RECOGNITION OF DIVERSITY: CHARLES TAYLOR’S EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT

Doctor of Philosophy (2014)

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Abstract

This study focuses on Charles Taylor’s educational thought with a view to understanding his contributions to the discipline of Philosophy of Education. No comprehensive study of Charles Taylor’s educational thought has been attempted. There is a single dissertation and a dozen or so published periodical articles that do take Taylor’s educational views into consideration, to be sure. Yet these studies, which limit themselves to Taylor’s account of the recognition and/or non-recognition of identity in multicultural societies, are insufficient on five accounts: i) they are indifferent to the historical nature of Taylor’s scholarly work; ii) they neglect the philosophical sources of his educational thought; iii) they fail to highlight the interconnections between the key educational themes he takes up; iv) they disregard his major critics and the dialectical tensions raised by these critics; and v) they are somewhat dated in that they do not consider his more recent scholarship. My dissertation seeks to fill these scholarly gaps. My thesis is that an inner logic is implicit in Charles Taylor’s educational thought. I argue that Taylor’s views on the modern condition, (i.e. in his readings of Descartes, Kant, Herder, and Hegel), are closely interwoven with his views on modern education, and that interconnected currents in the modern history of ideas elucidated by Taylor, (i.e. scientific rationality, exclusive humanism, and the ethics of authenticity), have contributed to the rise of, and the sensitivity toward, both the theory and the practice of the politics of recognition in contemporary educational institutions. I conclude that an education for culturally diverse minds and hearts, anchored in human, historical, and epistemological recognition, and democratically open to both immanence and transcendence, is the true calling of Taylor’s educational thought.
Acknowledgements

The exercise of writing a Ph.D. dissertation can be likened to a solo climb up a very high mountain. The journey can be a long, difficult, and painful struggle. Trials and tribulations abound: weather can obstruct, rope can tear, hands and feet can injure, and one's supplies can quickly deplete. What can seem like one step forward can amount to two steps back. Human faculties are tested, including the will to mentally, physically, and emotionally endure.

My own proverbial climb to the summit of Mount Dissertation has been eased by the support of many. Thanks are due, first and foremost, to those in the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto who made this study possible: to Dr. John Portelli, my Graduate Supervisor, for his inspiration, wisdom, and humour; to Fr. Mario D’Souza, C.S.B., Dr. Trevor Norris, Dr. Lauren Bialystok, and Dr. Douglas Simpson, my doctoral committee members, for their enthusiastic endorsement of the project; to Dr. Dwight Boyd, Dr. Megan Boler, Dr. Maureen Ford, Dr. Jeff Stickney, Dr. Dieter Misgeld, Dr. David Levine, Dr. Eric Bredo, and Dr. Jim Lang, my professors in the History and Philosophy of Education program, who challenged me to think differently; to Janice Verner, Karen Dinsdale, Sezen Atakan, Kristine Pearson, Margaret Brennan, Wendy Mauzeroll, Karolina Szymanski, Linda Pereira, Ruth Rogers, Lise Watson, Dr. Carrie Chassels, and Dr. Abigail Bakan, the talented group of administrators who guided me along the path; to Mary MacDonell, for allowing me to present my research at the annual O.I.S.E. Dean’s Conference; and finally, to Rula Kahil, Paula Carrasco, Selena Nemorin, Carmen Poole, Maureen Neil, Lynne Alexandrova, Laura Clayton, Sarah Cashmore, Glen White, Michael McGarry, Brian Wright, Dr. Graham McDonough, and Fr. Francois Mifsud, O.P., my student colleagues, all of whom were a constant source of enrichment to me through the course of my doctoral studies.

On the academic front, thanks are also due to Dr. Ruth Abbey, at the University of Notre Dame, for her invaluable bibliography of Charles Taylor’s writings; to David Cayley, at the Canadian Broadcasting Company, for his revealing five-part radio documentary on the life and times of Charles Taylor; to the organizers of various conferences I attended and/or presented at to better understand Taylor’s philosophy, including ‘Religion on the Borders: New Challenges in the Academic Study of Religion’ in Stockholm, Sweden (2007), ‘The Sacred and the Secular in a Global Canada’ in London, Ontario (2008), ‘A Secular Age? Tracing the Contours of Religion and Belief’ in Dublin, Ireland (2009), ‘Ecumenism and the Challenge of Pluralism: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue’ in Toronto (2010), ‘Charles Taylor at 80’ in Montreal (2012), and ‘Educating in Canada: Inequalities, Controversies, Debates, and Possibilities’ in Niagara (2013); to Dr. Rachael Cayley, at U. of T.’s School of Graduate Studies, for her excellent course on dissertation writing and her equally excellent advice on refining my Ph.D. proposal; to the librarians at the University of Toronto and at Brock University, who were helpful to me at every stage of the writing process; to Duane Rendle and Kevin Dancy, the Dean and Assistant Dean of Students at Saint Michael’s College, for their generosity in extending my term as a don in residence; to Carolyn Chau, Ali Galestan, Brendan Kelly, NR Harrel, Daniele Bertolini, Kyle Ferguson, Steve Williams, Fr. Youngmin Song, Dr. Kevin Connolly, Dr. Stephan Dusil, Dr. Jack Cunningham, Dr. Pablo Argirate, Dr. Stephen Scharper, and Dr. Schriner Persad, my academic friends at U. of T., for their erudite conversations on all matters intellectual; to the gifted students I have tutored; to Dr. Francesco Guardiani and Dr. Mark McGowan for hiring me as a Teaching Assistant; to Dr. Donald Wiebe, for a summer research opportunity; to Dr. David Goicoechea, for his mentorship; to Dr. Don Furlong, C.S.B., for his spiritual direction; to the late Sir Isaiah Berlin, whose writings in the history of ideas first led me to Charles Taylor; and finally, to Professor Taylor himself, for his private discussions on the educational relevance of his writings.

Last, but certainly not least, I am more than grateful to the members of my family, all of whom had a hand, in one way or another, in ensuring the completion of this study. Thanks go out to my 90-year-old grandmother, Elizabeth Pichelli, for her strength of soul; to my mother, Clara Palma, and to my father, Don Palma, talented educators in their own right, for their careful editing of the manuscript; to my younger brother, Mark Palma and his wife Amy, and to my younger sister, Laura Reid and her husband James, for their patient encouragement; to my nephew Aiden and my niece Ella, for instilling hope in the future; to my cousin-in-law, Tom Phelan, for believing in me; and to Carmen Morra, for his thoughtfulness and generosity.

Four important people passed away while this dissertation was being written: Nicholas Schoenhoffer, a gentleman and friend; Dr. Margaret O’Gara, a gifted theologian and ecumenist; Fr. Robert Madden, C.S.B., alumni guru and ‘pied piper’ of story-telling; and John Pichelli, my much-loved maternal uncle.

This study is offered in honour of their memory.

Anthony J. Palma
“The capacity to love ... is more important to me than the capacity to reason.”

Charles Taylor¹

¹ See Thomas Meaney and Yascha Mounk, ‘Spiritual Gains’, The Utopian, December 7th, 2010.
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Introduction

Why Charles Taylor?
INTRODUCTION

It has become rather cliché in academic circles in recent years to acknowledge that Charles Margrave Taylor, Professor Emeritus at McGill University, is not only Canada’s finest living philosopher, but also one of the more influential thinkers in the contemporary Western world.

This study focuses on Charles Taylor’s educational thought with a view to articulating his contributions to the discipline of Philosophy of Education. Surprisingly, little attention has been paid to Taylor’s reflections on modern education. No comprehensive study of Charles Taylor’s educational thought has been attempted. There is a single dissertation and a dozen or more published periodical articles that do take Taylor’s educational views into consideration, to be sure. Yet these studies, which limit themselves to Taylor’s account of the recognition and/or non-recognition of identity in multicultural societies, are insufficient on five accounts: i) they are indifferent to the historical nature of Taylor’s scholarly work; ii) they neglect the philosophical sources of his educational thought; iii) they fail to highlight the interconnections between the key educational themes he takes up; iv) they disregard his major critics and the dialectical tensions raised by these critics; and v) they are somewhat dated in that they do not consider his more recent scholarship. This dissertation seeks to fill these gaps.

The study is divided into four parts. Part One, ‘Taylor in the Conversation on Education,’ engages with a variety of scholars who have reacted to Taylor’s educational thought and the concept that emerges with which they are most preoccupied, namely, ‘recognition’. Part Two, ‘Taylor’s Readings of Modern Philosophers,’ looks at four modern philosophers who ground Taylor’s reflections on education: Descartes, Kant, Herder, and Hegel. Part Three elaborates on the four major themes in Taylor’s education-related writings: scientific rationality, exclusive humanism, the ethics of authenticity, and the politics of recognition. Part Four attends to four of Taylor’s major critics (i.e. Clifford Geertz, William Connolly, Richard Rorty, and Jürgen Habermas), to the tensions that emerge in Taylor’s work (i.e. naturalism vs. hermeneutics; the ‘buffered’ self vs. the ‘porous’ self; relative truth vs. objective truth; and individual rights vs. communal rights), and to Taylor’s call for a balance between rather than an either/or approach to, the dialectical tensions at

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1 See Charles L Venegoni, Charles Taylor and Education: Philosophy, Policy, Practice (Ph.D. Diss.), Loyola University of Chicago, 2000. [Periodical articles are discussed in Chapter One].

2 There is, of course, no perfect consensus on what amounts to doing philosophy and/or the philosophy of education. In pure philosophy, the analytic/continental divide is still alive and well (though perhaps not as intense as it once was). On the other side of the fence, a perusal of the last decade or so of periodical articles in leading journals with titles including the words ‘Philosophy of Education’ reveals that there are innumerable approaches to the discipline. The notion that there should be a single way to do either philosophy or philosophy of education is itself a subject of contestation.

3 As Ben Rogers has noted, Taylor is “a notable phrasemaker” whose thematic terminology has “to some degree entered the academic lexicon.” See Ben Rogers, “Charles Taylor,” Prospect, February 29, 2008.
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hand. In light of the findings of the study, the conclusion includes a brief consideration of Taylor’s contributions to the discipline of Philosophy of Education.

I argue, throughout the thesis that Taylor’s views on modern education are closely connected to his views on the modern condition. One cannot understand the former without understanding the latter. In light of Taylor’s work, my primary focus will be on what has motivated the main intellectual currents in the modern history of ideas that have contributed to the rise of the politics of recognition as we know it today, and, on how these currents, in turn, have affected both the form and content of modern education.

I claim that the connections between the four major influences on Taylor’s educational thought – a Descartes-inspired scientific rationality, a Kant-inspired exclusive humanism, a Herder-inspired ethics of authenticity, and a Hegel-inspired politics of recognition – express an internal, cause-and-effect logic. The first influence leads to the second, which leads to the third, which in turn leads to the fourth. A scientific rationality, which brackets metaphysical claims, leads to an exclusive humanism, which sees human flourishing as the only true end. An exclusive humanism, which sees human flourishing as the only true end, leads, in turn, to an ethic of authenticity, an ethic of being true to oneself. Finally, an ethic of authenticity, an ethic of being true to oneself, leads to a politics of recognition, a politics of claiming one’s legitimate rights in the public sphere. There is a striking development here, a ‘metamorphosis’ of sorts, one that has not been properly identified, explained, or understood in education-related studies of Charles Taylor’s writings.

Apart from filling a gap in Philosophy of Education scholarship, my dissertation has a three-fold objective: to explore how a Canadian Catholic philosopher of international reputation relates to a climate of secularity in the North American academy, to investigate how Taylor’s notions of self and society emerge from his genealogy of modernity, and to suggest how a sense of the transcendent can be restored to the culturally diverse environment of contemporary education.

I should, from the outset, acknowledge my own educational bias. As with any academic study, one’s particular perspective cannot be avoided. I am the son of two Canadian Catholic educators. My elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schooling took place in Canadian Catholic institutions. In my undergraduate years at Saint Michael’s College, University of Toronto, I majored in Philosophy. I then proceeded, at said university, toward a Master of Divinity and a Master of Theology. Enamored with the history of ideas, I decided to further my studies in a doctoral program at the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Education. In retrospect, the move to the study of education proved to be a ‘paradigm shift’ in my thinking. I had never been deeply exposed to a more secular form of education, to the complexities of post-modern thought (e.g. in the writings of
Michel Foucault, Thomas Kuhn, and Richard Rorty), or to contemporary discussions on the politics of personal identity (i.e. of gender, race, and class). Needless to say, it was an eye-opening experience for me. My religious assumptions were more than challenged in the process. So was my intellectual naïveté. As I journeyed through my graduate course work and comprehensive examinations, I began to see that the nature of academic discourse in a more secular environment was radically different from that to which I had been exposed. Whereas I had previously swam, (for the most part), in the theological waters of ‘transcendence’, much of what took place in the Philosophy of Education program was immanence-based. What emerged from this was the need for a synthesis. Could the disciplines of Philosophy, Theology, and Education, disciplines that were the foundation of my academic studies, be brought together in some sort of unified way? This was the question I asked myself as I pondered over which dissertation topic to pursue.

