seems to be itself derived from that same philosophical account for which the narratives are intended to provide support. Perhaps this hermeneutical circularity is ineliminable. But we only have good reason to

[101] Ibid., p. 152.
[102] Ibid. Emphasis is Beiner's.

> endorse Taylor's interpretation of the relevant histories, if we have matched its claims against those made for at least some rival interpretations of the same subject-matter, something which Taylor omits to do.[103]

One might note that while the first of the above sets of critique accuses Taylor of Platonism, the other accuses him of not being Platonic enough. Taylor has faced criticisms from opposite camps of a number of philosophical and political debates throughout his career. This is largely due to his commitment, inspired by Hegelian dialectics, to combine seemingly incompatible concepts and goods in order to come to a more enlightened mediated position. In response to the Habermasian charge that his project depends on an ontological vision that is too substantial for the age of postmetaphysical argumentation, Taylor admits that the idea that goods are part of an ontic order that is independent of human articulation is untenable in modernity. Taylor writes: "In these circumstances, the very idea that one such order should be embraced to the exclusion of all others...ceases to have any force. It is only too clear how another sensibility, another context of images, might give us a quite different take, even on what we might nevertheless see as a similar vision of reality."[104] When Taylor argues, however, that the ontological value of hypergoods exists exogenous to the subjectivity of the individual, he does not imply that they are, in Olafson's words, "in no way constituted as such by us." He means that they are constituted intersubjectively, as a response to deep moral intuitions, and provide the intelligibility to human action and thought in such a transcendent way that humans could never live as purposeful beings without them. In emphasizing that goods are constituted intersubjectively, Taylor conceives an active, self-

[103] MacIntyre, Alasdair. "Critical Remarks on *The Sources of the Self* by Charles Taylor." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54.1 (March 1994): p. 188-89.

interpretive agent, not a mere passive identifier of goods that survive independent of human re-articulation. The significance of this difference will be highlighted in the following chapter, in which Taylor highlights a conception of language that allows for an active participation in the production of goods. These goods do, on the other hand, carry weight outside the subjectivity of individuals and, indeed, direct deliberation and intentionality. Taylor writes: "We have no good grounds to question the ontology implicit in the terms which allow us our best account of ourselves...these carry a realist force."[105]

Taylor's Best Account principle is guided by the very question raised by his critics: How can one really trust his or her own moral position? He answers that "the only test you can put it through is that of meeting successfully all the challenges put up to it, or rebutting the supposed error-reducing moves which would transform it into something else."[106] Taylor proceeds with supersession arguments, "the combined transition of outlook and social condition which is not rationally reversible."[107] Following MacIntyre, this means that a "position or tradition can show itself superior to another, if it can give a more satisfactory account of the internal difficulties of the inferior position than can be given from within that position."[108] Taylor admits that there are, however, limits to self-constitution through self-interpretation, as "the road taken has excluded other roads which would also have conferred great benefit...our ethical outlook will be full of tensions and unresolved conflicts between goods we don't know yet how to

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[104] C. Taylor, "Reply to Commentators," op.cit., p. 211.
[105] Ibid., p. 208.
[106] Ibid., p. 206.
[107] C. Taylor, "Comments on Jurgen Habermas' 'From Kant to Hegel and Back Again'," op.cit., p. 162.
[108] C. Taylor, "Reply to Commentators," op.cit., p. 205-06.

combine."[109] The tensions involved in supersession arguments will come to greater light in the fourth chapter on incommensurability.

We turn first, however, to the question of language. In the following chapter, I will assess how the expressive conception of language, in contrast to the designative one, elucidates the ability of the Best Account principle to at once encourage particular expressions of the good and also work towards the rationalization of moral accounts and social practices. Further, I will examine Taylor's claim that language is constitutive of self-consciousness, moral intuition, strong evaluation, and ethical standards. The holism of language and the intersubjective condition of situated agents will also be explored, so as to shed light on the social nature of the critical assessment of moral accounts.

[109] C. Taylor, "Comments on Jurgen Habermas' 'From Kant to Hegel and Back Again'," op.cit., p. 163.

3. Two Conceptions of Language and Meaning

As stated in the introduction, to better understand the hermeneutic nature of the Best Account principle, we must explore the distinction that Taylor makes between two conceptions of language: the designative and the expressive. In this chapter, I will assess the strength of the expressive conception vis-à-vis the designative one at illuminating the moral agent's powers for intersubjectively-mediated self-reflexivity and self-interpretation, powers upon which the Best Account principle depends.

3.1 The Designative Conception of Language and Meaning

The designative conception sees language as referring words and signs to objects, actions, feelings, relations, and thoughts that are considered as existing independently of the mediator of language. It is an enframing that describes behaviour, purposes, and mental functions without any reference to the way language itself constitutes them. According to Taylor, this conception stems from Medieval nominalism, which declares that universals are simply an effect of our marshalling of particulars into categories. This influenced Descartes' dualist way of ideas, which conceives inner thoughts as units of representation to be assembled according to the way components of the exterior, objective world are assembled. Taylor explains that "atomic 'ideas' were combined in the mind and made the basis of a calculation underlying action."[1] Cartesian dualism influenced the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, including Hobbesian mechanism, which saw the world increasingly as a neutral, objective process. Here language is conceived as an instrument of control through representational

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[1] C. Taylor. "Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger." *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993: p. 320.

knowledge for an individual subject conceived as fully aware and in possession of his or her language instrument. This immediately self-aware subject, represented by Locke in what Taylor calls Locke's conception of a 'punctual self', marshals his or her thoughts as a disengaged, monological observer, with an aim to control both the world around him or her and his or her self-transparent inner sentiments. The punctual self is conceived as able to take an instrumental stance towards not only the natural and social environment, but also towards features of his or her own character, in order to reorganize these in an effort to secure his or her own welfare and that of others. The social and political consequence of this conception, according to Taylor, is an atomistic and instrumental depiction of society as constituted by an amalgam of individual purposes.[2]

The Cartesian and ensuing epistemological and naturalist traditions aim at satisfying the demand for control of one's environment and subjective responses, gained through an objective account of mankind and the world. This is achieved, however, through what Taylor (following Heidegger) refers to as the ontologizing of the disengaged perspective. Relevant meaning is seen as framed in linguistic representations of an independent reality. These streams of thought take value neutral, disengaged, instrumental reason, with its procedural marshalling of ideas, and conceive it as constitutive of the mind itself, rather than as one mental perspective among other engaged ones. This disengaged perspective allows for the separation of the descriptive from the evaluative dimension by aiming at the disengaged control of the faculty of evaluation, so that "'factual' information is distinguished from its 'value,' that is, its relevance for our purposes."[3] Taylor writes that "the subject as ideally disengaged [is] free and rational to

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[2] C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, op.cit., p. 7.
[3] C. Taylor, "Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger," op.cit., p. 320.

the extent that he has fully distinguished himself from the natural and social worlds, so that his identity is no longer to be defined in terms of what lies outside him in these worlds."[4] The empiricist epistemology of naturalism attempts to break past the hermeneutic circle that is dependent on the continual comparison of subjective interpretation. Its basic unit of knowledge is brute sense-datum, ideally stripped of any subject-centered qualitative distinction. As Taylor believes that human beings must be understood as existing within a horizon of these distinctions, he finds the naturalist aim of absolute and neutral explanation to be misguided. He writes: "A being who exists only in self-interpretation cannot be understood absolutely; and one who can only be understood against the background of distinctions of worth cannot be captured by a scientific language which essentially aspires to neutrality."[5]

Taylor argues that naturalist disengagement is only possible through the designative conception of language. As we have seen, he is highly sceptical of the application of the disengaged perspective - a necessary element of the natural sciences - to the human world, where the self-interpretation and, hence, intentionality of actions, feelings, aspirations, and outlooks constitute our best account. Common, intersubjective meanings are not adequately accounted for in mainstream social science, Taylor claims, which is grounded on the epistemological tradition and designative conception of that language, which conceive experience and, in turn, knowledge, as concerning the *individual* agent. He writes: "We need to go beyond the bounds of a science based on verification to one which would study the inter-subjective and common meanings

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[4] C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, op.cit., p. 7.
[5] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 3.

embedded in social reality."[6] Habermas seems to agree with Taylor, as he writes that "[f]ormal semantics...recurs to the ontological relationship between language and world, sentence and fact, or thought and intellect (as the subjective capacity to apprehend and judge thoughts)."[7] Habermas argues that because formal semantics relegates language to empirical analysis, it cannot explain the broader meaning of truth within linguistic communication. The social reality, he writes, is more complex than can be explained merely by a conception of nature objectified in instrumental reason and scientific research.