My perplexity led me to Charles Taylor. Though I had stumbled over bits and pieces of Taylor’s work in the past (via Hegel and Modern Society, The Malaise of Modernity, and Sources of the Self), I had never come to truly appreciate the value of his work. Taylor embodied all the qualities I was seeking: he was (and is) a Catholic, a Canadian, an historian of ideas, an interdisciplinary thinker, a public intellectual, and well-respected in both secular and religious circles. To add to the attraction, he had the mystique of having been a Rhodes Scholar as well as a former student, at Oxford, of the late Sir Isaiah Berlin, (whose conversational brilliance, stunning erudition, and thought-provoking writings I had long-admired). I knew that many in the Canadian political intelligentsia, both past and present, (including former federal Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff as well as former Ontario Premier Bob Rae) had ‘passed through Berlin’, as it were, and I wanted to know what Berlin’s influence on a Catholic interlocutor (such as Taylor) would amount to. Was there an ‘anxiety of influence’ mysteriously at work in the relationship between Isaiah Berlin and Charles Taylor? I was curious to know. Combined with Taylor’s breadth and depth of learning, with the fact that he was wholly immersed in the more captivating debates of our time – including those concerning the relationship between the human sciences and the natural sciences, the promise and peril of nationalism, the development of modern society, the meaning of language, the dynamics of the self, the distinction between multiculturalism and interculturalism, and the connection between the sacred and the secular – Taylor seemed, to me at least, to be a natural and logical choice. And so, with the encouragement of my doctoral supervisor, Dr. John Portelli, I gravitated to Taylor.

As would be the case for any graduate student pursuing a doctoral degree, I have spent a great deal of time on the writings relevant to my topic. Having said this, no amount of primary and secondary reading, internet searches, radio interviews, videotaped footage, and the like, could
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possibly substitute for live, real-time, face-to-face encounters with the subject of my study. Over the past number of years, I have had the privilege of experiencing Professor Taylor on stage and in person, at his Larkin-Stuart Lectures on ‘Mediational Epistemology’ (Toronto, 2004), at a talk on ‘Religion and Violence’ (Toronto, 2004), at a keynote address on ‘Reasonable Accommodation’ at the annual conference of the American Academy of Religion (Montreal, 2009), at a public dialogue with Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on ‘The Future of Religion in a Secular Age’ (Toronto, 2011), and at ‘Charles Taylor at 80’, a three-day international conference held in his honour (Montreal, 2012). Each of these experiences was intellectually enriching. During the course of these events, I found Professor Taylor to be a gifted teacher, communicator, and listener. He was a towering figure. He had a gentle charisma, was high-spirited, and was gifted with boundless energy and great vitality. His mind was subtle, holistic, and illuminating. He spoke to his audience in a polite, conversational manner. He was humane, moderate, fair-minded, sincere, humble, thoughtful, respectful, funny, wise, and unusually gracious with his critics. (Indeed, much of his writing reflects these qualities). As I came to discover, these were but some of the reasons why he was affectionately known as ‘Uncle Chuck’ among some of his undergraduate devotees.

In addition to the aforementioned occasions, I had the great pleasure of talking to Professor Taylor, for nearly an hour, in a lobby inside the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, at the annual conference of the American Political Science Association (Toronto, 2009). Professor Taylor was to deliver a late afternoon plenary address on ‘The Many Forms of Secularism’ at the conference, and I, eager to claim a seat, arrived early on the scene. As I wandered through the hallway on one of the lower levels of the convention centre, I noticed a distinguished, white-haired gentleman sitting quietly alone reading *The Globe and Mail* newspaper. “Is that who I think it is?” I asked myself. As I moved closer to the assortment of furniture surrounding this man, my intuitions were validated. It was indeed, Charles Taylor. “Are you Professor Taylor?” I asked, not knowing what else to say. “Yes, yes I am,” he replied, peering down from the top of his newspaper, as if to invite me in. “I’m actually here to attend your plenary,” I said. “Oh, good,” he said. I proceeded to tell him that I was in the process of writing a dissertation on the educational implications of his thought. “Would you mind if I asked you a few questions about your work?” “Sure,” he said, “have a seat.” As I sat down I immediately felt as though I was in the presence of a long-time friend. I was struck by how down-

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4 Taylor is unusually ‘fit’ for his age and counts swimming, skiing, and hiking among his hobbies. See Elizabeth Lumley, (ed.), *Canadian Who’s Who* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 1240.
5 Ruth Abbey, a former student of Taylor’s, has remarked that the most aggressive words she ever heard him speak in public toward a harsh adversary were: “I see only two things wrong with your argument: its premises and its conclusion.” See Mark Brender, ‘The Multi-Faceted Charles Taylor’, in *McGill Alumni Quarterly*, Winter 2008. [In his turtleneck-wearing days as a professor at McGill, Taylor had a reputation for dignifying virtually every question directed to him in class, however mindless, trivial, or inane].
6 Given Taylor’s admirable character, it is hilariously paradoxical that the first link that comes up on any given internet search is the like-named Liberian dictator.
to-earth, unassuming, and genuinely likeable this intellectual giant actually was. His wore his erudition lightly. He made me feel at home. “This is quite a coincidence. I didn’t expect to meet you this way. I haven’t prepared a list of questions for you,” I confessed. “That’s ok,” he consoled. And so it began. Professor Taylor and I embarked on a freewheeling conversation that lasted for nearly an hour. Astonishingly, he was appreciative of the fact that I had read much of his work. “But you’re Charles Taylor,” I thought quietly to myself. “You’re a world-famous philosopher. Everyone has read your work.” It was, needless to say, an engaging conversation, so engaging, in fact, that we nearly missed the plenary. A late check of Professor Taylor’s wristwatch saved the day. Though space forbids me to go into the details of our to-and-fro, one fragment of our conversation was particularly relevant at the time. At one moment in the discussion, I pointedly asked Professor Taylor, “Do you have a Philosophy of Education?” After a brief pause, he looked at me, somewhat bemused, and replied, “I don’t think I’ve given that enough thought.” He was correct in his assessment of his own work, but only partially so. I proceeded to remind him of a few of the insights on education I had extracted from some of his lesser-known works during the course of my research. “Did I write that?” he asked, amusingly. “Yes” I said. “Oh,” he replied. Not wanting to lend the impression that I knew Professor Taylor better than he knew himself, I agreed with him that though he might not have an explicit philosophy of education, a philosophy of education might indeed be implicit in his writings. “My task,” I went on to say, “is to make what is implicit in your education-related writings explicit.” “I see,” he replied, with a nod of approval. And there it was. I had engaged with one of Canada’s greatest minds.

A full-scale biography of Charles Taylor is presently unavailable. This is, in light of his philosophical accomplishments and his international stature, particularly surprising. If there is any truth to the phrase that ‘all philosophy is biography’, the absence of the latter will no doubt obscure an understanding of the former. This is no less true in the case of Charles Taylor. As the following biographical sketch reveals, defining moments in Canadian history have had a profound influence upon his life and work.

Charles Taylor has led a full and remarkable life. He was born on November 5th, 1931, the youngest of three children, to a bilingual family in Montreal, Québec. His mother, Simone Beaubien, was a notably attractive, socially energetic dress designer, from a long-standing French

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7 The best biographical source on Taylor is ‘The Malaise of Modernity’, a five-part radio documentary produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s David Cayley, which aired in April of 2011. The documentary is available at [http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/episodes/2011/04/11/the-malaise-of-modernity-part-1--5/]. Excellent resumes of Taylor’s life are available on the Templeton Prize website at [http://www.templetonprize.org/ct_factsheet.html] and on the Kyoto Prize video of Taylor at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ay8nlZQkDo]. In addition, Ruth Abbey’s University of Notre Dame-based bibliography of Taylor’s works is an invaluable tool for scholarly research on Taylor. See [http://www3.nd.edu/~rabbey1/]. Much of the biographical sketch presented here is based on these sources.
Catholic family. His father, Walter Taylor, was an Anglican Torontonian who had lost vision in his left eye during the First World War, was an avid reader (in spite of his disability), and a successful partner in a steel manufacturing business. (His eldest sister, Gretta, had a fruitful career as a journalist for both the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Montreal Gazette, and served, for an eight-year term, as Chancellor of McGill University. His older brother Geoffrey died tragically in a skiing accident at age 44). Young Charles was raised Roman Catholic, attending mass at Saint Viateur, a parish Taylor has described as “very special.” Charles spent much of his childhood in Outremont, a tranquil suburb of Montreal well known for its lush gardens and natural beauty. His surroundings instilled a sense of wonder in him. Taylor grew up in a political family. In the 1930s, with attention turned toward Munich, members of his family were “fiercely anti-appeasement.” Yet there were divisions from within. His maternal grandfather, Charles-Philippe Beaubien, was a Senator from Québec, with Voltairean, anti-clerical, pro-Paris leanings. In opposition to many in his home province who loathed the thought of fighting for the British Empire, he supported conscription of French-Canadians during the Second World War. As an 8-year-old boy, Taylor recalls Prime Minister Mackenzie King’s conscription crisis as causing a great deal of hostility in his family. Tensions between the French and the English alerted him to the need for deeper understanding, to the task of “explaining each to each.” Early on, with “no single [cultural] model to cleave to,” young Charles was destined to be a ‘bridge-builder’. From 1936-1946, young Charles attended Selwyn House, a private boys school in Westmount, Québec, established in 1908, and named after a renowned Anglican Bishop. There, he was taught by a man named Patrick Anderson, a specialist in English Romantic poetry, (Keats in particular), who “was one of the greatest teachers [Taylor] ever had.” Early exposure to the Romantics, in literature, in art, and in music, would “set [his] life in a certain direction.” He remained at Selwyn House until Grade 11.

From Selwyn House, Taylor moved, in 1946, to Trinity College School, a co-educational preparatory institution in Port Hope, Ontario, established in 1865. TCS was one of Canada’s oldest boarding schools, heavily steeped in British traditions (and prejudices). Attending Trinity was a “culture shock” for Taylor. “It was very Toronto WASP,” he would later recall, “and there was a lot of contempt for Québec.” Despite swimming in difficult waters, and the need for discretion about

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9 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
his English/French background, Taylor excelled at TCS, finishing two levels in a single year, and
distinguishing himself both academically and in extra-curricular activities. During his time there, he
was Editor-in-Chief of the Trinity College School Record, President of the Debating Society,
President of the Political Science Club, and a Canadian representative at the World Youth Forum in
Britain. According to Robert Meynell, Taylor’s publications in the TCS Record, “read like early
drafts of his later work: he advocates for the importance of individuality within community, political
engagement of Canadians, the restoration of faith within modern society, and finding social unity
and lasting peace through a belief in God.”15 Taylor was well liked by his fellow students, as well as
his teachers. His then Classics instructor, Geoff Dale, has remarked that it was “fun dealing [with]
him.”16 It was at TCS that Taylor discovered classical music, spending hours listening to the
school’s record collection stored in an alcove near the dining hall. (He took a liking to Brahms).
Upon graduation from TCS in 1949, Taylor was awarded the Chancellor’s Prize. His valedictory
address highlighted the importance of community, compromise, and co-operation: “We have
learned that in whatever we do, we must consider not only our own ends, but the ends of those
around us. We have learned the necessity for compromise. And we have learned co-operation - not
merely co-operation to accomplish one’s own ends, but the real co-operation and friendship in co-
operation that comes from entering a common enterprise together, and going through a common
experience together, such as one finds so often on the football field and the hockey rink.”17 In
looking back on his days at TCS, Taylor has acknowledged a “certain philistinism” among students
in the school in which “people who read poetry and listened to classical music [as he did] were
considered weird.”18 In spite of such philistinism, however, he found the quality of education at
TCS to be “excellent.”19

After graduating from TCS, Taylor returned to Montreal and enrolled at McGill University.
Though not knowing what he would study, he enrolled in Honours History, a decision that would
later allow him to see people, places, and events from a narrative point of view. Wilfrid Cantwell
Smith, a professor of comparative religion, who later became director of Harvard’s Centre for the
Study of World Religions, had the greatest influence on Taylor during his time at McGill. “He really
opened my mind in a new direction,” Taylor has acknowledged.20 Smith was fully committed to
interfaith dialogue and to a greater historical understanding of the world’s religions. After

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
graduating with a First Class Honours Degree from McGill in 1952, Taylor was awarded a coveted Rhodes Scholarship, which would allow him to further his studies at Balliol College, Oxford.

In his intriguing book on Cecil Rhodes, The Rhodes Trust, and Rhodes Scholarships, Philip Ziegler includes the following text from Cecil Rhodes's will:

"Whereas I consider that the education of the young Colonists at one of the Universities in the United Kingdom is of great advantage to them for giving breadth to their views for their instruction in life and manners and for instilling into their minds the advantage to the Colonies as well as to the United Kingdom of the retention of the unity of the Empire ... My desire being that the students who shall be elected to the Scholarships shall not be merely bookworms, I direct that in the election of a student to a Scholarship, regard shall be had to (i) his literary and scholastic attainments (ii) his fondness of and success in manly outdoor sports, such as cricket, football, and the like (iii) his qualities of manhood, truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindliness, unselfishness, and fellowship and (iv) his exhibition during school days of moral force of character and of instincts to lead and to take an interest in his schoolmates, for those latter attributes will be likely to guide him to esteem the performance of public duties as his highest aim."

These were the criteria that Cecil Rhodes laid down in his will for the recruitment of Rhodes Scholars, criteria a young Charles Taylor was thought to possess. Years later, in an interview with McGill's Alumni Magazine, Taylor admitted that his bilingualism may have given him additional "points" with the Québec selection committee.

Taylor arrived at Oxford in the early 1950s. "This was the post-war period," Taylor recalls. "There was still rationing but a feeling that prosperity had arrived ... There were brilliant graduates from all over, and a tremendously vigorous intellectual life. People were forming societies to discuss various topics. The tutorial system was used which is a superb system if it's done by people who are into it." Taylor's scholarship allowed for frequent travel throughout Europe. "Had I gone to the United States, I don't think I would have had the exposure to French and German thought which shaped my thinking," he has acknowledged. With a view to a life in politics, Taylor read 'PPE' (Philosophy, Politics, and Economics) at Oxford, from which he graduated, with first class honours, in 1955.

Linguistic philosophy was still very much at its height and was the dominant paradigm at Oxford when Taylor arrived at Oxford in the 1950s. Philosophers such as A.J. Ayer, J.L. Austin, and Gilbert Ryle were eagerly championing the benefits of clear conceptual analysis. The analytic school, as it was often called, was keen to base all knowledge claims on the methodology of the natural sciences. In his essay 'What Drove Me To Philosophy', Taylor admits that his first encounter with the naturalistic mindset of academic philosophy at Oxford was far from pleasant. "I

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23 Ibid.
was appalled with what I saw as a dry, positivistic style, which seemed to devalue and dismiss the deepest, most important questions of life,” he writes. “I just couldn’t make my peace with the idea of philosophy so drained of human import, and with a picture of human life so narrow and reductive.”

Acting on his disillusionment, Taylor would eventually serve, as a manuscript reader, for Ernest Gellner’s provocative polemic Words and Things: An Examination of, and an Attack on, Linguistic Philosophy. Taylor’s frustrations with Oxford-style philosophy were put to rest, however, by the discovery of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s 1945 work on the Phenomenology of Perception. Merleau-Ponty’s continental philosophy underscored the embodiment of human beings, and human engagement with the physical world, in the acquisition of knowledge. Given the choice between English analytic philosophy and French continental philosophy, Taylor much preferred the latter to the former. Taylor was firmly committed to a humane epistemological realism which gave due attention to both the internal and external dynamics of knowledge claims. He was clearly captivated by Merleau-Ponty, so much so that the French phenomenologist later became “the guiding thread” of his own philosophical work.

One of Taylor’s main philosophical objectives would be to ‘nudge’ the analytic school in the direction of its continental neighbour. His bilingualism was a scholarly asset to him in this regard, as it was regularly put to use at academic conferences where members of both schools were present. Taylor made his mark early on as a philosophical translator who could navigate both traditions with equal competency, and speak to each about the other.

Inspired by the writings of Merleau-Ponty, Taylor decided, in 1955, to further his studies toward a doctorate in philosophy under the supervision of Isaiah Berlin and Elizabeth Anscombe, the former, a philosopher of liberty, the latter, an authority on Wittgenstein. As a further incentive to complete his doctorate, Taylor was elected, in 1956, to a four-year fellowship at All Souls College, one of the highest academic distinctions at Oxford. That same year, he married his first wife, Alba Romer, an artist and social worker of Polish descent. [The couple went on to have five daughters, born between the years 1958-1965: Karen (an actress), Miriam (who holds a doctorate in religious history), Wanda (who holds a masters degree in history), Gabriela (a family therapist), and Gretta (a medical doctor)]. In 1961, Taylor received his D. Phil. from Oxford for a dissertation critiquing the psychological theory of behaviourism. His study, half of which comprised laboratory experiments, underscored the interpretive distinction between random ‘movement’ and purposeful

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27 Kyoto Prize video of Taylor at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayi8nlZQkDo].
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‘action’. (The book was published, in 1964, as The Explanation of Behaviour). During his stay at Oxford, Taylor found time to establish Universities and Left Review, a journal dedicated to a progressive form of socialism. He was the first president of the Oxford Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He also took a six-month leave of absence from his studies in 1956 to work with the World University Service in Vienna in establishing a field office to assist with Hungarian refugees. “My choice between the scholarly and active lives was never total,” he would later write. “I have always tried to run them in some degree together.”

After a ten-year stint at Oxford, Taylor returned to Montreal in 1961. He then accepted a post, at the age of 29, as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at McGill University. A year later, he added a teaching position in Faculty of Philosophy at Université de Montreal to his portfolio. He continued to write learned articles for a variety of publications, including Cité Libre, a prominent political journal for leftist intellectuals in Québec that helped spark the province’s ‘Quiet Revolution’ toward greater modernization. The winds of change were omnipresent during the 1960s. In addition to the civil rights, feminist, gay liberation, and anti-war movements, there was much discussion over the Second Vatican Council’s proposed reforms to the structure of the liturgy, to the role of the laity, and to the ecumenical and inter-faith movements. Taylor was especially inspired during this time by the writings of such French theologians as the Dominican Father Yves Congar and the Jesuit Father Henri de Lubac. Taylor lived through the whirlwind of change. After being courted by the New Democratic Party of Canada as a federal candidate in the central Montreal riding of Mount Royal, he ran four times for parliament – (i.e. in 1962, 1963, 1965, and 1968) – losing on all four occasions, to Liberal candidate and eventual Speaker of the House of Commons Alan Macnaughton in ‘62 and ‘63, and to future Liberal leader and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in ‘65 and ‘68. By 1965, Taylor had become the National Vice-President of the N.D.P. That same year, in his third election try, he found himself campaigning against his friend and colleague, Pierre Trudeau. The two had much in common. Both were fluent bilingual, had taught together at Université de Montreal, and had been co-contributors to the journal Cité Libre. In Taylor’s 1963 run for federal parliament, Trudeau had publicly supported Taylor as an N.D.P. candidate. The reasons as to how the two high-profile intellectuals ended up as political combatants are complicated. During the 1963 election, Trudeau had denounced then Prime Minister Lester Pearson’s ‘flip-flop’ on the Bomarc Missile Program, a program that would effectively allow American-made nuclear warheads into Canada. Pearson, who had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for his United Nations peacekeeping efforts in the Suez Canal Crisis, had initially opposed the

program, only to reverse his position in advance of the '63 federal election. In response to the policy reversal, Trudeau had bitterly denounced Pearson in the pages of Cité Libre, calling him “the defrocked prince of peace.” With the onset of the 1965 federal election, to counter the rise of separatism as well as to assure victory, the Liberal Party desperately needed star candidates in Québec. One of these star candidates was Jean Marchand, a popular Québec trade unionist. The Liberal Party courted Marchand to run, and he agreed, with the proviso that his two political allies, Gerad Pelletier and Pierre Trudeau, would also run as Liberals. The ‘three wise men’ (les trois colombes) had worked side-by-side during the 1949 Asbestos Strike in Québec. The Liberal Party brass accepted the proviso, but, in an apparent move to punish Trudeau for his prior criticism of Pearson, ran him against his good friend Charles Taylor in Mount Royal. In an interview with CBC journalist David Cayley, Taylor referred to the maneuver as a deliberate “dirty trick.” Though the party brass had accepted Trudeau’s candidacy, they were not prepared to make life easy for him. The irony, according to Taylor, was that “the very person [the Liberal Party brass] would have loved to have seen kicked out turned out later to be their ticket to success.” Taylor has described the 1965 campaign against Trudeau as “very tense” and “really uncomfortable,” especially for Trudeau. Each had his own vision of what Canada should be, with Trudeau affirming a federal unity based on individual human rights and Taylor affirming a federal unity based on the recognition of diverse cultural groups. Trudeau was at odds with the asymmetry of Taylor’s federalism. “C’est pas logique,” Trudeau would often say to Taylor. “Exactly!” Taylor would respond. In spite of their political differences, including Taylor’s strong critique of Trudeaumanian in his 1970 book The Pattern of Politics, the two would remain life-long friends. “He was a great intellectual. I loved the guy. He was a great friend of mine,” Taylor has recounted to the CBC’s David Cayley. “But he was just totally blind, he had such animosity against the Québec nationalists that he couldn’t see that a kind of moderate nationalism was possible.”

During the 1970s, Taylor declined invitations to run for the federal N.D.P. leadership, and, instead, turned back to McGill University and the world of academe. In 1975, he published a six-hundred-page study of Hegel, a study intended to make Hegelian philosophy intelligible to philosophers in the analytic tradition. The study received widespread acclaim and led to Taylor’s appointment, from 1976-1981, to the prestigious Chichele Chair of Social and Political Theory at Oxford, a chair his former teacher Isaiah Berlin had once occupied. In 1979, he published Hegel and

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
Modern Society, a shorter version of his prior study. He returned to Canada that same year to participate in the heated debates on the impending separatist referendum in his home province of Québec.

After the defeat of the Québec referendum in 1980, Taylor took up a number of lectureships in different parts of the world, including the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi (1981), the J.W. Goethe University in Frankfurt (1984), and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (1985). (He has also taken up teaching posts, at various points in his career, at Carleton, Queen’s, Toronto, Berkeley, Northwestern, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale). In 1985, two books of Taylor’s philosophical papers, Human Agency and Language and Philosophy and the Human Sciences, were published by Cambridge University Press. Both books included thoughtful critiques of reductive approaches to the human sciences. In 1987, Taylor was once again called upon as a commentator on political debates in Canada, this time over the Meech Lake Accord, which promised ‘distinct society’ status for Québec by way of a constitutional amendment. Unlike his friend Pierre Trudeau, Taylor supported the accord. In a dramatic turn of events, the accord failed to pass, not in Québec, however, but in the Legislative Assemblies of Manitoba and Newfoundland. 

Remarking on the ‘distinct society’ debate years later, Taylor noted, with a touch of humour, that “it’s like a Victorian discussion of sex. If you mention it, the roof falls in!” After Meech Lake, Taylor returned to his teaching and writing at McGill, and, in 1989, published Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity. Taylor has described the book as follows:

“This was my first large-scale attempt to make a philosophically-informed reflection on history. The theme was the development of the modern understanding of the human agent, with its peculiar and often conflicting features: an individual, potentially disengaged from history, society, and the body, and yet with inner depths, calling for further definition through expressive activity, with an identity which he or she can contribute to define. My thesis is that we are all caught in the tension between what we have drawn from the Cartesian-Lockean tradition and the Enlightenment on one hand, and what we have learned from the Romantic-expressive movement on the other.”

Sources of the Self was well reviewed and highly regarded around the world, and Taylor’s academic reputation ascended to new heights.

Tragedy struck a year later, in 1990, however, with the passing of Taylor’s first wife, Alba Romer, who died of leukemia at the age of 59. To the best of my knowledge, this sad chapter in Taylor’s life has been completely neglected. No reviewer, journalist, or scholar has delved into the spiritual,
emotional, and intellectual effects Alba Romer’s tragic passing has had on Taylor’s life and work. Romer’s death meant that Taylor, now in his 60th year, was suddenly left as a sole parent with five daughters to raise. Adjusting to this new life must have been excruciatingly difficult for him. When we met in the halls of the Metro Toronto Convention Centre in 2009 for a sit-down conversation, I dared to raise the matter with him. “I know this is a personal matter, but her death must have had a tremendous impact on you at the time,” I said. “Ya,” he answered, in a solemn voice, after a reflective pause, with his eyes welling up. Somewhat stunned by my question, he spoke briefly about the distinguished family she came from, and we quickly moved on to another subject. It was clear to me, then, that I was treading on unchartered waters. Taylor is a private man who has entirely refrained from discussing the death of Anne Romer in his published writings. Yet if one considers Taylor’s corpus as a whole, one notices a distinct post-1990 ‘religious turn’ in his work. That this ‘religious turn’ occurs after the death of his first wife is, I think, no coincidence.