According to Taylor, the disengaged perspective poses great difficulties for the engaged conception of subjectivity. He argues that the reductive account of language and the disengaged perspective that it facilitates make various levels of awareness unstatable. He writes: "The unproblematic nature of the referring relation reflects the lack of question about subjectivity, about the fact that things appear for us as objects of the kind of explicit awareness in which we apply names and descriptions to them."[8] Taylor criticizes what he refers to as the Procrustean outlook of modern rationalism, in which "[o]ur understanding is supposedly made up of a finite number of not yet expressly foregrounded representations that are in some sense already there...What this completely misses is the irreducible content-context structure of engaged agency."[9] The intelligibility of human action and intentionality is already assumed. In his critique, Taylor owes much to Heidegger, who argues that "[a]s cases of Dasein, humans do not come to sight as isolated centers of 'intentional consciousness', nor as 'transcendental

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[6] Ibid., p. 52.
[7] J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, op.cit., p. 13.
[8] C. Taylor, *Hegel*, op.cit., p. 566.
[9] C. Taylor, "Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger," op.cit., p. 328-29.

egos' merely capable of representing an external physical world, but bearing only an accidental metaphysical relationship to it."[10] Heidegger criticizes modern epistemology and the general supposition of such views: that "there is a World in Itself, knowable (in whole or part) or not, in terms of which our 'representations' (ideas, propositions, and sentences) are true or false."[11]

Another limitation of the disengaged perspective is that it cannot account for the synthesis of the two demands of situated freedom. Taylor writes that reductive, mechanistic theories of behaviour narrowly conceive freedom as the untrammeled fulfillment of desire, that which is decided by nature and are, thus, insufficient for any notion of freedom:

> Reductive theories claim to suppress the problem of relating freedom to nature. But in fact they cannot escape it. It returns, this time unadmitted, in that the scientific objectification of human nature presupposes a subject of science whose activity and judgments about truth and depth of explanation cannot be accounted for in the reductive theory...The notion of a freedom rooted in our nature, and yet which can be frustrated by our own desires or our limited aspirations, requires a more articulated, many-levelled theory of human motivation. It is very doubtful whether any theory which recognizes only efficient causation can do justice to it. We need the notion of a bent in our situation which we can either endorse or reject, reinterpret or distort.[12]

3.2 The Expressive Conception of Language and Meaning

Much of Taylor's intellectual project depends on a second conception of language and meaning. This is the Romantic, expressive, or, as Taylor labels it, 'HHH'

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[10] Stewart, Roderick M. "Heidegger and the Intentionality of Language." *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 25.2 (April 1988): p. 153.
[11] Ibid., p. 155.
[12] Taylor, *Hegel*, op.cit., p. 564.

theory of language, coined after Herder, Humboldt, and Hegel, but influenced also by Kant, Heidegger and Wittgenstein. In the context of this discussion, I will refer to it simply as the expressive conception. By noting the merits, assumptions, and possible limitations of this conception regarding self-reflexivity, engaged agency, and culturally-shaped intersubjectivity, we can come to a greater understanding of the Best Account principle and the dynamic of situated freedom.

3.2.1 Language as Constitutive of Self-Consciousness

One merit of the expressive conception, especially important to the Best Account as a hermeneutic principle of rational discourse, is that it views language as constitutive of human reflective consciousness, moral intuition, and self-understanding. Taylor points to Herder as an important figure in the development of this view. Herder, in his critique of Condillac, writes that language is inseparable from the subject's deeper awareness and understanding of experience.[13] To Herder, linguistic, symbolic forms make thought possible and constitute logos. This notion is anti-dualist in that thought becomes inseparable from the linguistic medium that embodies it. According to Habermas, the classical view of the relation between facticity and validity, first developed in the Platonist tradition, accorded thoughts and states of affairs an ideal being-in-themselves, separated from perceptible reality. This changes, according to him, with the 'linguistic turn' of philosophy, when reason must be embodied by the universal medium of language, "so that the facticity of linguistic signs and expressions as events in

[13] For a critique of Taylor's reading of Herder and Condillac see Aarsleff, Hans. "Fact, Fiction, and Opinion in the History of Linguistics: Language and Thought in the 17th & 18th Centuries." *Papers from the Parasession on Theory and Data in Linguistics, Chicago Linguistic Society*, 32.2 (1996): p. 1-11.

the world is internally linked with the ideal moments of meaning and validity."[14] Habermas, citing Peirce, presents the image of valid argumentation that he feels must follow from the linguistic turn, an image strikingly similar to Taylor's Best Account principle:

> The world as the sum total of possible facts is constitued only for an interpretation community whose members engage, before the background of an intersubjectively shared lifeworld, in processes of reaching understanding with one another about things in the world... A justified truth claim should allow its proponent to defend it with reasons against the objections of possible opponents; in the end she should be able to gain the rationally motivated agreement of the interpretation community as a whole.[15]

Expressive language constitutes ideas in a way that makes them manifest, or 'appear', in Heideggerian terms. Herder shows that language gives us the capacity to reflect, to hold an object in a special space of attention. Language makes explicit awareness possible through the act of speech, picking particular things out and making them available both to the self and intersubjectively. Herder's conception of language and, indeed, the expressive theory in general, are useful when the very idea of human consciousness is considered an achievement. Taylor writes:

> Herder's first important insight was to see that expression constitutes the linguistic dimension. This emerged from his understanding of linguistic thought as situated. Reflection arises in an animal form that is already dealing with the world around it. Language comes about as a new, reflective stand towards things...The action that expresses and actualizes this new stance is speech.[16]

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[14] J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, op.cit., p. 34.
[15] Ibid., p. 14.
[16] C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, op.cit., p. 92.

Taylor writes that Herder's demonstration of the background upon which language rests is influenced by Kant's transcendental deduction. Kant argues that every impression must be understood with a familiar context that makes it intelligible, not as an autonomous piece of information. Each sensation must have intentionality. Kant's transcendental deduction shows the necessity of the background of intelligibility for words and information to have meaning. This opposes the atomic, designative approaches of Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke. The expressive conception holds that for designating even to make sense, it requires an intelligible context. Heidegger and Wittgenstein also build on this notion. To Wittgenstein, atomic concepts can only gain meaning within the context of language games or life forms (*Lebensform*). Heidegger argues that in the expressive conception, "language is no longer seen as a 'later' acquisition of rarefied tools, skills, and practices by Dasein added onto a prior existing, non-semantic field of meaningful human action and intentionality. Rather, language is now argued to be an essential or 'constitutive' part of Dasein in all its dealings."[17] Heidegger widens language to comprise all human phenomena governed by social practices, or "all meaningful technical and practical intentionality."[18] In the Heideggerian sense that Taylor endorses, language must be taken as the whole range of meaningful media and symbolic forms. This conception runs counter to scientific objectivity because of its inclusion of subject-related properties and experience. It is convincingly shown, however, to be essential when speaking of the particularly human dimension of self-interpretation and normative evaluation. Through the perspective of the expressive

[17] R.M. Stewart, "Heidegger and the Intentionality of Language," op.cit., p. 154.
[18] Ibid., p. 159.

conception of language, Taylor's ontologizing of the human's dialogically-constituted experience appears justified.

3.2.2 Language as Constitutive of Moral Intuition and Strong Evaluation

Another benefit of the expressive conception is that it explains how language is constitutive of feeling and strong normative evaluation. This is particularly pertinent to Taylor because of his critical focus on moral intuition, the reception of moral goods by the subject through the mediator of feeling. In articulating initially undefined feelings about a good through adequate expressive media, these feelings may be rendered more intense, transparent, and precise. The feeling towards the good can actually form and transform through the articulation, as the subject becomes more self-aware of his or her initial, unarticulated intuition.

As we have seen, the expressive theory requires a life framework conceived as linguistic, since strong values can only exist for someone through the mediator of expressive forms. These media make strong qualitative distinctions, the recognition of good, and feelings of awe or repulsion possible. This theory overcomes Hobbes' mechanistic conception that reduces the human's normative deliberation to a question of instrumental, self-preserving attraction or aversion to objects. It allows for a much more reflexive and ethically aware subject than that depicted by C.B. Macpherson in his critique of the Hobbesian or Lockian possessive individual, by conceiving him or her as capable of articulating second-order desires through language-constituted qualitative distinctions that transcend his or her first-order desires or repulsions.[19]

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[19] Macpherson, C.B. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.

Taylor's consideration of strong normative evaluation in his conception of agency has important consequences. It raises freedom to the level of moral autonomy in the Kantian sense by demanding that the subject recognize (*Achtung*) the moral good through his or her feeling and that this inner resonance be adequately expressed concretely through the medium of language. Mere negative freedom, to use Isaiah Berlin's term, is not enough. To be free, the subject must feel and clearly express the good. This positive freedom is rendered possible by expressive language since it is that through which we articulate our distinctly human emotions and the qualitative distinctions of right, good, just, or beautiful. In Taylor's words, our horizon of human concerns and standards is made manifest through expressive behaviour. Language and expressive action provide the medium through which the most important human concerns are made available in public space, where they can call on individuals to respond. One of the earliest available and most famous sources linking language to qualitative distinction is Aristotle who, in his *Politics*, writes that "language serves to declare what is advantageous and what is the reverse, and it is the peculiarity of man, in comparison with other animals, that he alone possesses a perception of good and evil, of the just and the unjust, and other similar qualities; and it is association in these things which makes a family and a city."[20]

Humans, as opposed to other animals, strive for the appropriateness of signs and words, not only in their exactness of description, but also in their power of evocation. The terms that we use to make sense of our lives must strive for intelligibility and clairvoyance in giving us insight into what it means to live as a human in this world. The principle of a Best Account calls on humans to recognize and articulate the standards,

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[20] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, op.cit., Book 1, Chap. 2, p.11.

virtues, or rules that structure any given domain. This articulation is essential to moral agency. The combination and rational evaluation of these accounts generates the human reality, one inseparable from qualitative distiction and, therefore, language. Taylor writes: "If we are partly constituted by our self-understanding, and this in turn can be very different according to the various languages which articulate for us a background of distinctions of worth, then language does not only serve to *depict* ourselves and the world, it also helps *constitute* our lives."[21] The ontological account put to the test of the Best Account principle requires expressive language to form the commonly intelligible articulations of strong evaluation and previously implicit moral intuition. This includes attributing descriptions to human beings, which requires the evocative power of word. The Best Account principle strives for both descriptive appropriateness and evocative, constitutive power. Through an appropriate description of our moral ontology and an account of what makes humans worthy of respect, it tries to evoke a strong sense of universal benevolence.