However the death of his wife may have affected him, the early ‘90s proved to be academically fruitful years for Taylor. In 1991, he was chosen to give the Massey Lectures for the Canadian Broadcasting Company. Published in Canada as The Malaise of Modernity, (and in the United States as The Ethics of Authenticity), the lectures were a sort of ‘coles notes’ version of his earlier book Sources of the Self, with a particular emphasis on the challenges posed by modern individualism. In 1992, he published Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition, an important essay on the recognition and misrecognition of modern personal and collective identities. Taylor had drawn much of his material for the essay from his political experience in Québec. Later that year, the Charlottetown Accord was put forward for a national referendum. Unlike the Meech Lake Accord, the Charlottetown Accord included extensive consultations with First Nations. The accord was soundly defeated by a majority vote in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Québec, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon. Taylor had once again campaigned hard on behalf of the accord, and had once again found himself on the losing side. Many of the articles Taylor produced on Québec nationalism and Canadian federalism before, during, and/or after the Meech and Charlottetown Accords were gathered, in 1993, in Reconciling the Solitudes. Philosophical Arguments, a third volume of Taylor’s papers, was published by Harvard University Press in 1995. These papers covered a variety of epistemological issues. Later that year, Taylor married his second wife, art historian Aube Billard.

The aforementioned ‘religious turn’ began to manifest itself in the latter half of the 1990s. In 1997, Taylor was chosen to give the annual Marianist Lecture at the University of Dayton, Ohio. The lecture, which focused on the way in which the Catholic Church should relate to the modern

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world, was published two years later under the title A Catholic Modernity? Up until his Marianist Lecture, Taylor had been noticeably silent about his religious belief (apart from a few pages in Sources of the Self). A Catholic Modernity? was his first major statement on the question of faith. At the close of the decade, in 1999, Taylor delivered the prestigious Gifford Lectures, at Glasgow University, on the rise of secularism in the West and the place of spirituality in the contemporary world. Taylor’s Gifford Lectures were later published, in three installments, as Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited (2002), Modern Social Imaginaries (2004), and A Secular Age (2007). The latter of these three books is (arguably) his magnum opus. Relative to his earlier preoccupations, then, it is clear from these involvements that Taylor’s work had taken a decidedly new turn.

Two major international awards soon followed. In 2007, Taylor was awarded the $1.5 million Templeton Prize for research in spiritual realities, (the most lucrative academic prize in the world), and, in 2008, the $½ million Kyoto Prize in arts and philosophy from the Inamori Foundation, (better known as the ‘Japanese Nobel’). Taylor is the first Canadian to win the Templeton prize, and one of only two Canadians to win the Kyoto prize. These well-earned prizes gave Taylor instant acclaim, and made him an internationally celebrated figure.

In 2008, a report entitled Building the Future A Time for Reconciliation was released by the Québec government’s Commission de Consultation Sur Les Pratiques D’Accommodement Reliées Aux Différences Culturelles. Then-premier Jean Charest had established the commission in response to controversy surrounding ‘reasonable accommodation’ of cultural differences in the province. The commission was co-chaired by Charles Taylor and Gérard Bouchard, a prominent sociologist, and brother of Lucien Bouchard, a former premier of Québec. A book entitled Secularism and Freedom of Conscience, co-authored by Taylor and Laval professor Jocelyn Maclure, emerged from the commission, and was published in 2011. Dilemmas and Connections, a fourth collection of Taylor’s essays, offering a further elaboration on secular themes, was also published in 2011.

Taylor has had his share of honours and accolades. He is a Companion of the Order of Canada, a Grand Officer of the National Order of Québec, and a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2012, Oxford University, his alma mater, made him an honorary Doctor of Letters. Colleagues, both old and young, have praised him. His Oxford teacher, the late Sir Isaiah Berlin, has written fondly of him:

“He is a man of acute intelligence, total intellectual and moral sincerity, unswerving integrity, and a remarkable insight into a variety of philosophical traditions ... His view of social and political life, to which he has devoted his thought, is imaginative, generously receptive, [and] deeply humane ... [he is] a genuine source of continuous inspiration even to those who hold views very different from his own

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39 Toronto cell biologist Anthony Pawson is the other Canadian recipient of the Templeton Prize.
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... Charles Taylor is a noble, gifted, and deeply interesting thinker, every one of whose works has stimulated and excited me, as it has many other readers. His unique position among social and political philosophers is due [in part] to his humanity and his empathy with differences of groups, individuals, societies, and nations ... He is, in short, a great fertilizing force, a creative and original thinker than which there cannot be anything more wonderful to be.” 40

More recently, Akeel Bilgrami, Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University, (and fellow Rhodes Scholar), had this to say about Taylor:

"Charles Taylor's worldwide influence and reputation owe to the depth and imagination of his work. They owe, too, to the fact that he is one of the few philosophers who has consistently made his ideas accessible to different philosophical traditions, as well as to scholars in other disciplines. His range of interests and reference is impressively wide and his writing is accessible and bracingly free of jargon. He is almost temperamentally incapable of writing on any subject without relating it to the most fundamental philosophical questions. He is generous when writing of others, drawing out what is most significant in their work, with never an unfair or unforgiving note. He has a keen and constantly curious cosmopolitan sensibility. Above all, his humanity is vast.” 41

The sentiments expressed in these accolades are shared by many of Taylor's academic colleagues, including his critics.42 As a testament to his global appeal, his works have been translated into more than 20 languages.

Taylor has been a practicing Roman Catholic all his life. He is, what one might call, a 'Catholic humanist'. In 'Of Human Interest', a 1985 profile of Taylor in Saturday Night magazine, then-journalist Michael Ignatieff revealed that:

"Every two years in August, a group of thinkers meets at Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome, for a week of talk with a fierce and gifted philosophical amateur, Pope John Paul II. The group includes some of the most penetrating minds in contemporary thought: Leszek Kolakowski, the Polish philosopher; Paul Ricoeur, the French philosopher; Clifford Geertz, the Princeton anthropologist; and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, the French historian. It is a group whose purpose is to draw a philosophical map of modernity and its discontents. For a Pope who has made a crusade against modernity's symptoms of disease - abortion, sexual promiscuity, political terror, and repression - the meeting provides a tough and demanding audience of skeptics. One Canadian is included in this circle: Charles Taylor.” 43

While Taylor has, in the past, been in direct contact with the Pope, he has had his share of differences with the pronouncements of his Church. On divisive issues such as abortion, contraception, and women in the priesthood, Taylor, a layman and father of five daughters, has sometimes found himself on the opposite side of doctrinal teachings. In theological terms, Taylor has a low (i.e. human) Christology, rather than a high (i.e. divine) Christology. His conception of the ‘church,’ (i.e. his ecclesiology), reflects his Christology. For him, the church is more a sacramental

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42 I take up four of Taylor's critics in Part IV of my study. Taylor has been faulted by his academic adversaries for being: 'anti-scientific', 'intellectually biased', 'overly religious', 'apologetical', 'ideological', 'an essentialist', 'liberal', 'a communitarian', 'too accommodating', 'indecisive', 'wishy-washy', 'vague', 'idealistic', 'naively optimistic', 'a poor historian', 'unfocused', and 'long-winded'.
43 Michael Ignatieff, 'Of Human Interest', Saturday Night, 100/12, (Dec. 1985), 63-7. [Ignatieff also reveals here that Taylor once remarked to Isaiah Berlin at Oxford that his life's work would be "Man. Man."]
communion and less a clerical society of rules and regulations. In response to a question about why he has chosen not to belong to a different faith community, he told David Cayley in a CBC radio documentary which aired on ‘Ideas’ in the Spring of 2011 that, “I think that what’s important in the church is that it’s a sacramental communion, a body in which the sacraments play a central role, particularly the Eucharist.” But for some Catholics, he added, “the power trip is the point.” That Taylor has been invited to high-level Vatican discussions in the past, notwithstanding the distance he has taken from certain doctrinal teachings, is significant in itself.

As a Catholic professor of philosophy who has spent much of his life in the realm of higher education, the question as to what post-secondary institutions are called upon to do is one he himself has contemplated. “Should they be funded as institutions which are somehow giving qualifications to lots and lots of people which allow them to get jobs [and] are giving us people who will fill the essential professional slots in the society or because in some way free thought, new discovery in philosophy and in other domains is important, [that] there’s a kind of excellence and point to human life, [and that] as Aristotle said, human beings desire to know?” In reply to his own question Taylor asserts that “some of us think that … governments are funding universities in a way that show that they don’t have the sense of the full value of learning for its own sake.” In remarks such as these - that a university education is synonymous with free thought, new discovery, excellence, meaning, and learning for its own sake - the influence of Taylor’s Catholicism on his educational philosophy shines forth.

In the chapters that follow, I have tried to do justice to both the breadth and depth of Taylor’s thinking on contemporary education. I have attempted to steer away from both the Scylla of hagiography and the Charybdis of reproach. The task has been challenging, but equally rewarding. Content and method are united throughout. I have done my best to present an argument in the ‘spirit’ of Taylor’s writings, in keeping with the historical nature of his philosophy. For Taylor, “[p]hilosophy and the history of philosophy are one ... it is essential to an adequate understanding of certain problems, questions, [and] issues, that one understands them genetically ... In order to understand properly what we are about, we have to understand how we got where we are.” This is no less true for Taylor’s own work. If his educational thought is intertwined with the history of philosophy, as I will show, then a retrieval of said history will, in turn, illuminate said thought.

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44 See Charles Taylor, ‘Clericalism’, Downside Review 78, No. 252, (Summer 1960), 167-180. Taylor writes that “[i]n many churches the faithful are systematically excluded from any active or indeed conscious participation in the liturgy. In this reduction of the laity to passive bystanders where they should be active participants, we have what might be called the paradigm manifestation of clericalism.”
46 Ibid., part 2.
47 Ibid.
Part I

Taylor in the Conversation on Education
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

1.1 The School of Recognition

While it is true that the landscape of secondary literature on Charles Taylor is vast, writings that relate Taylor’s philosophical insights to contemporary educational issues represent only a small portion of the whole. This is not to suggest, however, that the existing conversation among scholars interested in the educational implications of Taylor’s thought is, at all, insubstantial. There is, to be sure, a fairly robust debate among professional academics on the matter. This is evident in the variety of theoretical approaches to Taylor’s work. The most dominant of these approaches in the literature is, what I shall refer to hereafter as, ‘The School of Recognition’. Writings resting outside the boundaries of the school, which are no less important to our understanding of the conversation, will be taken up in due course. The School of Recognition, then, includes those scholars who, in responding to the arguments put forward by Taylor in his influential 1992 essay The Politics of Recognition, are primarily concerned with the concept of ‘recognition’ and its relevance in and for education. I offer, for the benefit of the reader, a brief summary of the contents of this essay in what follows.

Taylor begins The Politics of Recognition by acknowledging that a number of issues in contemporary politics – including those relating to national movements, minority groups, feminism, and multiculturalism – hinge on the need of, and at times the demand for, recognition. Recognition is seen to be a particularly urgent objective because of its connection to identity, which Taylor defines as “something like a person’s understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being.” ¹ It is the link between recognition and identity, then, that informs the thesis of Taylor’s essay:

“The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being ... misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.”²

Taylor argues that the move from a hierarchically based ‘honour’ society to a democratically-based ‘dignity’ society has profoundly affected our understanding of the concept of recognition. In contemporary Western liberal societies, the accordance of equal dignity often takes the form of enshrined constitutional rights. Individual and group rights, however, can and do clash, and clashes between rights necessitate a resolution. Taylor cites two kinds of moral commitment on the way to resolving differences between rights. The first moral commitment, which concerns the ‘ends of life’, is substantive. The second moral commitment, which concerns an acknowledgement to deal fairly and equally with people despite differences in the ends they pursue, is procedural. The latter of these two moral commitments, that is, the procedural moral commitment, has had a strong influence on contemporary Western societies, especially on the United States. But, as Taylor argues, the application of the procedural moral commitment is not uniformly applicable. When applied to the Canadian situation and, more specifically, to the recent demand of the province of Québec for ‘distinct society’ status within the federation, a procedural moral commitment, which is often suspicious of collective goals, is not altogether equipped to deal sufficiently with Québec’s substantive moral commitment to ensure the protection of its language and culture. The clash of individual and group rights in modern liberal societies is not, as Taylor points out, limited to the realm of politics, however. We see this clash in education, as well, most clearly in the ‘canon debate’ within university departments, a debate between the classic texts of the past and the newly liberated, no-longer-marginalized voices of the present. Taylor cites Gadamer’s notion of a ‘fusion of horizons’ on the way to tipping his hat in favour of comparative cultural study, without, that is, its homogenizing tendencies. According to Taylor, “[b]y implicitly invoking our standards to judge all civilizations and cultures, the politics of difference can end up making everyone the same.” The solution? Taylor concludes his essay on The Politics of Recognition, in his usual way, with a plea for balance and moderation: “There must be something midway between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other. There are other cultures, and we have to live together more and more, both on a world scale and commingled in each individual society.” There is, in the conclusion of Taylor’s essay on The Politics of Recognition, then, a sense that recognition is tied to pluralism, that is, that our capacity to truly ‘recognize’ our fellow citizens in a modern liberal society depends, in part, on our capacity to successfully ‘recognize’, (and, indeed to navigate our way through), the pluralism in which we live.

4 Ibid., 72.
Turning once again to our literature review, there are, as I will show, four intellectual ‘strands’ within the School of Recognition itself. These strands associate recognition, in an educational context, with questions of identity, multiculturalism, globalization, and pedagogy. With the objective in mind of better understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the School of Recognition, this chapter offers a brief presentation of each of these four strands. The analysis of these four strands points to the view that there are ‘missing pieces’ in the overall conversation. The final section in this first chapter identifies what these missing pieces are, and, in doing so, sets the stage for a further elaboration of these pieces throughout the thesis.

1.2 Recognition and Identity

The ‘Recognition and Identity’ strand of the School of Recognition makes four major claims: that categories can be used as instruments of power and exclusion (Willinsky, 1998); that there is a creative tension between the self and the community (Mesa, 2005); that the principle of equality is more dependent upon the dignity of a person than the worth of a culture (Strike, 1996); and that identity is influenced by the context of recognition (Ohna, 2003). Let us turn, now, to an examination of these claims.

The first claim is that categories can be used as instruments of power and exclusion (Willinsky, 1998). Categories associated with gender, race, sex, occupation, ability, status, economics, politics, citizenship, nationality, culture and/or religion - reflected in such words as ‘feminine’, ‘black’, ‘celibate’, ‘unemployed’, ‘handicapped’, ‘divorced’, ‘poor’, ‘conservative’, ‘American’, ‘immigrant’, ‘Western’, ‘Islamic’, etc. - ought not to have, but sometimes do have, pejorative undertones. This is no less true in a pluralist society where there naturally exists a heightened tendency to categorize, to distinguish between bad apples and good oranges. Willinsky reminds us, however, that categories have consequences. In Charles Taylor’s view, which Willinsky cites, “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false,
distorted, and reduced mode of being." For Willinsky, categories can be misused as instruments of false recognition. Willinsky finds echoes of Taylor’s position in the work of Edward Said. In Orientalism, Said writes movingly on the human impact of excessive categorization: “how long can we divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?” Categories, whether intentional or not, subsume individual souls, in all their fragility, into abstract collectivities. Willinsky asks, in accordance with his claim that categories can be used as instruments of power and exclusion, just how such categories came to be. How were these categories formed over time? What were the historical dynamics that led to the construction of these categories? According to Willinsky, an education in the politics of recognition can help to equip young students with a deeper understanding of the genesis of human categorization, leading to a more profound level of critical thinking in relation to public policy, media reportage, academic scholarship, and the like.

Much can be said about Willinsky’s claim, I think. While there is little doubt that categorical discrimination can and often does lead to categorical violence, one is left wondering how else, but by way of language, can human beings, in their limited mental capacities, make sense of other human beings? Humans, by nature, need some method of comprehending the world around them, if for no other reason than psychological reassurance. All categories have meanings, perceptions, and expectations associated with them. No category is perfectly neutral. Yet there is surely a difference between categories of interpretation, which seek to understand, and categories of opposition, which seek to reject. Willinsky’s claim that categories are instruments of power and exclusion fails to acknowledge on the one hand, the intention behind a given label, and, on the other hand, the perception of the label itself. It is certainly true that stereotypes can and do emerge, whether or not they are intended or perceived. In a short article related to the issue at hand, Taylor refers to such stereotyping as ‘block thinking’, which “fuses a varied reality into a single indissoluble unity.” Block thinkers paint whole peoples with the same brush. They confine their fellow human beings, inhumanely, to a single set of prejudicial characteristics. The statement “All immigrants are lazy” would be one example of ‘block thinking’. This statement forms a captivating image of immigrants as nothing but lazy, that is, that laziness is, in actual reality, the very essence of all immigrants. Now if one were to sit down with our lazy immigrant over a café latté and ask her to

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describe herself she might begin to tell you that she is a single, middle-aged parent, with a son in university, works two part-time jobs as an interior designer, loves ping-pong, takes long hikes, plays the cello, reads mystery novels, and sees herself as a warm, caring, and spiritually enlightened friend. One might, in seeing her humanity revealed, begin to appreciate the complexity of her identity. Might her 'laziness' be misconstrued? It would be fair to say, upon further reflection, that her qualities are less monistic - and, hence, more pluralistic - than the characteristic of mere laziness would suggest. What we have here, then, is a classic confrontation between 'the one' and 'the many'. In short, making sense of human beings by way of categorization can both illuminate and darken our understanding of the true nature of personal identity. Yet where a balance between monistic and pluralistic sensibilities is in play, categorical violence is less likely to occur. While Taylor and Willinsky are in agreement that categorization has the potential to do much harm when applied to human beings, Taylor would, I think, be much more inclined to qualify Willinsky's claim that categories can be used as instruments of power and exclusion, with a sense that labels and/or categories do help us make sense of the reality around us, if, that is, their associated intentions and perceptions correspond in an appropriate way, and if their descriptive potential takes the complexity of human nature into proper account.

A second claim made by the Recognition and Identity strand of the School of Recognition is that there is a creative tension between the self and the community (Mesa, 2005). According to Mesa, Taylor’s account of the sources of the self identifies three aspects of modern individualism: a sense of inwardness, an affirmation of ordinary life, and an expressive view of one’s true identity. Taylor’s account of the sources of the self “opens up new possibilities: human dignity, diversity, richness of inner life, and the ethics of self-responsibility,” writes Mesa. “[Yet] it also shows some of the most problematic aspects of modern individualism: atomism, self-fulfillment, and some forms of egoism and narcissism.” In Taylor’s mind, modernity’s assumption that the self is pre-eminent has dire consequences for a commitment to community, a commitment that makes shared life possible. Where ancient and medieval assumptions thought it inconceivable that life could be lived apart from community, the modern assumption is that community ties to church, state, civil society, and the like, are problematic in as much as they are a threat to the flourishing and fulfillment of one’s autonomous self. For Mesa, the modern individual becomes, “the sun, the moon, and the stars of...

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15 Ibid., 139.
the new universe."\textsuperscript{16} The enrichment offered by allegiance, belonging, solidarity, and connectedness becomes flattened in the name of self-interest. The solution, Mesa argues, is to live in ‘creative tension’ with the plurality of goods that both individual and community offer. The creative tension account “invites us to overcome views that make the multiplicity of goods incompatible.”\textsuperscript{17} Practical wisdom is needed to guide human beings through the difficult choices they will inevitably have to make. But how might such practical wisdom be nurtured in an educational setting? One way of proceeding, suggested by Charles Bingham in a published response to Mesa, would be to “aim at the self-actualization of students as community members even while modernity tends to create a tension between individual and community.”\textsuperscript{18} Education in the politics of recognition would thus encourage students to rediscover, in a healthy way, the mutually reinforcing bonds between self and community.

I would claim that the ‘creative tension’ argument assumes that there is, in fact, a perpetually unavoidable tug-of-war between self and community. The argument here also assumes that pre-modern tensions between self and community were negligible, that modernity is largely responsible for both constructing and exacerbating said tensions, and that a proper education can restore a modicum of balance to the relationship between self and community, a relationship that weighs heavily on the side of the former, in much of modern culture. What the assumptions fail to do is articulate this sensibility as a clash between rights and duties - rights of self vs. rights of community and/or duties to self vs. duties to community. Attentiveness toward the rights vs. duties side of the equation further complicates the self/community divide. Are rights to be prioritized over duties or are duties to be prioritized over rights? Is, for example, duty to self less or more important than the right of the community, or equally so? Similarly, is duty to community less or more important than the right of the self, or equally so? To take another example, is mercy more or less important than justice, justice more or less important than mercy? Is there such a thing as a merciful justice and/or a just mercy? Which of these variables, if at all, trumps which? Context matters immensely in such cases. According to Isaiah Berlin, Taylor’s tutor at Oxford, the very idea of a utopian solution here is intellectually incoherent. What we have are two incommensurable values that cannot be wholly reconciled. Some sort of tragic choice must be made. While it is true that Taylor still hopes for a

\textsuperscript{16} José Mesa, ‘Revisiting an Old Predicament: Primacy of the Individual or the Community?’, in Philosophy of Education Yearbook, ed. Chris Higgins, (Champaign, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 2005), 134.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 136.

On one side of the table, we have the Sartrean existentialists who argue that one must decide one way or another, one must freely ‘plump’, and plump without reference to any sort of transcendental reference point beyond personal experience. On the other side of the table, we have the Platonic essentialists, (with whom Taylor more readily identifies), who argue that all choices are made out of a purposeful moral background that orders the plurality of possible goods available to one accordingly. The essentialists, in general, have a deep respect for metaphysics while the existentialists, in general, have a deep respect for ethics. Both share a desire for the good. Which side is right? Rather than offering up an answer one way or the other, it might be wise to remove ourselves from the liberal democratic context that the self-community debate, as framed in the literature, presupposes. The well-known African proverb “I am because we are” can be flipped around to read, “We are because I am.” We find quite a different ontological perspective here than the aforementioned ‘creative tension’. Could the modern tension between self and community, ‘creative’ or otherwise, be a by-product of a sensibility that emerges from a Western-style liberal democracy, a sensibility radically different from other, often older societies in the non-Western world? In my view, Mesa fails to acknowledge that a Western bias permeates his ‘creative tension’ argument. Taylor differs from Mesa, in this respect, in that Taylor is much more self-critical of his own argumentation, much more attuned to the cultural limitations that underlie his own theoretical speculations.

The third claim of the Recognition and Identity strand is that the principle of political equality is more dependent upon the dignity of a person than the worth of a culture (Strike, 1996). According to this claim, persons and cultures are distinguishable. Moral persons are found in immoral cultures just as immoral persons are found in moral cultures. Strike asserts that, “Liberals view culture as a possession of persons, but not as constitutive of persons. Culture is mine, but not me.” But what becomes of the principle of equality and its connection to a universal metaphysic in a liberal society where minority cultures are struggling to survive? In his essay on the politics of recognition, Taylor asks how the survival of the French language and culture in his home province of Québec can be accommodated when the same procedural rights, within a larger society that adopts no substantive view about the ends of life, are uniformly applied to all (predominantly English-speaking) Canadian

21 Ibid., 198.
citizens and, moreover, when different collective goals are looked upon, by the majority, with inhospitable suspicion. This dilemma leads to a further question: Is there a standard justification for valuing a culture other than one’s own? Apart from a studied assessment of the culture at hand, Taylor argues that a culture that has proven durable over time must contain ‘something of worth’. He further argues that the ‘fused horizons’ that emerge when one culture encounters another can help to develop a shared sensibility for appreciating diversity. Both of these arguments – the ‘something of worth’ argument and the ‘fused horizons’ argument – have provoked much debate. Strike criticizes Taylor’s ‘something of worth’ argument as “a weak form of recognition ... consistent with assertions of cultural inferiority.”

Taylor’s ‘fused horizons’ argument is also criticized by Strike for its “suppressed assumption that we are embedded in our cultures in a way that is difficult to change.” Strike’s criticisms lead to his conclusion that “we might profit more from a politics of possibility than a politics of identity,” a politics that liberates us “from the need to defend what is ours, rather than what is best.” According to Strike, such a politics of possibility would be non-metaphysically attuned to cultural life, that is, attuned to a view that cultures (as well as the identities within them) are not fixed or static entities, but change and evolve over time. By implication, then, Strike insists that the recognition of equal citizenship demands that encounters with other cultures be seen as hopeful opportunities for growth in rather than fearful threats to one’s identity.