3.2.3 The Holism of Language and the Intersubjectivity of Situated Agents

Another important merit of the expressive conception is that it conceives words and signs not as independent tools for the marshaling of ideas, but rather as a holistic matrix, as in Humboldt's *Gewebe*. This has a number of consequences regarding engaged agency, the decentering of the self, and the intersubjective nature of rationality.

With language conceived as a holistic matrix, utterances exist not independently, but are received by the other in a way that is affected by his or her own prior understanding of all related concepts existing in the language matrix. Taylor claims that

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[21] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 9. Emphasis is Taylor's.

"[t]he field of meanings in which a given situation can find its place is bound up with the semantic field of the terms characterizing these meanings and the related feelings, desires, predicaments."[22] The decentered subject can, as a result, never fully control his or her expressive tool, as is conversely assumed as possible by the designative conception. Language situates thought in nature as it conceives the human as an embodied, social being, forced to express his or her intuitions or thoughts about truth or rightness through an expressive tool that is both finite and impossible to fully master. Heidegger refers to the 'finitude' of the knowing agent in his critique of monological and dualist rationalism. Heidegger argues, in a way that will influence Merleau-Ponty, that embodiment shapes the subject's perception of the world and, therefore, constitutes his or her world. In his reading of Heidegger, Taylor explains that "an engaged form of agency is one whose world is shaped by its mode of being. This mode of being provides that context in which the experience of this agent is intelligible..."[23] Heidegger argues that expressive media give us access to such modes of being. His concept of *Lichtung* (clearing), is where *Sein* (being) is disclosed to *Dasein* (being-in-the-world, or the human being). Being is revealed through language, since language calls Dasein to adequately recognize the deeper meaning of things in the world. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes that things are disclosed first as part of a world, "as correlates of concerned involvement, and within a totality of such involvements."[24] Atomism of input is denied while neutrality is refuted by the thesis that objects are first disclosed in a world as ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*). Understanding the various levels of significance that an object bears for the subject depends both on Heidegger's conception of Being as temporal, so that the

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[22] Ibid., p. 25.
[23] C. Taylor, "Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger," op.cit., p. 328.

meaning of things is expanded to relate to their emergence, presence, and future, but also to the above-mentioned language matrix in which objects and terms can evoke new meanings by extending to other concepts within the web.

Heidegger argues that "most cases of Dasein find themselves 'thrown into' a world of well laid out and established practices...with a powerful normative force over each new herd-member."[25] Taylor adopts this view and claims that using language in accordance with social practices requires shared meanings. With its focus on the atomism of information and subsequent subjective reactions, the designative approach cannot account for the important way shared meanings situate agency. When we extend the situated aspect of subjectivity to the realm of the moral, as Taylor does, we see that when an agent describes his or her experience or intuition, it is only intelligible within the background of the moral horizon in which he or she is situated. This horizon, too, is shaped by the intersubjective languages and shared modes of being into which the agent is born. The subject is brought up in a language community that expresses certain goods that he or she must reckon with. This moral decentering, facilitated by a holistic view of language and meaning, explains how commonly held hypergoods within the Best Account principle can claim real moral authority.

Taylor shows that because human reason is embodied in a commonly-shared matrix of symbols that can never be mastered by a single subject, rationality and autonomy must be constituted intersubjectively. The web of signifiers, symbols, words, and ideas that comprise the subject's language exist prior to his or her entering society and is continually maintained and shaped by his or her language community. This

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[24] Ibid., p. 332.
[25] R.M. Stewart, "Heidegger and the Intentionality of Language," op.cit., p. 154.

community maintains the linguistic barriers of meaning, intelligibility, and adequate expression of feeling. Hence Herder's focus on 'volk' as language carrier. Taylor is convincing when arguing that a view that considers the role of language in the intersubjective moral formation of the subject better understands the human moral predicament than the disengaged and monological conceptions of the Cartesian, naturalist, and possessive individualist streams.

3.2.4 The Particular Expression of the Good

A related merit of the feeling-constitutive role of expressive language is that it allows both individuals and whole speech communities to project their love for the good into the public space in a way that is properly their own. Speech communities share vocabularies that generate particular ethical standards and self-descriptions. Taylor writes: "The range of human desires, feelings, emotions, and hence meanings is bound up with the level and type of culture, which in turn is inseparable from the distinctions and categories marked by the language people speak."[26] Taylor submits that various symbolic activities evoke various levels of human consciousness from the previously less explicit levels, the implicit background of our intuitions and thoughts. These activities take different forms in different cultures and societies around the world:

> Common meanings are the basis of community. Inter-subjective meaning gives people a common language to talk about social reality and a common understanding of certain norms, but only with common meanings does this common reference world contain significant common actions, celebrations, and feelings. These are objects in the world that everybody shares. This is what makes community.[27]

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[26] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 25.

Taylor's use of the philosophy of language seems to break with Hegel's relegation of particular historical communities to mere moments in the whole of a more uniformly perceivable unfolding of Geist. Following Rousseau and Herder, Taylor writes that each person's moral intuition resonates in a unique way and is, consequently, articulated and lived by each in his or her own way. This sensibility to the good is felt much deeper than the merely formal demand of universality. Here we see the Romantic notion of a particularly embodied resonance of the good, which strives to fill the demand for expressive unity within the modern dichotomy of situated freedom. Again, in situating reason within the bounds of culturally inherited expressive media, Taylor takes much here from Hegel and Heidegger. Stewart explains Heidegger's project in this regard:

> to accept some version of the traditional claims that *logos*, *ratio*, and language set Dasein off from what is non-Dasein, while, on the other hand, not wanting to separate in reality or thought our capacity for *logos* from our inherited, rule-following social practices. In a move reminiscent of Hegel's critique of Kantian rationality and *Moralitat* and his advocacy of the rationality found in ongoing *Sittlichkeiten*, Heidegger wants to urge the view that Dasein is 'by nature' a rational and social animal...[28]

Taylor's Romantic-inspired emphasis on particularity and expressive freedom does not mean, however, that the subject can escape the boundaries of his or her language matrix, as this would render his or her expression and action unintelligible to the other, while (in Hegel's terms) making his or her radical freedom vacuous. It is to say rather that each individual and culture has its own unique way of expressing their moral

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[27] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 39.
[28] R.M. Stewart, "Heidegger and the Intentionality of Language," op.cit., p. 155. Emphasis is Stewart's.

intuition within the available expressive media, which include art, music, literature, gesture, and personal style. Because these media are shared intersubjectively, the intuition can be made public where it can be recognized, informed, and transformed through the engagement with and critique of others. Taylor writes that language creates the very public space wherein this critique takes place, in that it presents matters before *us*. It is constitutive of the specifically human situation of *being together*, as well as the social relations that create, uphold, and transform the speech community. Social and political institutions, relations of authority or intimacy, formality or familiarity are shaped by not only the terms available within a particular language, but also the way that they are delivered within the public space through gesture, tone, or innuendo. We can see here how Hegel could have conceived of institutions themselves as expressive of the idea, rather than merely instrumentally. Taylor writes: "The meanings and norms implicit in these practices are not just in the minds of the actors but are out there in the practices themselves, practices which cannot be conceived as a set of individual actions, but which are essentially modes of social relation, of mutual action."[29]

The expressive conception of language is here linked to Taylor's theory of authenticity, wherein the identity of the individual or community is at once constitutive and generated by how the good is felt, articulated to the other, and put into practice. Taylor criticizes the radically subjective and relativist deviants of the ethic of authenticity in both *Sources of the Self* and *The Malaise of Modernity,* while demanding that the expressive articulation that constitutes identity be authentically reflective of the qualitative distinctions of good that the subject feels resonate within. The way we project ourselves in public space and what we express through language media is an articulation

[29] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 36.

of our sensitivity to what we admire or would care to have recognized in us. Expressive behaviour, therefore, helps to raise personal identity above the level of relative tastes or irrational whims towards an idea of the self as a carrier and articulator of the good. Again, Taylor stresses that authentic expression is necessarily achieved through languages offered by the subject's community, thus setting himself in opposition to proceduralists who tend to overlook the importance of cultural and language groups in their depiction of the atomic moral agent.

With the expressive conception at his disposal, Taylor shows the nature of language as an activity carried out by a subject with a certain situated perspective, thus showing the importance of personal identity when considering moral ontology. The conception of the embodied subject that sees reason as inseparable from language, identity, and community, demands that legislation and public deliberation take account of the subject in his or her particularity. This attempt is countered by the opposite demand for universal validity in practical reason and applied law. Taylor agrees that each individual or community must ensure that its first, implicit moral intuitions are guided by good reasons, rather than clouded by provincial prejudices or irrational desires. The moral agent must reflect on whether his or her particular feeling and articulation of the good is acceptable as part of the best possible account of that which commands our respect. The Best Account principle calls on the agent to be reflexive towards his or her unique sensibility of the good. Expressive media are in this way not only those through which the subject articulates his or her moral intuition in its own particularity, but are also constitutive of the process by which he or she can evaluate the rational validity of his or her particular worldview. Taylor argues that "[a]s we come in the situation of

intercultural comparison to understand better the differences in outlook and understanding between different civilizations, we can come to see the languages and repertories which are at home in these cultures as offering different takes on a common human condition..."[30]