Strike’s claim that the principle of political equality is more dependent upon the dignity of a person than the worth of a culture, (which, in turn, presupposes a society where the state of affairs is such that individual rights trump collective rights), begs the question, I think, as to whether persons can be so easily detached from the cultures to which they belong. If the existence of an individual right intrinsically presupposes, by extension, the existence of a collective right, if, that is, both individual rights and collective rights are fundamentally intertwined, then Strike’s argument that political equality is more dependent upon persons rather than cultures is unsound. Individuation has a context; it implies socialization. One’s dialogical life experience helps to shape one’s identity and is, in a significant way, constitutive of that identity. While Strike’s premise that we are more than the cultures we possess has some validity, it is also true that identities cannot be changed in the same way as, say, buying a new pair of shoes. Strike’s assertion, in terms of political equality, that the dignity of a person is more important than the worth of a culture, relies upon a

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23 Ibid., 200.
24 Ibid.
rather ‘thin’ description of culture, where the secular and/ or religious attitudes, beliefs, and values embodied by the culture are merely peripheral rather than central to the ontological identity of the person. Those who take their culture less seriously and less meaningfully than Taylor, would, of course, be more inclined to sign off on the trumping of collective rights by individual rights, but in the case of Taylor’s home province of Québec, where the French language is at the very heart of the society, a ‘thick’ understanding of culture is more welcomed than not. Taylor’s public support of ‘distinct society status’ for Québec is consistent with the view that Québec’s culture is indeed worthy of preservation and, further, that assimilation into a predominantly English-speaking Canadian federation would ultimately surrender the province’s cultural identity. In my opinion, Taylor would see his position on distinct society, contrary to his critics, as more ‘realist’ than ‘essentialist’. The reality on the ground is that French-speaking citizens, though a clear majority inside Québec, are a clear minority outside Québec. In our contemporary world, where borders between political, economic, social, and cultural jurisdictions are becoming increasingly porous, the issue of how majority and minority societies can live together in relative peace and prosperity is not likely to retreat. As Taylor writes, “indisputably ... more and more societies today are turning out to be multicultural, in the sense of including more than one cultural community that wants to survive. The rigidities of procedural liberalism may rapidly become impractical in tomorrow’s world.” The proper balance in public policy between rigidity and flexibility, between preservation and accommodation, between judgment and understanding, then, will make or break the pluralist societies to come. In as much as personal identities are bound up with the social contexts in which they are realized, the problem of personal recognition might have more to do with cultural recognition than some would care to admit. Due recognition of both persons and cultures “is not just a courtesy we owe people,” writes Taylor, “it is a vital human need.” The fundamental difference between Strike and Taylor on the matter of political equality, I think, is this: whereas Strike would see persons and cultures as loosely distinguishable, Taylor would see persons and cultures as intimately bound.

The fourth claim of the Recognition and Identity strand is that identity is influenced by the context of recognition (Ohna, 2003). Ohna argues that there are personal constructions of identity

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27 Ibid., 26.
just as there are social constructions of identity. One's self-understanding is consequential for social perceptions just as social perceptions are consequential for one's self-understanding. The personal and the social are in a perpetual symbiotic relationship, taking on different guises from day to day in varying accordance with context, time and place, and quality of interaction. Many of us prefer to associate with persons who understand who we are; we tend to be less at home with persons who do not. As Ohna demonstrates, there is a common self-understanding at work, for example, when a group of deaf persons are gathered together in a classroom setting. What it means to be a deaf person, the meaning of deafness itself, is likely not to be at the forefront of concern among members of the group. Deafness, here, is much more likely to be natural, obvious, and taken-for-granted. Yet when a deaf person finds him/herself among hearing persons in a similar classroom setting, the identity of deafness takes on a whole new meaning; to be deaf is to be different. A deaf person is apt to be less conscious of the uniqueness of his/her identity when surrounded by deaf persons and more conscious of the uniqueness of his/her identity when surrounded by hearing persons. The following exchange, which Ohna provides, is revealing: (Interviewer) – “When did you discover that you were deaf? (Respondent) – “When I was 12 years old ... When I attended the school for the deaf, I took deafness for granted, I did not understand then, that if you are deaf, you do not hear. Then you are not like the others. Then you are different. I did not understand it. I took being deaf for granted.”29 An experience of affiliation in the company of deaf persons turns into an experience of alienation in the company of hearing persons, a form of alienation, which Taylor describes, in terms of the politics of recognition, as “a reduced mode of being (that induces) a depreciatory image (and internalizes) a picture of inferiority.” Ohna concludes that the deaf person is thus faced with the need to integrate both of these experiences, of affiliation and of alienation, into his/her own identity, his/her own self-understanding, and, by implication, become “deaf in (his/her) own way.”30

I would agree with Ohna that social context counts when it comes to identity. Yet, to borrow a cliché, if everything changes, what remains the same? What is it that anchors a person’s identity notwithstanding changes in social context? We know that human beings have the ability to adapt to their environment. We also know, however, that human beings are not chameleons. A person might very well decide to change his name, have plastic surgery, adjust his hairstyle, alter his wardrobe, take on several careers over the course of a lifetime, etc., yet something of who he truly is as a person remains in spite of it all. What holds this ‘something’ in place? Is it memory? The integrity of

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30 Ibid., 10.
mind, heart, and soul? Are purely interior qualities untouched by external revisions? Taylor's answer is given in his epistemological writings: “What is real is what you have to deal with, what won’t go away just because it doesn’t fit with your prejudices ... It means rather that you need these terms to make the best sense of what you’re doing.”31 A deaf person's 'deafness', with or without the miracle of a hearing aid, is not likely to altogether disappear. In Taylor’s parlance, then, there is an abiding ‘reality’ about the fact that this person is deaf. And so what do we do? We stream this person in a class with other deaf persons where he/ she will learn how to be deaf. The person in question may very well have exceptional musical aptitude, refined literary skill, untold sporting ability, yet, in the end, his/ her deafness outweighs all else. It is a riddle why society is more inclined to see deaf persons less in terms of their possibilities and more in terms of their limitations. Deaf persons are defined more by what they lack than by what they offer. Does the deaf person see deafness as the essence of his/ her identity or is this essence socially constructed and imposed? It is a challenge to understand how and why entire human cultures and sub-cultures are organized around what Freud once referred to as “the narcissism of minor differences.”32 Minor differences distinguish the ‘we’ from the ‘they’. In the exaggeration of such differences, however, shared humanity gets lost in the shuffle. While Ohna and Taylor agree that identity is influenced by the context of recognition, it would be fair to say, I think, that Ohna extends Taylor’s analysis to a realm he neglects, that is, to a consideration of the implications of a politics of recognition for persons with developmental challenges, be they mental or physical, and to a questioning of our assumptions about the nature of personhood itself.

When we add up the four claims of the Recognition and Identity strand - that categories can be used as instruments of power and exclusion (Willinsky, 1998); that there is a creative tension between the self and the community (Mesa, 2005); that the principle of political equality is more dependent upon the dignity of a person than the worth of a culture (Strike, 1996); and that identity is influenced by the context of recognition (Ohna, 2003) - what do we see? I would argue that what we see is a phenomenon not altogether present in Taylor’s work – a complex interplay, in the struggle for identification, between labels, persons, societies, and contexts. For the sake of argument, let us refer to each of these by their first letter: (l) for labels, (p) for persons, (s) for societies, and (c) for contexts. A minor change in one of these elements can affect the identity of the entire series. This is best represented in short hand. The identity of $L^1PSC$ is clearly different from the identity of $L^2PSC$. Likewise, the identity of $LP^1SC$ is clearly different from the identity of $LP^2SC$. Similarly, the

identity of LPS\(^1\)C is clearly different from the identity of LPS\(^2\)C. And finally, the identity of LPSC\(^1\) is clearly different from the identity of LPSC\(^2\). And so on. A change in one element of the sequence leads to a change in identity for the entire sequence. Genetic coding might be a good parallel here, insofar as the transmission of genetic information in reproduction is akin to the shuffling of a deck of cards.\(^{33}\) Each time a deck of genes is shuffled, a new identity is born. So too with recognition. What we learn from the Recognition and Identity strand, then, is that various configurations can emerge when the constitutive elements of identification are changed, an insight that adds further refinement to Taylor's treatment of recognition.

1.3 Recognition and Multiculturalism

The ‘Recognition and Multiculturalism’ strand of the School of Recognition makes four major claims, as well: that the connection between recognition and multiculturalism should be loosened (Blum, 2001);\(^{34}\) that a cultural approach to multicultural education must address persistent forms of oppression in a liberal democracy (Gupta, 2002);\(^{35}\) that an education which fosters mutual understanding offers the best chance of nurturing respect for different cultures as well as our common humanity (Houston, 1996);\(^{36}\) and that developing a critical understanding of various forms of art as well as an appreciation for the life contexts of artists is central to a multicultural art education (Richmond, 1995).\(^{37}\)

The first claim of the Recognition and Multiculturalism strand is that the connection between recognition and multiculturalism should be loosened (Blum, 2001).\(^{38}\) According to Blum’s claim, “[t]he value of recognition in education goes beyond multiculturalism, and the reasons for multiculturalism go far beyond recognitional concerns.”\(^{39}\) Blum criticizes Taylor for understating the principle of equality, that is, for understating the way in which both political institutions and a democratic culture help nurture the recognition of equality among citizens. As Blum explains, a student asked by a teacher in a classroom to offer ‘a black point of view’ for example, is likely not...

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\(^{38}\) Op. cit., Lawrence Blum, 539-559.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 539.
the way that student would want to be recognized. The student neither considers herself to be a representative of what ‘a black point of view’ might be, nor does she see her skin colour as any more definitive than, say, her Haitian background. She does not appreciate when her ‘foreignness’ is pronounced. While the teacher might not have intended any negativity whatsoever toward the student, the request is nonetheless recognized by the student as insensitive at best, prejudicial at worst. Though a multicultural approach to education might very well encourage the recognition of the student’s uniqueness, a heightened sensitivity toward that uniqueness would serve to further check and balance the possibility for unhealthy discussion in the classroom. In Blum’s view, the situation calls for a ‘student-centred’ rather than a ‘subject-centred’ outlook. For Bloom, the way the student sees herself is more important than the way society sees her, and this ought to be reflected in classroom pedagogy. The aforementioned student ought to be given the opportunity to decide whether her black Haitian identity is relevant at all to the classroom discussion at hand, rather than have her teacher impose a direct consideration of that identity upon her. (She may very well see other factors, such as her Canadian citizenship, as much more important, for instance). Blum’s point is this: while it is true that at least some group-based characteristics warrant institutional recognition, the enhancement of the student’s educational development should be the primary concern. The connection between recognition and multiculturalism should be loosened, then, to reflect a better appreciation for equality in the classroom.

The striking omission in Blum’s claim, I think, is its apparent indifference to the fidelity both teacher and student ought to have toward whatever knowledge is presented in class. What we have here is a student-centred approach to education that privileges the teacher-student relationship at the expense of the acquisition of knowledge. I would argue that higher education ought to be directed toward the cultivation of the mind. The education of good persons, good citizens, and good workers - all noble ends to be sure - is and ought to be a hopeful result of the university’s primary responsibility. There is nothing wrong with a student-centred approach to education, so long as it is balanced with a commitment to transmit whatever knowledge has been approved by the curriculum. Too much attention given to the teacher-student dynamic in the classroom leads, I think, to too little attention given to ‘Knowledge 101’. A different perspective emerges when course knowledge becomes the focus of teacher-student interaction. Both teacher and student are free to interpret said knowledge, in the way each sees fit, without casting any aspersions on the other. Yet there is an expectation that the teacher knows the course material better than the student. The educational arrangement implies this. There is certainly an inequality in regard to expertise, but both teacher and student are equal in the eyes of the course material. Both can learn from each other.
Both have their own perspectives, interpretations, and understandings of the course material regardless of how familiar or unfamiliar that material might be. A too close attention to the cognitive complexities of student identity, however, can mask such realities. Blum’s claim that the connection between recognition and multiculturalism should be loosened in order to better promote equality among persons, would seem odd to Taylor, I think, in light of the fact that the principles of individual and collective equality are presupposed to a significant extent, in the very act of recognition itself, whether such recognition includes course material or not.

The second claim of the Recognition and Multiculturalism strand is that a cultural approach to multicultural education must address persistent forms of oppression in a liberal democracy (Gupta, 2002). Gupta’s claim focuses on the discourse of liberal democracy, its limitations, and its alternatives. It offers a perspective on the liberal democratic discourse as “primarily concerned with identifying political values and institutions that can be commonly shared by the diverse members in a multicultural society.” Values such as liberty and equality, often in tension with one another, tend to dominate the discourse. Gupta cites Will Kymlicka, (one of Charles Taylor’s principle interlocutors in the ongoing debate on Canadian multiculturalism), who contends that the state can never be neutral on questions of public policy. For Kymlicka, “government decisions on languages, internal boundaries, public holidays, and state symbols unavoidably involve recognizing, accommodating, and supporting the needs and identities of particular ethnic and national groups. The state unavoidably promotes certain cultural identities, and thereby disadvantages others.”

Responding to Kymlicka, Gupta argues that minorities within a liberal democracy are culturally vulnerable and need external protections to sustain their rights. In protecting minorities and their respective cultures, liberal democratic discourse is limited in two ways, first, by the relationship between the ‘recognizer’ and the ‘recognizee’, and second, by the degree of respect that allows for recognition to take place. A dominant group can wield power over the powerless and decide who and what receives recognition and who and what does not. A culturally imperialistic ideology, supported by a system of meanings, can alienate members of cultural minorities who, for a variety of reasons, simply cannot identify with such meanings. For Gupta, black women, who can experience both racism and sexism, are particularly prone to self-hatred as a result of a social order that devalues their human identity. Hence, Gupta concludes that only an approach to

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41 Ibid., 300.
42 Ibid., 302.
multiculturalism that addresses persistent forms of discrimination and oppression can effectively deal with dimensions of social injustice and self-respect, both inside and outside the classroom.

It would be fair to admit, I think, that no form of political, economic, social, or cultural organization is perfect, and that multiculturalism, in all its strengths and its weaknesses, is no different. Whereas the United States has historically adopted a more assimilative ‘melting pot’ understanding of its society, Canada has chosen the path, at least in recent decades, of a more inclusive multicultural approach to its demographic. This is not to deny, of course, that there may well be multicultural sensibilities in the United States and/or melting pot sensibilities in Canada. Notwithstanding how they are understood, both of these societies can attest to the fact that there are bound to be forms of oppression and discrimination, persistent or not, in any given model of social order, between as well as within minority and majority cultures. Cross-cultural hybridity further complicates the issue. In my view, the debate is one of deciding on which theoretical model works best. Which of the models best mitigates the possibility for such oppression? Multicultural policies relate to the realities of discrimination and oppression in a variety of ways. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (assented to on July 21st, 1988), which is worth quoting at length here, reads as follows:

"It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to:

(a) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance, and share their cultural heritage;

(b) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada’s future;

(c) promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation;

(d) recognize the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Canadian society, and enhance their development;

(e) ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity;

(f) encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic, and political institutions of Canada to be both respectful and inclusive of Canada’s multicultural character;

(g) promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins;

(h) foster the recognition and appreciation of the diverse cultures of Canadian society and promote the reflection and the evolving expressions of those cultures;
(i) preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada; and

(j) advance multiculturalism throughout Canada in harmony with the national commitment to the official languages of Canada.”

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act continues to be at the forefront of Canadian cultural debate. Any serious reflection on multiculturalism in Canada must give thoughtful consideration to its provisions. Both Taylor and Kymlicka would surely agree that the Canadian government’s articulation of its multicultural policy is anything but neutral. In perusing the ten aforementioned articles of the Act, one is struck by the verbs that begin each clause. It is revealing that the word ‘recognize’ appears three times in the text, more than any other word. (The word ‘promote’, which appears twice, takes the consolation prize). Recognizing the significance of diversity is fundamental to Canada’s official policy on multiculturalism. In terms of facing the realities of discrimination and oppression, the Act speaks, among other things, of elimination of barriers to participation, equal treatment and equal protection under the law, and respecting and valuing diversity. These pronouncements are meant to be generally applicable. While due recognition of the contributions of minority cultures to Canadian society is implicit in the aforementioned text, there are also clear protections for the majority cultures of English and French, (though sadly no mention of Aboriginal Canada). Are some Canadians more equal than others? In principle, the Multiculturalism Act allows for mutual recognition of both minority and majority cultures. Whether such recognition is evident in practice is quite another matter. As I interpret the Act, it is unclear how persistent forms of discrimination and oppression should be dealt with in educational settings. The Act, however, does provide a liberal democratic discourse within which multicultural values can be recognized and promoted. Taylor would likely accept Gupta’s claim that a cultural approach to multicultural education must address persistent forms of oppression in a liberal democracy, with an important qualification that new ways of living together ought to be explored in dialogue, in overcoming such forms of oppression.

The third claim of the Recognition and Multiculturalism strand is that an education that fosters mutual understanding offers the best chance of nurturing respect for different cultures as well as our common humanity (Houston, 1996). Does multicultural education, Houston asks, help or hinder national unity? That is the question to which mutual understanding is her reply. According to Houston’s view, neither shared values nor shared identity will suffice. A list of values thought to

be shared by all Canadians – a belief in equality and fairness; a belief in consultation and dialogue; the importance of accommodation and tolerance; support for diversity; compassion and generosity; attachment to the natural environment; and commitment to freedom, peace, and nonviolent change - is, in the end, a list consisting of mere names of values that camouflage the views of a dominant group. As Dwight Boyd, cited by Houston, remarks, “How they are interpreted to be values according to the complex, dynamic web of meaning and justification that constitute different cultures cannot be accommodated by the list itself.” So too with shared identity. A shared civic identity often takes the form of a common citizenship, that is, of membership in a political community. The problem, for Houston, rests in the fact that we have “not only a diversity of cultural groups but also a diversity of ways in which members of these groups belong to the larger polity.” Given the diversity of approaches to both shared values and shared identity, then, how might a multicultural education intended to nurture respect for different cultures as well as our common humanity move forward? According to Houston, the key lies with the recognition of what Charles Taylor calls ‘deep diversity’: “This means that the members of a polyethnic and multination state must not only respect diversity, but also respect a diversity of approaches to diversity.” This is easier said than done, of course. Relating to that which is different is never an easy task. What is needed is an ethical stance, a sympathetic approach to the ideals of the other. Houston refers her reader to a fascinating exchange between Cornel West and Michael Lerner in their book Jews and Blacks: A Dialogue on Race, Religion, and Culture in America, where Lerner attacks West for his collaboration with Louis Farrakhan, a Muslim African-American leader perceived by many Jews to be simultaneously anti-Semitic, sexist, and homophobic. West’s response:

“But there is no purity in any side ... I don’t see you as sacrificing Jewish interests because you want to be in dialogue with someone who is causing Jewish pain. That view assumes that Farrakhan has no interest whatsoever in trying to move in a humane direction or be humane. That is your basic assumption. And that is the assumption I disagree with. If people believe that he is the embodiment of evil then every move will be seen as a capitulation to evil. But if you believe that there is a possibility of movement, then you engage. Some people will perceive me as being used, manipulated, naïve and so forth. But that is the way I proceed with anybody.”

West’s contention is that if there is no purity in any side, one must persist in understanding, engaging, and acting. Appeals to the better angels of our human nature can move mountains. That

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46 Ibid., 193.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 194.
49 Ibid., 194-195.
is the point West (an African-American) is attempting to communicate to Lerner (a Jewish-American). West is revealing to Lerner a general approach toward being human that influences the way in which he relates to his interlocutors. West reveals this to Lerner in the hope that Lerner will come to understand the reasons why West collaborates with Farrakhan, and thus, be less inclined to be prejudicial about what Farrakhan may or may not represent, and, by implication, what West himself may or may not represent. Houston concludes that it is precisely this sort of approach, an approach centred on mutual understanding, which multicultural education can benefit from.

The question I would ask is this: ‘Are there any discernible limits to the approach of mutual understanding in multicultural education?’ Another way of expressing this might be to ask at what point understanding ceases to be justifiable. If, for example, the person Michael is trying to understand is recognizably different than he is, has a different background, culture, language, sensibility, etc., that is one thing. But if that same person has views Michael finds reprehensible, inhumane, immoral, degrading, idiotic, and so forth, Michael’s powers of intellectual and emotional sympathy are naturally compromised. What ought Michael to do? Let us, for the sake of argument, add that the person in question, (let us call him George), is a fellow classmate. Both Michael and George are enrolled in a first-year university course entitled ‘The Promise and Peril of Multicultural Education’. Michael sees George on a regular basis, whether Michael wishes to or not, and has no control over his thoughts or actions. Michael is taught in the course that mutual understanding is a good thing and that he should apply this principle in his everyday life. There are obvious differences between Michael and George. George likes coffee and Michael likes tea. George is an extrovert and Michael is an introvert. George has a passion for politics and Michael has a passion for religion. The differences are acute, yet well within the range of mutually understandable acceptability. But wait. The more Michael comes to know George, the more he realizes how different the two really are. George is financially secure, and Michael is not. George is disrespectful toward women, and Michael is not. George is a libertarian who believes in the absence of government, and Michael is not. George is a radical atheist, and Michael is not. Michael finds George’s views not only different, but ineradically different. George’s views are antithetical to the very core of what Michael believes. Is authentic mutual understanding possible in this instance? Add to these differences the fact that George is continually insulting Michael in the school dining hall, that George is perpetually pointing out Michael’s every fault to those present at table, and where does this leave them? In response to George’s views, Michael might a) try to make George see the reasons for their disagreement; b) try to persuade George to change his mind; c) keep his distance from George; d) file an official complaint against George; or e) punch George in the nose. After reflecting on these options,
Michael dismisses d) and e) as unwise, and a) and b) as pointless. That leaves option c). Option c) is for Michael to keep his distance from George. Yet if Michael chooses option c), Michael knows that opportunities for mutual understanding will be significantly reduced. But that is the price Michael must pay, he convinces myself, in order to preserve whatever modicum of civility he and George still share. The point in all this, of course, is that mutual understanding is much more difficult in practice than it is in theory, even if one is well aware that, as Cornel West argues, there is no (absolute) purity in any side. Inspired, in part, by Taylor’s notion of ‘deep diversity’, Houston’s claim that an education that fosters mutual understanding offers the best chance of nurturing respect for different cultures as well as our common humanity, is all the more persuasive in that she, perhaps even more than Taylor, has a real appreciation for the practical challenges of such mutual understanding.

The fourth and final claim of the Recognition and Multiculturalism strand, applying Taylor’s multicultural theory to aesthetic education, is that developing a critical understanding of the sociocultural contexts of various forms of art is central to a multicultural art education (Richmond, 1995). Richmond affirms that the cultivation of both sympathetic interpretation and imagination is particularly important for artistic appreciation in a liberal democracy. In Richmond’s opinion, the public school art curriculum should be void of politics and prejudice. Understanding a piece of art from within its own sociocultural context reveals “what an artwork means to its makers and users insofar as this is attainable by those outside a culture.” According to Richmond, the honouring of artistic cultures, not the denigrating of same, ought to be the raison d’être in a multicultural classroom. This implies that one “put aside their preconceptions, interests, and biases and attend to a work of art aesthetically, that is, with appropriate disinterest.” Though there is no ‘final’ understanding of any piece of art, some interpretations are more defensible than others. The task of art education, as far as Richmond is concerned, is to discern which of these interpretations is more in keeping with the origin, intent, and spirit of the work. There is something within art, of course, that is not entirely unfamiliar, something transcendent that all interpreters of beauty and/or ugliness can appreciate. Richmond’s invocation of Taylor’s ‘presumption of equal worth’ when relating to cultures other than one’s own need not imply that there is no place for aesthetic judgment. What it does imply, for Richmond, is that “the study of the art of different societies enriches our understanding of ourselves even as we make the effort to understand the other.”

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51 Ibid., 23
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 24.
Taylor’s own take on aesthetic theory has, to the best of my knowledge, not been properly developed in his corpus. The closest he comes to actually defining his stance on the matter is the thought, in a festschrift celebrating his work, that: “There is a dynamic in some art of the last two centuries which pits an avant-garde against a supposedly uncomprehending ‘philistine’ public. I didn’t mean to be taking sides for or against this in reporting it. In fact, my feelings about this are complex and many sided, and I haven’t got room to go into them here.”54 Richmond’s claim that developing a critical understanding of the sociocultural contexts of various forms of art is central to a multicultural art education, appears to be at home with Taylor’s notion of a ‘presumption of equal worth’ in relation to cultural comparison. Yet Taylor never makes specific use of the word ‘art’ when discussing equal worth, only the word ‘culture’, broadly defined. It is Richmond himself who relates Taylor’s analysis to the field of aesthetic judgment. Taylor does argue that a culture that stands the test of time has something important to teach us, but that is as far as his analysis takes him. In any event, one of the key issues here, I think, is what role, if any, democracy should play in the educational appreciation of cross-cultural art. If art is appreciated only in the context of a democratic paradigm, that is, if art is appreciated of, by, and for democracy, and democracy only, this subjects art to strict utilitarian demands. Art becomes a commodity, an object, not of beauty, creativity, or profundity, but of a democratic, capitalistic sensibility. Richmond’s application of Taylor’s multicultural theory to the realm of art education, then, helps us to reflect, more deeply, on how Taylor’s ‘presumption of equal worth’ might influence aesthetic judgment in a variety of sociocultural contexts, including the context of liberal democracy.