3.2.5 The Generation of Meaning: Transforming the Language Matrix

Certain terms within a language matrix are essential for social norms to be recognized and institutionally manifested in political practice. Taylor points to the example of the term *equality*, which shaped so much of Athenian politics. Along with the normative terms of a living language, substantive goods must be continually re-articulated for social practices, relations, and conditions to remain or become legitimate. This idea has roots in Hegel's focus on the re-articulation and affirmation of *Sittlichkeit*, but depends on an agent that Taylor conceives as more active than the Hegelian individual. On one hand, Taylor's Best Account principle demands that each moral agent articulate his or her particular self-understanding in relation to hypergoods that carry moral authority independently of his or her subjective will. This, however, is not meant to stifle the creative freedom of the agent. On the contrary, the expressive conception of language on which the Best Account principle relies demands the subject's active participation in generating meaning through the continual and gradual transformation of his or her language matrix. This has roots in Humboldt and also in Saussure, who see language not as a forever fixed and accomplished set of signs, but as an on-going speech *activity* through which logos is constantly created. Terms within the specific context of

[30] C. Taylor. "Reply and Re-Articulation." *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, op.cit., p. 239.

the same language game (to use Wittgenstein's term) can usually be clarified and interpreted by other languages, terms, and language games. Taylor writes:

> In effect, if we want to situate language, we would have to place it at two levels, identified by the Saussurean terms *langue* and *parole*... This capacity only maintains itself by its continuous exercise... Without *langue*, no *parole*, because the individual's acts of speech are only possible against the background of the repertory, the code... But without *parole* no *langue*, since this latter is not only sustained but continually redefined in the former.[31]

This contrasts with the ancient Greek conception of ontic logos, evident in Plato and Aristotle. Here, words were the externalization of dialogical reason that was forever trying to reflect the ultimate, objective truth inherent in the natural logic of the Cosmos. The modern degree of expressive freedom to generate meaning is also superior to Augustine's Divine Verbatum, in which human speech is the earthly manifestation of the word of God, the author of all Ideas within the providential order. Taylor's application of expressive language also allows for a more participatory subject than does Hegel's dialectical logic, where Idea is fully manifested according to rational necessity. Taylor writes: "Each new articulation helps to redefine us, and hence can open up new avenues of potential further articulation. The process is by its very nature uncompletable, since there is no limit on the facets or aspects of our form of life that one can try to describe or of standpoints from which one might attempt to describe it."[32] This immense depth of the language web shows questions of moral intuition as more complex and multi-layered than can ever be fully articulated through expressive media. Some of our inability to adequately articulate our moral ontology is due to the irony that our language tool, while

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[31] Ibid., p. 238-39. Emphasis is Taylor's.
[32] C. Taylor, "Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger," op.cit., p. 328.

at once being that on which we depend to constitute our moral reactions, often eludes us so that we cannot adequately express what we feel. Either we cannot find the words that could manifest what we mean to express, or what we say is interpreted by another agent in a way that distorts our feeling. This is the complex and interrelated nature of the language web. Fortunately, articulations can be clarified by placing terms within a larger context, or by expressing the feeling or idea with an alternative medium. The designative conception, which would attempt to fully and decisively account for a particular moral feeling through an objective term, will not recognize this depth and its changing, temporal nature. The Best Account principle deals with trying to best understand the unarticulated conditions of our engaged agency, rather than with the fully explicit position of classical scientific reasoning.

By allowing the subject more freedom to generate meaning expressively, outside of a rigid, substantial order, Taylor demands that he or she be reflexively engaged in the activity. In this way, institutionalized qualitative distinctions will theoretically better reflect the authentic moral intuition of the subject living in community. A high degree of participation and reflection is demanded in the continual, albeit gradual, transformation, creation, or retrieval of hypergoods. Here, moral freedom demands more than recognizing and acting according to a categorical imperative. Moral freedom requires that the subject feel the imperative resonate within, that he or she recognize it as formative to his or her own identity, and that, in addition to acting willingly according to it, that he or she be able to render account of his or her feeling and action through an appropriate, intersubjectively shared language medium. Despite the subject-decentering recognition that the agent owes the good, there is a high degree of agent participation in

articulating or transforming his or her moral ontology, which makes for an active conception of the subject as an individual or self. The subject is not passive in his or her reception of the good, but loves it, engages in it, indeed sustains it and can change it through expressive media, practices, and institutions.

3.2.6 The Universalization of Culturally-Situated Beliefs and Norms

That a speech or ethical community's shared practices and institutions can become more rational is one of the Best Account principle's main assumptions. It is in this way that culturally-situated norms begin to merge with the universalist demand for rational autonomy. We have seen this is the last chapter. The expressive conception of language, however, demonstrates particularly well how the intersubjective critique and correction of terms and meanings within the ever-shifting language matrix can serve to improve the rationality and universality of a given community's self-understanding and corresponding institutions. As we have seen, the expressive conception recognizes language as a holistic, multi-layered matrix. Within two terms of this interconnected web, there exists a context-dependent space of energy or meaning. No word presents a single, transparent, and permanent significance, as the designative theory would suggest. Words rather carry changing connotations depending on their situation within a sentence, text, or language game. Taylor focuses on this changing space of energy between words when speaking of modern auto-telic, epiphanic poetry, such as that of Ezra Pound. This is significant to the Best Account principle because of the transforming force that it bears upon traditional, cultural goods and practices. The expressive theory holds that altering the language matrix facilitates new ways of feeling, new ways of understanding one's

self, and new ways of responding to certain ideas. Taylor accordingly writes that when an individual or community recognizes the worth of a hypergood and begins to love it authentically, this changes the way that other goods are evaluated. This is an important aim of the Best Account principle, in asking agents to be self-reflexive and to rationally articulate their moral ontology. Agents might come to see their belief system as containing unsustainable contradictions or irrational exclusions once they try to defend it as making the best sense of the human moral condition. Habermas also addresses this phenomenon:

> The ideal tension breaking into social reality stems from the fact that acceptance of validity claims, which generates and perpetuates social facts, rests on the context-dependent acceptability of reasons that are constantly exposed to the risk of being invalidated by better reasons and context-altering learning processes.[33]

If a traditional community whose practices were exclusionary to a portion of their membership begins to understand the terms of universal respect, human dignity, and inclusion, it is likely that their customs and traditional goods will be seen in a different light. It may be that much of the old tradition is maintained, but in a more inclusive fashion, or in a way that is reflective of respect for all human beings. Terms included in the culturally-bound good life of this individual or community might remain, but with an adjusted, transvaluated significance, due to the new terms of universality that frame it. A new space of meaning can manifest between the terms and practices of the traditional goods and those of universal dignity and inclusion. Again, there is a link between the holistic notion of language and the holistic notion of life-story. Here, Heidegger's

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[33] J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, op.cit., p. 36.

temporal structure of being is related to the moral space. A requirement of moral agency is that life be seen as a whole, the 'quest' of MacIntyre. The changing nature of connotation within languages allows for the changing of one's relation to the good, as well as their changing self-understanding and form of recognition by the other. To begin to understand the political importance of this, one need only look to the powerful re-appropriation and consequential transvaluation of the terms 'Queer' or 'American Indian' by their respective communities. This change can occur due to the agent's understanding of his or her life as narrative with potentially transformational chapters; communities and individuals can recognize themselves or be recognized by others in a new light that they can actively help define. In the next chapter, I shall further explore the dynamic of cultural communities facing the demands of universal inclusion and respect, the effect that this has on the public recognition of these communities, as well as problems of incommensurable worldviews that this inevitably faces.

In the last section of this chapter, however, we briefly consider the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans Gadamer as it relates to the distinction between the designative and expressive conceptions of language. Gadamer has influenced Taylor through his dialogical understanding of knowledge and meaning, an understanding which helps demonstrate not only the importance of difference recognition, but also attempts to meet the challenge of incommensurable worldviews.

3.3 Gadamer's 'Fusion of Horizons'

In *Truth and Method*,[34] Gadamer argues that understanding a text, a historical event, or another civilization should not be construed on the model of a 'scientific' grasping of an object. Understanding should rather be undertaken through the 'conversation' model of speech partners who come to a mutual understanding. Gadamer rejects the 'unilateral' model of understanding, in which the agent's search for knowledge is conceived as attaining the best explanatory language for an objective phenomenon. This model seeks intellectual control of the object, and fulfills only the first, rational demand of situated freedom, as discussed in chapter one. The designative conception of language is useful to the unilateral model, as it allows for the disengaged and instrumental marshalling of ideas and phenomena into intelligible units of information. A view of knowledge as the attaining of the best disengaged, explanatory language does not fit with Gadamer's 'bilateral' model, in which understandings are party-dependent and can only be accessed in interlocution with others. This dialogical form of understanding depends on the intersubjective nature of language, as it is recognized by the expressive conception. Gadamer defines experience as *Erfahrung der Nichtigkeit*, the negation and reconstitution of previous realities in response to the feedback of the other. With his bilateral model, the researcher might have to alter his or her initial objectives, depending on what he or she learns from his or her interaction with the studied speech partner.

Following Heidegger, Gadamer argues that the languages of the human sciences, as opposed to the 'pure' sciences, draw their intelligibility from our ordinary

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[34] Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden & John Cumming. New York: Seabury Press, 1975.

understanding of what it is to be an engaged human agent. Part of this engagement, as we have seen, is cultural. Gadamer believes in the notion of irreducible cultural variation, the possibility that our best account will vary both with the perspective of the people studied and with that of the students. Any fundamental, common human nature, the object of experience-transcending science, is always mediated by culture, self-interpretation, and language. Gadamer writes that understanding and the overcoming of ethnocentrism depend on identifying and undoing facets of our implicit understanding that distort the reality of the other, while allowing our own worldview to be challenged. In this way, we will see our particularity as an articulated fact, as well as perceive the features of the other's life form in a less distorted way. This progressive, engaged understanding is gradual and imperfect, but Gadamer argues that it cannot be replaced in favour of any disengaged standpoint, one that, as Taylor shows, the designative approach to language would allow.

Taylor refers to 'languages of perspicuous contrast' that are meant to bridge the implicit self-understandings and moral ontologies of interlocutors. This is directly inspired by Gadamer's concept of a 'fusion of horizons'. In this fusion, interlocutors try to come to a mutual understanding, to find a language with which both can agree to communicate undistortively. They identify that part of their lives which the other's customs "interpellate, challenge, and offer a notional alternative to."[35] Taylor defines a language of perspicuous contrast as a language in which two cultures could formulate each of their ways of life

> as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both. It would be a language in which the possible human variations would

> be so formulated that both our form of life and theirs could be perspicuously described as alternative such variations. Such a language of contrast might show their language of understanding to be distorted or inadequate in some respects, or it might show ours to be so...[36]

Vincent Descombes writes that to fuse horizons,

> [w]hat the enquirer studying different forms of life must do is to discover the native categories...It is as if, in correcting her first attempt at description, she had to reconstitute an original which, in a sense, has never existed...The enquirer must take her bearings from this ideology, and translate it into more universal categories.[37]

Each horizon, or understanding of the human condition, shifts to make room for the articulated perspective of the other. Taylor writes:

> We learn to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture. The "fusion of horizons" operates through our developing new vocabularies of comparison, by means of which we can articulate these contrasts. So that if and when we ultimately find substantive support for our initial presumption, it is on the basis of an understanding of what constitutes worth that we couldn't possibly have had at the beginning. We have reached the judgment partly through transforming our standards.[38]

According to Gadamer and Taylor, a fusion of horizons must take into account what it would be like to be an engaged participant in the other's way of life. This is impossible as a disengaged observer, which is a reason why Taylor sees the designative approach to meaning as so limiting. In a fusion of horizons, we must try for mutual

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[35] C. Taylor. "Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes." *Gadamer's Century*, ed. Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arswald, & Jens Kertscher. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002: p. 293.
[36] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 125.
[37] V. Descombes, op.cit., p. 111.

clarification of terms and a negotiated language, so as not to judge only by our own standards. This also requires that our own terms and normative claims be put into question and be ready for possible transformation. The very possibility of this requires a changeable language matrix, which an expressive conception of language recognizes.

Gadamer's fusion of horizons seeks pan-cultural criteria for claims to truth and rightness, criteria generated intersubjectively. Accounts can be judged for accuracy, comprehensiveness, nondistortion, and for their taking in and making mutually comprehensible a wider range of perspectives. The best or most comprehensive account is meant to replace the application of disengaged scientific understanding that grasps humanity under one set of explanatory laws. Taylor sees the principle of a comprehensive account as an important ideal, both epistemically and humanly. Obviously, Gadamer's hermeneutic picture of fusing horizons has striking parallels with Taylor's Best Account principle. Following Gadamer, Taylor argues that for a dialogical fusion of ontologies and ethical standards to take place, there must be mutual recognition of dignity and validity from both parties of the exchange. Taylor's politics of cultural recognition, which attempts to surpass cultural relativism and find objective grounds for recognition, will now be addressed. I will also examine the ever-presence of incommensurable horizons, which challenges the possibility of ethical convergence and threatens a slide to relativism.

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[38] C. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," op.cit., p. 67.

4. Recognition and the Challenge of Incommensurability

In this chapter, I will examine how the Best Account principle's standard of universal respect animates Taylor's politics of cultural recognition, before turning to the everpresent challenge of incommensurable ethical worldviews that this politics faces. Finally, I will briefly assess how Gadamer's philosophy might help meet the challenges of incommensurability, before analysing the connection between cultural openness and the hypergood of autonomy on which the Best Account principle depends.

4.1 Recognition and the Politics of Difference

As I have shown, Taylor's Best Account principle sets equal respect and inclusion as the primary standard by which to evaluate diverse moral ontologies. This standard, as a result, also informs Taylor's politics of cultural recognition. Taylor writes that "[t]he politics of equal dignity is based on the idea that all humans are equally worthy of respect...what is picked out as of worth here is a *universal human potential*."[1] The Romantic ethic of authenticity has, however, helped to extend the recognition of equal dignity to a recognition of the worth of cultural particularity:

> In the case of the politics of difference, we might also say that a universal potential is at its basis, namely, the potential for forming and defining one's own identity, as an individual, and also as a culture...the demand for equal recognition extends beyond an acknowledgement of the equal value of all humans potentially, and comes to include the equal value of what they have made of this potential in fact.[2]

Taylor is sympathetic to the recognition of particularity, partly because of the importance of community and its languages in developing the agent's capacity for strong

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[1] C. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," op.cit., p. 41. Emphasis is Taylor's.
[2] Ibid., p. 42-43.

evaluation. His sensitivity is also due, however, to an awareness of historical, political movements in which the drive to universal freedom or a conception of the general will severely repressed any such difference. Regarding the philosophy of Rousseau, Taylor argues:

> three things seem to be inseparable: freedom (nondomination), the absence of differentiated roles, and a very tight common purpose. We must all be dependent on the general will, lest there arise bilateral forms of dependence. This has been the formula for the most terrible forms of homogenizing tyranny, starting with the Jacobins and extending to the totalitarian regimes of our century. But even where the third element of the trinity is set aside, the aligning of equal freedom with the absence of differentiation has remained a tempting mode of thought. Wherever it reigns, be it modes of feminist thought or of liberal politics, the margin to recognize difference is very small.[3]

Taylor endorses a brand of liberalism that calls for the steadfast defence of certain fundamental, universal, individual-based rights, but which is also willing to attribute certain immunities and benefits to cultural groups in order to ensure survival and integrity. His stance has been contrasted to the more neutral liberalism of fellow Canadian and cultural theorist, Will Kymlicka.

4.1.1 Kymlicka's Liberalism

Kymlicka, unlike Taylor, attributes no autonomous, moral value to the cultural community vis-à-vis the individual. To him, the cultural community does not represent any moral entity or conception of the good in itself, but rather offers the context for individual assessment and choice of goods. Culture is seen as a mechanism or instrument for self-definition, a necessary context for the development of individual liberty.

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[3] Ibid., p. 51.

Kymlicka promotes modern liberal democracy for its defence of each individual's equal right to conceive his or her own vision of the good:

> No particular task is set for us by society, and no particular cultural practice has authority that is beyond individual judgement and possible rejection. We can and should acquire our tasks through freely made personal judgements about the cultural structure, the matrix of understandings and alternatives passed down to us by previous generations, which offers us possibilities we can either affirm or reject.[4]

The state, according to Kymlicka, should only offer special immunities and political rights to significantly large national minorities whose cultural community is otherwise structurally disadvantaged. As an example of such a group, Kymlicka refers to the Aboriginal communities of Canada. These special rights are not meant, however, to promote one cultural conception of worth over any other, but rather to strengthen the institutions specific to the underpriveleged community in order that each member enjoys the necessary conditions for individual autonomy to an extent equal to non-members. Kymlicka, however, does not promote the political recognition of difference if this recognition in any way limits the community member's liberty of self-definition. Working under the liberal bias of individual equality and autonomy, Kymlicka argues that no culturally-bound conception of the good ought to be imposed on the individual members of that community. He argues that the egalitarian principle of state neutrality is the most likely principle to secure social cohesion in a society that is diverse, yet historically intolerant:

> The liberal view that I am defending insists that people can stand back and assess moral values and traditional ways of life, and should be given not only the legal right to do so, but also the social conditions which enhance

[4] W. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, op.cit., p. 50-51.

> this capacity (e.g. a liberal education)...To inhibit people from questioning their inherited social roles can condemn them to unsatisfying, even oppressive, lives.[5]

I agree with Taylor in his argument against Kymlicka that political institutions ruled entirely by the egalitarian principle of neutrality will be incapable of sustaining legitimacy and freedom. Taylor opts for a brand of liberalism that goes beyond neutrality and the negative rights of state non-interference. Because he sees individual freedom as dependant on a continuously vulnerable cultural structure, Taylor asks that citizens recognize the substantive goods and positive duties that serve to sustain this culture.

4.1.2 Standards of Recognition

The difficulty that arises in Taylor's form of liberalism is deciding on which substantive goods to promote and on which basis to attribute political recognition to various cultures within the state or at the international level. There are many views on the matter. Steven Rockefeller offers what he calls an ecological and religious answer to the question, claiming that each culture "has its own place in the larger scheme of things, and each possesses intrinsic value quite apart from whatever value its traditions may have for other cultures...the ecological standpoint offers [a] perspective in light of which all cultures possess intrinsic value and in this sense are of equal value."[6] Rockefeller, like Taylor, sees the politics of recognition as an expression of the human need for acceptance and belonging. Rockefeller considers this a religious need, so that to offer only an initial *presumption* of equal value, rather than recognizing objective equal value itself, does not

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[5] W. Kymlicka. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights.* Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995: p. 92.
[6] Rockefeller, Steven C. "Comment." *Multiculturalism*, op.cit., p. 94.

fully address this human need. From Taylor's perspective, Rockefeller's justification of recognition is too relativist. Rockefeller celebrates diversity for its own sake, rather than being rationally critical of the goods espoused by each culture. Taylor writes: "The claim seems to be that a proper respect for equality requires more than a presumption that further study will make us see things this way, but actual judgments of equal worth applied to the customs and creations of these different cultures."[7]

Susan Wolf, like Rockefeller, finds it disturbing that the recognition of difference should require that a culture has something in its moral ontology that is judged objectively as valuable to the rest of the world. She argues, contrary to Taylor, that recognition should rest simply on each individual's membership in the multicultural community. Wolf argues that in failing to recognize one's cultural identity, aside from judgements of merit, we fail to respect the individual as an equal.[8] In a similar argument, Habermas writes that obligations to recognition

> arise from legal claims and not from a general assessment of the value of a culture in question...The right to equal respect, which everyone can demand in the life contexts in which his or her identity is formed as well as elsewhere, has nothing to do with the presumed excellence of his or her culture of origin, that is, with generally valued accomplishments...To this extent coexistence with equal rights from different ethnic groups and their cultural forms of life does not need to be safeguarded through the sort of collective rights that would overtax a theory of rights tailored to individual persons...the protection of forms of life and traditions in which identities are formed is supposed to serve the recognition of their members; it does not represent a kind of preservation of species by administrative means...For to guarantee survival would necessarily rob the members of the very freedom to say yes or no that is necessary if they are to appropriate and preserve their cultural heritage.[9]

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[7] C. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," op.cit., p. 68.
[8] Wolf, Susan. "Comment." *Multiculturalism*, op.cit., p. 79-81.
[9] J. Habermas. "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," op.cit., p. 129-30.

In nuanced opposition to Habermas, Taylor claims that the politics of difference demand that "we all *recognize* the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their worth."[10] Taylor finds the justification for recognition espoused by Rockefeller, Wolf, and Habermas as limited, for they lack an objective standard by which to judge the ethical worth of cultural practices, over and above a formal system of individually-distributed rights. The negative result is that political recognition is thus robbed of its significance, for even those communities or individuals who might exhibit practices that obviously lack or run contrary to the demands of universal respect would receive the same treatment as those communities and individuals who show the highest in ethical standards. Groups who show practices that are seen as abhorent by the larger international community or state citizenry could claim their rights as full political participants without having to answer to any ethical standard. Taylor finds this unacceptable. As Rockefeller perceives, "Taylor's resistance to an outright judgment of equal value reflects a critical perspective that is concerned with the progressive evolution of civilization and the need to make distinctions about the relative merits of various achievements of different cultures."[11] Recognition, to Taylor, carries an activist force. He argues: "On the international scene, the tremendous sensitivity of certain supposedly closed societies to world opinion – as shown in their reactions to findings of, say, Amnesty International, or in their attempts through UNESCO to build a new world information order – attests to the importance of external recognition."[12]

Taylor argues against a peremptory demand for favorable judgements of cultural worth. He writes that it makes no sense to demand as a matter of right that an external

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[10] C. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," op.cit., p. 64. Emphasis is Taylor's.
[11] S. Rockefeller, op.cit., p. 94.

judge see a culture as great or equal to another prior to close comparative analysis. He claims that the judgement of value must be objective if it is meant to be taken as a genuine sign of recognition and respect. If the judgement is based on pure subjective will, it comes off as patronizing, insincere, ethnocentric, and even a contempt for the other's intelligence.[13] Another problem, according to Taylor, is that unreflective judgements of equal worth can, paradoxically, be homogenizing to the culture in question: "For it implies that we already have the standards to make such judgments...And so the judgments implicitly and unconsciously will cram the others in our categories."[14] Taylor suggests, instead, an initial working *presumption* of worth that should guide the politics of recognition and, indeed, any study of another culture:

> it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time - that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable - are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject.[15]

This working presumption reflects Taylor's belief that certain common ground must be shared by interlocutors for any form of practical reasoning to be fruitful or any genuine political recognition to be attributed. He argues that any practical reasoning or standard of political recognition that considers the substantial value of ethical goods must begin from the standpoint of engaged participants. Since every individual and culture is engaged in its own space of moral goods, every interlocutor must participate in practical dispute or comparative cultural study with the working assumption that the other's

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[12] C. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," op.cit., p. 64.
[13] Ibid., p. 70.
[14] Ibid., p. 71.
[15] Ibid., p. 71-72.

perspective carries some measure of validity and justification. Taylor's initial assumption, rather than outright judgement of equal worth, calls on the members of the culture in question to articulate their moral ontology in their own terms, so as to avoid being misrepresented and misjudged by the terms of another culture. As discussed in chapter two, the best possible account of one's moral ontology depends on self-reflexivity and expressive articulation. Taylor tries to overcome a problem raised in much of the debate concerning multiculturalism: the assumed superiority that drives the imposition of some cultures on others. Although Taylor's Best Account principle and politics of recognition aims at the progressive rationalization of the institutions of each culture, Taylor does not wish to make the Hegelian reduction of foreign cultures to mere moments in a Western-lead historical march to freedom. Taylor admits that "Western liberal societies are thought to be supremely guilty in this regard, partly because of their colonial past, and partly because of their marginalization of segments of their populations that stem from other cultures."[16]

4.1.3 Moral Autonomy as the Primary Condition of Recognition

Despite the importance of an initial presumption of worth required for effective cultural exchange and political recognition, this presumption does not, in itself, set any standard by which to finally evaluate cultural claims to rightness. Ronald Beiner writes:

> The question for a political philosopher is not the relevance of identity, but how to assess the normative claims embodied in conflicting visions of identity...the mere fact that certain people are contingently committed to a certain identity furnishes no normative foundation for claims to recognition; whether the latter claims are valid or not depends on the

[16] Ibid., p. 63.

substance of the identity to which those people are committed.[17]

Part of the reason that Taylor insists on attributing political recognition within Western societies on the basis of objective criteria is that he does, indeed, view Western liberalism as embodying a set of moral goods that must be preserved and that can serve to assess competing normative claims. Taylor does not support a version of liberalism that claims complete cultural or ethical neutrality, but instead refers to liberalism as a 'fighting creed'.[18] This conviction is part of what drives Taylor to criticize the strictly procedural and formal justifications for liberalism, as we saw in chapter two. The moral goods that Taylor believes are the most vehemently defended by Western liberalism are the same that stand as the main criteria of validity within his Best Account principle. Once a culture fails to reflect the standards of universal respect and inclusion, Taylor writes, Western societies no longer feel compelled to recognize the good in that culture. Although Taylor identifies a number of moral goods throughout *Sources of the Self*, including those of theism, those of 'ordinary life', and those of Romanticism, it is, in my view, moral autonomy which is the primary moral good. It is this that drives Taylor's favoured conception of liberalism, his primary standard for recognition, and his Best Account principle. Without it, no individual of any culture could rationally evaluate, identify with, and combine in a single life-story the other ethical goods that are provided by his or her community. Although Taylor implies that Western society would be morally empowered by more fully recognizing its Christian sources, I see moral autonomy, even in its secular form, as the chief underlying good of liberalism's 'fighting creed', the good which, if not respected by other cultures, should not receive political

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[17] R. Beiner, *Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit*, op.cit., p. 165.
[18] C. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," op.cit., p. 61.

recognition according to Taylor's Best Account principle. In his Best Account principle, Taylor provides the theoretical tools to empower a plurality of non-Christian articulated goods, while inviting us to recognize the objective worth of these accounts. Contrary to what some critics claim, Taylor's principle is aimed not at conversion to Christianity or any other single substantive hypergood, but at self-consciousness and the respectful recognition of the other. Because the Kantian good of moral autonomy is the chief driving good of modernity, the culture of modernity, according to Taylor, should not be reduced to historical contingency, but should rather act as the best rational standard by which to judge the objective worth of competing normative claims.

Although Taylor differs from Habermas in his Romantic, expressivist, and communitarian critique, both support modernity's demand for moral, rational autonomy. Taylor's Best Account principle rules out, like Habermas' discourse ethics, the recognition of forms of fundamentalism that lead to practices of intolerance and exclusion. Habermas writes:

> Such conceptions lack an awareness of the fallibility of their claims, as well as a respect for the "burdens of reason" (Rawls). [They] leave no room for reflection on their relationship with the other worldviews with which they share the same universe of discourse and against whose competing claims they can advance their positions only on the basis of reason. In multicultural societies the national constitution can tolerate only forms of life articulated within the medium of such non-fundamentalist traditions, because coexistence with equal rights for these forms of life requires the mutual recognition of the different cultural memberships: all persons must also be recognized as members of ethical communities integrated around different conceptions of the good.[19]

[19] J. Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," op.cit., p. 133.

Taylor also agrees with Habermas when the latter writes that a reflexive culture, living in ever-changing modern societies, can only sustain traditional practices that genuinely bind or motivate their members while subjecting these practices to critical examination. This is possible through the intersubjective nature of language and rationality that both Taylor and Habermas espouse. Later generations are left with the option of adopting aspects from their own tradition or from another, a phenomenon permitted by the progressively malleable nature of a given culture's language matrix, as was discussed in the last chapter.

4.2 The Challenge of Incommensurability

Despite his commitment to the rationalization of cultural practices, Taylor is quite aware of a real problem arising "from the fact that there are substantial numbers of people who are citizens and also belong to the culture that calls into question our philosophical boundaries."[20] Taylor is not ready to compromise the modern, liberal goods of universal respect, inclusion, and moral autonomy, as I have shown above. The difficulty arises when we are engaged in a practical debate or asked to recognize the worth of a culture that seems to reject these goods. Taylor admits that "[t]he notion that we might have to convince people of an ultimate value premise that they undividedly and confusedly reject is, indeed, a ground for despair. Such radical gaps may exist, particularly between people from very different cultures; in this case, practical reason is certainly powerless."[21] Neil Levy suggests two sources of this incommensurability: first, "where we are not able to identify enough in the way of common values, practices, or

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[20] C. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," op.cit., p. 63.
[21] C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, op.cit., p. 53.

principles; or, [secondly] where we do share such values, practices, or principles, but the place we give to these values is sufficiently different."[22] In either of these cases, conflicting worldviews face the challenge of very limited mutual understanding and agreement. The fact of incommensurability, according to Levy, undermines the very possibility of coming to a 'best account'. He asserts that where no trust exists between the proponents of incommensurable world-views, the error-reducing moves of the Best Account principle will be undemonstrable.

The two demands of situated freedom - rational autonomy and expressive unity with nature - are at the root of what Taylor sees as a major source of incommensurability. The modern scientific revolution concretized a disengaged conception of rationality that divides rational understanding from an engaged attunement with nature. Taylor argues, however, that not all cultures think from this perspective. He explains another conception of knowledge, an engaged view represented by Plato's fusion between rational understanding and attunement with the natural order of being. From this perspective,

> [w]e do not understand the order of things without understanding our place in it, because we are part of this order. And we cannot understand the order and our place in it without loving it, without seeing its goodness, which is what I want to call being in attunement with it. Not being in attunement with it is a sufficient condition of not understanding it, for anyone who genuinely understands must love it; and not understanding it is incompatible with being in attunement with it, since this presupposes understanding.[23]

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[22] Levy, Neil. "Charles Taylor on Overcoming Incommensurability." *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 26.5 (Sept. 2000): p. 50.
[23] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 142.

The existing variety of conceptions of rationality is a major source of incommensurability, as well as prejudice. Inheritors of the disengaged conception, Taylor writes, "are tempted to judge other, atheoretical cultures as *ipso facto* less rational."[24] Taylor argues that the modern separation of rational understanding and engaged attunement with nature is part of what causes Western observers to misinterpret the meaning of foreign practices that retain the linkage.

4.2.1 Pan-Cultural Standards of Reason?

The tension between the two conceptions of reason raises the question of whether there are, in fact, rational standards that are valid across cultures. Taylor points to Peter Winch, in addition to Levy, as someone who argues that there are no such standards, that practices in a foreign culture cannot be legitimately judged as rationally deficient relative to the analogous practices in the culture of the observer.[25] Taylor, however, pre-supposes that we can, at least in principle, understand and recognize the goods of another society as goods-for-everyone, without the ultimate guarantee that they are perfectly combinable with our own goods. Evidently, he is aware of the possibility of incommensurable culturally-bound goods, but doubts whether some can't be rationally proven as better than others, following the error-reducing principle of the Best Account. Against Winch, Taylor defends the notion that despite a plurality of standards of rationality, judgements of superiority can, indeed, be made:

> For many societies and cultures...the prescriptions of general respect just seem like perverse violations of the order of things. Once you get over this hump, however...a field of potential argument is established...

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[24] Ibid., p. 137.
[25] Ibid., p. 139. Taylor refers to Winch, Peter. "Understanding a Primitive Society." *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1 (1964): p. 307-24.

> These special pleadings can be addressed, and many of them found wanting, by rational judgement.[26]

Although it is appealing to the liberal mindset - conscious of the dangers of ethnocentricity - to relativize incommensurable ways of life, Taylor finds that these life forms raise the question of which way is *right*. As an example, Taylor shows how modern science is superior to Renaissance science specifically because of their incommensurability, based again on a difference between the separation versus the fusion of rational understanding and attunement with nature. Specifically because the norms of these two views are incompatible, Taylor argues that one can judge which is superior. The criterion for judgement is not commonly accepted in advance, however, since in this case there would be no question of incommensurability. What is demonstrable as a claim to superiority, according to Taylor, is the advantageous facet of activity that cannot be ignored once embodied in practice. A set of practices can pose a challenge for an incommensurable interlocutor in terms which he or she cannot ignore. Taylor submits:

> one culture can surely lay claim to a higher, or fuller, or more effective rationality, if it is in a position to achieve a more perspicuous order than another. It seems to me that a claim of this kind can be made by theoretical cultures against atheoretical ones...at least in some respects theoretical cultures score successes which command the attention of atheoretical ones...A case in point is the immense technological successes of one particular theoretical culture, our modern scientific one.[27]

Taylor maintains that there is no *a priori* reason to assume incommensurability, no point in closing off our moral framework to the goods of others. At the outset of

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[26] C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, op.cit., p. 57.

Sources of the Self, Taylor writes that we must presuppose that there is a minimum shared dimension to the human condition. This universal dimension, Taylor argues, is the almost instinctive moral intuition that we share regarding the "respect for life, integrity, and well-being, even flourishing, of others...Virtually everyone feels these demands, and they have been and are acknowledged in all human societies."[28] Despite the challenges of incommensurability, Taylor refuses to abandon his realist conception of normative claims and practices in favour of a relativist acknowledgement of the equal worth of cultures. He maintains his pursuit of an objective justification and evaluation of normative claims, despite the difficulties that this faces outside of a Hegelian conception of history. In order to make real judgements of worth about culturally-bound ethical systems, without reducing them to steps in the same historical and teleological path, Taylor demands that the comparative cultural studies that he prescribes be undertaken in a way that transforms the perspective of the student. In this way, judgement is not simply made by the original, familiar standards of the student's own culture. According to him, the challenge in overcoming ethnocentricity is identifying how the conceptual distinctions of one culture can be undistortively contrasted to the conceptual distinctions of another culture.

To find ways of moving cultural evaluation beyond the impasses of ethnocentrism on the one hand, and relativism on the other, Gadamer's philosophy proves useful. As we saw in the last chapter, Gadamer argues that in coming to see the other through a less distorted perspective, we come to change our own self-understanding. In opening up to changing my own self-understanding as a researcher, I am less likely to feel that the

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[27] C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, op.cit., p. 150.
[28] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 4.

terms needed to understand the other are already in my vocabulary. Taylor writes: "Real understanding always has an identity cost – something the ruled have often painfully experienced. It is a feature of tomorrow's world that this cost will now be less unequally distributed."[29] In this way, Gadamer's fusion of horizons helps to avoid the imperialist phenomenon of a dominated people being forced to assimilate to the dominator's horizon of understanding. Cultural difference, to both Gadamer and Taylor, can no longer be marginalized as an "error, a fault, or a lesser, undeveloped version of what we are, and challenges us to see it as a viable human alternative."[30]

The cultural open-mindedness that Gadamer asks of researchers is reflected in Taylor's working presumption of equal cultural worth. Taylor's presumption requires "a willingness to be open to comparative cultural study of the kind that must displace our horizons in the resulting fusions. What it requires above all is an admission that we are very far away from that ultimate horizon from which the relative worth of different cultures might be evident."[31] This humble admission fits well with Taylor's critique of Hegel's conception of an end to history, a completely self-manifesting Geist, as well as with his own focus on the power of language in continually articulating changing moral horizons. Ruth Abbey writes that one of the main purposes of *Sources of the Self* is to make Westerners aware of their own cultural background and to encourage them to open up to understanding others.[32] In the book, Taylor looks back at the horizons of past epochs so that the modern agent might recognize the value inherent in them, transvaluate them into his or her own ethical horizon, and change his or her own self-understanding

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[29] C. Taylor, "Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes," op.cit., p. 295.
[30] Ibid., p. 296.
[31] C. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," op.cit., p. 73.
[32] R. Abbey, op.cit., p. 73.

accordingly. This self-reflexive process, however, requires a continued openness to other cultures and other historical eras.

4.2.2 Cultural Openness and Moral Autonomy

The challenge of incommensurability will never completely disappear. It is, I submit, the price of cultural uniqueness and particular expressions of the good. Complete convergence of all cultural norms and practices appears to be neither viable, nor desirable. The Best Account principle, however, does encourage convergence on the hypergoods of moral autonomy, reflexivity, and the respectfulness of difference. Despite the existence of incommensurable moral ontologies and epistemological outlooks that might initially encourage an isolationist argument for cultural relativism, the Best Account principle's aims of cultural openness and the intersubjective generation of shared ethical standards remains legitimate. Moving beyond relativism to the inter-cultural, rational adjudication of substantive goods is essential if we are to identify universal moral imperatives. As Taylor argues, the universality of a moral account requires not only that it *apply* to all, but that it also be *produced* or *re-articulated* by all parties to which it applies. This idea of authorizing one's own law is inscribed in the very etymology of autonomy, which is, I have argued, the chief good of Taylor's Best Account principle. Implied in Taylor's thesis, therefore, is the powerful claim that if an individual or community is to exercise moral autonomy, it must remain open to having its self-understanding transformed by the self-understandings of other individuals or communities. Only in this way can the self extend beyond the naturally or historically pre-determined conditions of its own subjectivity and participate in the production of

more universal ethical and moral standards. This universalization of the situated agent's self-consciousness has roots in Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, and is effectively encouraged by Taylor's Best Account principle.

Conclusion

Charles Taylor's philosophy is concerned with a question that has occupied much of modern political thought: how to find a legitimate basis for unity, mutual understanding, and benevolence despite the plurality of often-conflicting cultural and ethical perspectives. Tied to this search for objective, ethical goods is the epistemological question of what consists of a valid truth claim. One of Taylor's primary arguments is that although practical reasoning will always be inseparable from claims to truth and validity, the basis for validity should not be decided solely from either a disengaged, scientific standpoint, nor from a strictly procedural ethic. Taylor's Best Account principle, instead, holds that ethical practices and truth claims can be rationally adjudicated through a process of discursive contrasts beginning from the engaged position of self-interpreting agents. I submit that Taylor takes the hermeneutic, rather than naturalist or procedural route, in part due to his commitment to the preservation of the diversity of particular languages, traditions, and social institutions that situate human agency. This concern, as I have shown, was adopted by Taylor via Aristotle, Hegel, and later theorizers of situated agency, such as Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty.

Taylor's acknowledgement of the importance of particular manifestations of the good is reflected not only in his ethic of authenticity, as adopted from Rousseau, the Romantics, and Herder, but also in his focus on the expressive, rather than designative conception of language. The expressive conception, as I presented it in chapter three, effectively illuminates the human faculty of discursive and symbolic self-interpretation that describes the self's relation to the world, to other selves, and to the plurality of ethical goods. It is this faculty that first allows for the rational evaluation of natural

inclinations and moral intuition, thus giving a qualitative and ethical dimension to action. Self-interpretation, however, is carried out through expressive media that exist prior to the individual subject, media that often embody ethical goods and worldviews that are unique to a given community. Most of the languages that express a particular community's set of ethical goods develop over time, at least in part in response to real geographic, climatic, and hence economic conditions. This system of symbols allows a people to express their relation to the physical world, to other communities, and to the spiritual body or bodies in which they believe. Taylor has effectively shown that language largely shapes the process by which human beings find attunement with the natural conditions that partially bind them in their finite situation. This attunement is a form of wisdom that Taylor identifies as stemming from Platonism, but which cannot be adequately articulated through a designative, disengaged approach to meaning. We can conclude, then, that the aim of expressive unity with nature, the demand concerned with this form of attunement, is indeed most effectively elucidated by an expressive conception of language, with its emphasis on self-interpretation.

As I demonstrated earlier, the expressive conception also facilitates a human faculty that helps satisfy the other demand of situated freedom, that of rational autonomy. This faculty, again, is that of intersubjectively-mediated reflexivity, the ability of the agent to universalize his or her consciousness beyond the traditional (and often pre-reflective) beliefs and norms of his or her community. This universalization of the ego, according to Hegel, Taylor, Habermas, and Gadamer, is achieved intersubjectively, or discursively, rather than through a Rousseauian or Kantian monological process. The universalization of our moral ontologies through discursive critique is geared towards a

progressive rationalization of local institutions. This faculty is crucial to Taylor in overcoming the impasse of cultural relativism, a popular perspective when substantive goods stand in conflict with one another or when the practical processes of institutional change appear to be carried out under conditions of domination.

The power of words to crystallize qualitative distinctions, and thereby embody notions of value, allows for a continued, collective exchange geared towards the critical evaluation of potentially opposing goods. The shifting nature of the language matrix, furthermore, allows every political community that is engaged in the critical exchange to participate in the generation of new perspectives, new shared ethical standards, and new institutions to actualize these standards. As we saw in chapter one, this understanding of discourse as shifting and creative also allows us to move beyond the Classical and Hegelian notions of a Cosmic or logical necessity that manifests itself through nature or human activity according to a pre-determined course. However, when the Platonic or Hegelian understanding is replaced by one centering on language, we are presented with a new challenge of trying to find a basis for rational validity that can direct intersubjective critique. As I have shown, this is what Taylor tries to accomplish with his Best Account principle.

In chapter two, I presented the Best Account as a hermeneutic principle of rational justification and then contrasted it with the principles of justification of liberal proceduralism, scientific naturalism, and relativism. The aim was to evaluate to what extent Taylor's principle is able to reconcile expressive unity with nature, on the one hand, and rational autonomy, on the other. Is the Best Account principle successful, after all, at preserving particular, substantive goods that situate agency, while generating

universal moral imperatives on which diverse cultural practices may converge? I have found that the principle does, in fact, respect the demand for expressive unity with nature. It does so by beginning from the self-descriptions of engaged, particular agents who are free to articulate these descriptions through the expressive media with which they have traditionally sought symbolic attunement with their environment. These self-descriptions identify substantive goods that give an ethical dimension to agency and, as Taylor shows, help form personal and communal identity. I have found, through a contrast with the more value-neutral theory of liberal proceduralism, that articulating substantive goods is, indeed, crucial to practical reasoning. The Best Account principle also satisfies the demands of expressive unity with nature by appealing to pre-articulated moral intuition as a primary guide of the agent in describing his or her idea of the good. This pre-rational faculty has doubtless roots in Rousseau's voice of nature. The fact that Taylor emphasizes moral instinct as a natural, intuitive guide confirms that his Best Account principle respects the importance of expressive unity with nature within the dichotomy of situated freedom.

The more difficult and, perhaps, more significant question is whether the Best Account principle satisfies the demand for rational and moral autonomy. Does Taylor provide a legitimate theoretical tool for autonomously generating or discovering objective truth claims and ethical standards? Taylor's error-reducing, hermeneutic principle is, upon examination, successful at generating ethical goods that survive intersubjective, rational critique. The charge by naturalists and moral sceptics that a universally accepted good does not constitute an objective good is valid only from a perspective of a disengaged, scientific understanding of validity claims. From the scientific perspective,

ethical values do appear strange, as Mackie claims, since they can never ultimately be proven empirically. Ethical goods cannot be articulated from within a disengaged understanding of meaning, nor through a designative theory of language. That is why Taylor, beginning from his early critique of behaviourism, has been so adamant about distinguishing standards of validity of the social sciences from those of the natural sciences. Taylor does not claim that scientific discovery has no bearing on ethics, or vice versa. What he argues is that accounts within the realm of practical reasoning should not be unconditionally disprovable by arguments coming from a naturalist perspective that situates objective validity in a sphere separated from the experience of engaged human beings. Claims to truth must still be made in practical deliberation. Because modernity and post-modernity have taken their distance from the Platonic doctrine of Forms, these claims to truth do suffer from not being ultimately provable beyond a universal, intersubjective acceptance based on proposed reasons. These reasons, Taylor argues, must appeal to the universal respect for the dignity of each person and their capacity for moral autonomy. Only through the respect and encouragement of moral autonomy can agents discover, combine, and then express the other ethical goods that give purpose to human action. In presenting moral autonomy as the primary good defended by the Best Account principle, Taylor maintains a strong Kantian element. Taylor's principle is inclusionary in that it invites all communities to be involved in the generation of universal, moral standards. At the philosophical level, therefore, Taylor is, indeed, able to mediate between the two demands of situated freedom.

One limitation of Taylor's work, however, is that it does not suggest how, given real economic and political factors, the practical rationalization of specific institutions

should be carried out. His theory offers little detailed prescription on the practical level of how to reach convergence on moral standards. Taylor also tends to omit the particular political, economic, and social conditions that generated the philosophical ideals that he claims comprise modern identity. What lacks from Taylor's work is a rigorous examination of the forces of power and material conditions that have situated agency and largely influenced how particular ethical goods or notions of validity have been experienced by different social classes. He, himself, admits that his moral anthropology lacks a certain level of historical sensitivity. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor writes:

> By and large, I have been dwelling on certain developments in philosophy and religious outlook, with an odd glance at aspects of popular mentality. I have barely mentioned the great changes in political structures, economic practices, and military and bureaucratic organization which marked the period. Surely the modern identity would be unthinkable without these.[1]

Taylor finds some forms of historical materialism as implausible in what he sees as their overly determinist accounts of moral, religious, and legal-political ideas.[2] I believe, however, that Taylor's project could benefit from an examination of the forces of power and material conditions, or relations of private property and production, that continue to influence the intersubjective processes through which ethical goods are re-articulated and critiqued. This would help to explain some of the sources of impasse between current political perspectives that are bound to particular class and community interests. It might also elucidate how the dissemination of public information is influenced by the particular interests of the owners and controllers of media sources. This would be valuable, since it is with this information that citizens ideally attempt to

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[1] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, op.cit., p. 199.

form autonomous opinions and engage in ideally rational debate with others. Because the discursive process of Taylor's Best Account principle is, in practice, conditioned by the information available to agents at any given time and place, it would be beneficial to uncover the sources of this information and critically examine their motives.

Despite the above limitations, Taylor's work as a moral and political philosopher remains highly pertinent to the ongoing problem of conflict between and within ethical communities. Although some misread Taylor as an apologist for Judeo-Christian theism, I submit that his sympathies to a number of substantive goods keep him from suggesting that one such good might solve all problems of violence and human rights abuses. What Taylor's Best Account principle does clearly demonstrate is that the transformation of local institutions cannot be legitimized merely by private economic interests, the isolated will of an imperialist power, or through a unilateral military campaign that makes an appeal to Divine sanction. These institutional transformations must appeal, instead, to intersubjective reason.

The obvious challenge, as I explained in chapter four, is the perpetual existence of incommensurable moral ontologies. Getting over the impasse of conflicting self-understandings is much more difficult when one or all parties involved carry exclusionary beliefs and strictly self-interested motives. The open cultural exchange that is necessary for a Gadamerian fusion of horizons can be paralyzed when a community limits their respect for human dignity to their own membership, a select portion of their membership, or any other exclusive group. It can be concluded, therefore, that while the Best Account principle's aspirations for moral convergence on universally-generated ethical standards

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[2] Ibid., p. 203.

is theoretically plausible and morally desirable, it will not overcome or resolve in itself relations of conflict mediated by power.

From a Platonic perspective, one could argue that the tension between the theoretical lucidity and practical application of Taylor's Best Account principle stands as another example of the phenomenal world showing its continual resistance to the ideal. Taylor, however, would likely argue in an Aristotelian and Hegelian line that citizens acting within their community can, indeed, positively affect the real conditions of their world and help make moral ideals a concretized reality. This is where the politics of recognition must carry an activist force and why, I believe, Taylor is right to limit political recognition to groups who demonstrate a respect for moral autonomy. I admit that attributing political recognition on the basis of human respect will not immediately stop certain groups who clearly violate human rights from demanding recognition through violence. International organizations and independent states must, nonetheless, continue to actively criticize and attempt to discourage these forces that limit their conception of human dignity to an exclusive group. Only through a continued process of peaceful and rational dialogue, necessitating an openness to foreign ideas of worth and validity, can longstanding ethical traditions be preserved and understood by others, while practices and outlooks that hinder moral autonomy and human dignity be carefully criticized and intersubjectively transformed.

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