As we have seen, the ‘Recognition and Multiculturalism’ strand of the School of Recognition makes four major claims: that the connection between recognition and multiculturalism should be loosened (Blum, 2001); that a cultural approach to multicultural education must address persistent forms of oppression in a liberal democracy (Gupta, 2001); that an education which fosters mutual understanding offers the best chance of nurturing respect for different cultures as well as our common humanity (Houston, 1996); and that developing a critical understanding of various forms of art as well as an appreciation for the life contexts of artists is central to a multicultural art education (Richmond, 1995). What do all of these claims, when taken together, mean precisely? How might one make sense of them in relation to Charles Taylor? There is one insight here that stands out. There is an implicit criticism in each of the above claims that Taylor’s multicultural theory lacks attentiveness toward human persons. The criticism here is that Taylor’s multicultural

theory has been guilty of excessive theoretical abstraction. Thus, the comparison, evaluation, understanding, and recognition of cultural differences in a multicultural society should strive to be more humanistic and less ideological than it is. All of the interpreters in the Recognition and Multiculturalism strand of the debate are calling for a more ‘realistic’ approach to the challenge of multiculturalism, realistic in the sense that both theory and practice are relevant for a more comprehensive understanding of the past, present, and future promises (and perils) of multiculturalism itself.

1.4 Recognition and Globalization

The ‘Recognition and Globalization’ strand of the School of Recognition is less capacious in its claims. The claims associated with this strand are fewer than those found in the ‘Identity’ and ‘Multiculturalism’ strands of the School. The two claims of the ‘Recognition and Globalization’ strand are as follows: i) that the concept of recognition can be extended to embrace notions of local, national, and international citizenship (Golmohamad, 2004) and ii) that the ascendancy of neoliberal economic policies around the world has profound implications for educational policy research (Rizvi, 2006).

The first of these two claims, that the concept of recognition can be extended to embrace notions of local, national, and international citizenship, begs the question as to how an integrated self might be possible in the context of a plurality of possible allegiances (Golmohamad, 2004). Golmohamad argues that at one and the same time, a person might understand him/herself to be a citizen of a city, province, country, continent, and/or world. Modern globalization seems to enhance our allegiances to the point where, as Golmohamad sees it, people “find themselves in the position of being unable to identify with one category alone.” This is especially true with respect to citizenship where personal identities can be layered – and re-layered – in an assortment of ways. A distinction between ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ notions of identity remains for Golmohamad, however, within the context of these citizen-based allegiances. A ‘thin’ notion of identity “is the weaker notion that is constituted by status, ... an attachment, or merely a label” whereas a ‘thick’ notion of identity “offers a richer conception (which) penetrates further into ... dispositions, a mindset, and is concerned with a state of being. Such a rich conception ... has self-knowledge and social

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58 Ibid., 133.
On these definitions, thinner notions of identity are more extrinsic to self-identification whereas thicker notions of identity are more intrinsic to self-identification. ‘Thinner’ and ‘thicker’ notions of identity help us to make sense of the narrative(s) of our lives. Golmohamad’s claim that the concept of recognition can be extended to embrace notions of local, national, and international citizenship, however, is supported by his further premise that it is “not enough to be satisfied with a thin conception (of identity)” A thicker notion of identity, Golmohamad asserts, is more conducive to responsible citizenship. Persons are more likely to be active citizens in communities they can identify with. These persons can see themselves, that is, their thicker identities, reflected in the community. By having their thicker identities reflected in the community, these persons are, in turn, more likely to be ‘recognized’, and by way of recognition, more apt to contribute. A thicker notion of identity links self and community in a way that a thinner notion of identity does not. Taylor’s comparison of the search for a thicker identity with map reading resonates with Golmohamad. Just as a tourist needs a map to find his/her way in an unfamiliar land, so too do human beings require some capacity, both internal and external, for making sense of who they are and where they are going. For Taylor, a thicker notion of identity is “connected to, or in contact with, what is good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value.” Taylor would agree, I think, with Golmohamad’s assessment that the task of good citizenship education is to nurture a thick notion of identity in students, to prepare them for active engagement in their respective local and global communities.

I would argue that there is much in the literature on multiculturalism to refute the claim that a ‘thicker’ notion of identity is a necessary condition for responsible citizenship. If it is true, in today’s globalized world, that cultures are less holistic, anchored, and/or closed, and more hybrid, fluid, and/or open, it would then be reasonable to assume that thicker notions of identity would be less likely to be found among citizens. Modern trade, technology, and travel have made the borders between nation-states increasingly porous. This has had a profound effect on the commitment to citizenship. According to Seyla Benhabib, a Turkish-Jewish academic offering a contrary position to that of Golomohamad’s and Taylor’s, citizens ought to have the right to ‘egalitarian reciprocity’, ‘voluntary self-ascription’, and ‘freedom of exit and association’. What do these rights entail? They mean that minorities ought to have the same rights as majorities within a particular culture, that a

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 136.
person must not automatically be assigned citizenship by virtue of birth, and that the choice to remain in or leave a society should be unrestricted. These rights – egalitarian reciprocity, voluntary self-ascription, and freedom of exit and association – assume that the individual citizen, and not his/her culture, is the true determinant of identity. Even if modern citizens are constantly negotiating between thinner and thicker notions of identity it is they, and they alone, who must decide how they are to be defined. That is Benhabib’s argument, at least. It is an argument that rests on an existential platform, not an essentialist one. Human beings, on this logic, construct their own identities, their own life narratives; they do not receive their identities and/or life narratives from their respective communities. Benhabib’s implicit criticism of the ‘thick identity’ argument espoused by both Golmohamad and Taylor is that it perpetuates a holistic fallacy, a pars pro toto, a substitution of a part for the whole, in its flattened construal of cultures as singularly static entities, devoid of conflict, ambiguity, or inconsistency. Taken one step further, the ‘thick identity’ argument leads, in Benhabib’s view, to an ‘us vs. them’ mentality. Yet, as Benhabib’s criticism shows, I think, the ‘thick identity’ argument ignores the various tensions and contradictions within cultures. Whether it be a headscarf controversy in France or a cartoon controversy in Denmark, these tensions and contradictions can take many forms. What is considered acceptably legal in one culture could very well turn out to be blatantly illegal in another. Benhabib cautions us that the arbitration of such disputes is inevitable: “The negotiation of complex cultural dialogues in a global civilization is now our lot,” she writes. One cannot assume, either, that the negotiation of these cultural dialogues will be any smoother within liberal democratic societies as compared to non-liberal-democratic societies. In short, Benhabib’s challenge to the ‘thick identity’ argument is a serious one; it is a challenge that is inadequately addressed by both Golmohamad and Taylor.

A second claim of the ‘Recognition and Globalization’ strand is that the ascendancy of neoliberal economic policies around the world has profound implications for educational policy research (Rizvi, 2006). According to Rizvi, ‘neoliberalism’, the now-fashionable term of choice for a radical commitment to an anti-statist, market-logic view of society, has become, (in Taylor’s parlance), the new ‘social imaginary’ of our time. Like Taylor, Rizvi holds that identity is influenced by how both individuals and communities ‘imagine’ themselves. “It is through the collective sense of imagination,” writes Rizvi, “that a society is created, given coherence and identity, and also

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64 Ibid., 186.

subjected to social change both mundane and radical.” Rizvi understands Taylor’s use of the term ‘social imaginary’ as “the thinking shared in a society by ordinary people, the common understandings that make everyday practices possible, giving them sense and legitimacy.” Rizvi is convinced that apart from heightened levels of human interconnectedness, one of the consequences of globalization for postmodern liberal democracies has been the multiplication of social imaginaries. What we now have is a multiplicity of narratives to contend with, not just one but many competing social imaginaries. The growth of corporate enterprise, the withering of the nation-state, technological advancement, media proliferation, ease of travel by car, train, ship, and plane, the mass migrations of peoples around the world, and a new consciousness of environmental deterioration, have all had their role to play in the emergence of global neoliberal sensibilities. As Rizvi points out, these sensibilities have been furthered by a host of international organizations including the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the European Union (EU), the World Bank (WB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Neoliberal think tanks ideologically attuned to the new hyper-capitalism have offered their own missionary zeal to the project. Demands that education be restructured in accordance with market-based ‘rationality’ have been made by all of these stakeholders, who have ‘capitalized’ on the rapid and unprecedented changes of the post-modern world, which, in turn, has had destabilizing effects on contemporary education. In response to the neoliberal agenda, Rizvi claims that a different social imaginary is needed, one that is in line with democracy and social justice. The globalization of educational policy research is, for Rizvi, “essential to our attempts to develop an alternative educational policy agenda to neoliberalism, which demands not only fine-sounding policies but also the creation of an alternative social imaginary committed to strong democracy and global justice.”

In my view, neoliberalism is the assumed paradigm in much of the contemporary discourse on globalization. Claims to the effect that higher education is primarily concerned with economics, that the true purpose of the university is to train workers to compete in the global economy, and that educational content should reflect market demand, are part and parcel of the assumed inevitability of neoliberalism. Consistent with these claims is the further claim that democratic citizens are powerless

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67 Ibid., 196.
68 Ibid., 201-202.
69 Ibid., 203.
to stop neoliberalism, that neoliberalism is already too entrenched in too many societies both East and West. Yet if it is true that the imaginary of globalization is socially constructed, and not divinely ordained, as Taylor himself argues, then it must also be true that a new social imaginary other than the radically neoliberal sort, can and ought to be imagined. Disciples of the neoliberal imaginary point to such developments in the academy as the decline of tenure, the rise of short-term sessional contracts for would-be professors, corporate sponsorship of academic programs, on-line distance learning, accelerated specialization, flat fee tuition, the devaluing of the Humanities, rankings for universities, etc. There is little space within the neoliberal paradigm for education toward good personhood and/ or good citizenship. These objectives are overshadowed, time and time again, by the push to make education ever more market-friendly. This begs the question, I think, as to whether market-logic education is, in fact, market-wise. Setting the quest for an alternative paradigm aside for a moment, one might be more inclined to point out the flaws within neoliberalism itself. One of the more persuasive critiques of the neoliberal educational agenda is its neglect of what is commonly referred to in today’s economy as ‘transferable skills’. Transferable skills, which are often nurtured within the Humanities and Social Sciences, are skills and attitudes that are applicable across the board, that is, between and among a variety of employers. Transferable skills are techniques and attitudes that enhance the analytical, communicative, and imaginative abilities of students who acquire them. If it is indeed true that a typical university graduate is likely to change jobs multiple times during his/ her employment career, high degrees of specialization may hinder rather than help the employment process. Contrary to the fallible assumptions of the contemporary neoliberal agenda, then, both Rizvi and Taylor would agree, I think, that breadth and depth of training in the Humanities and Social Sciences is far more relevant for the job market than not. In terms of the social imaginary of neoliberalism, however, the key interpretive difference between Rizvi and Taylor is this: while Taylor’s main preoccupation is with the political, economic, and cultural effects of a social imaginary within a nation-state, Rizvi’s main preoccupation is with the educational effects of a social imaginary within a globalized world.

The two claims of the ‘Recognition and Globalization’ strand - i) that the concept of recognition can be extended to embrace notions of local, national, and international citizenship (Golmohamad, 2004) and ii) that the ascendancy of neoliberal economic policies around the world has profound implications for educational policy research (Rizvi, 2006) - acknowledge that globalization affects both the student as citizen and the student as worker. What these claims fail to address, however, is the student as person. How might globalization positively and/ or negatively affect the self-identity of a student? Is globalization an exercise in human alienation or de-alienation? What happens to the
moral quality of human commitment in a global age? These questions are not addressed in the aforementioned claims, which tend to focus more on the roles that are assigned to students as part of their place in society as citizens and/or workers, rather than on the conceptions of identity found within these same students. The emphasis here on the student as citizen and worker over and against the student as person, suggests not only a certain superficiality in the analysis, but a neglect of the more spiritual dimensions of education itself, a dimension Taylor seeks to retrieve in much of his scholarly work.

1.5 Recognition and Pedagogy

The ‘Recognition and Pedagogy’ strand of the School of Recognition focuses on the educational encounter between the known and the unknown, between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Two claims are made here: i) that the encounter with the ‘other’ is a potential source for self-transformation (Graaff, 2007); and ii) that the politics of recognition is synonymous with a politics of integration (Orwin, 1999).

The first of these claims is that the encounter with the ‘other’ is a potential source of self-transformation (Graaff, 2007). Graaff argues that the encounter opens up a fusion of horizons, allows one to be “pulled up short” and/or “interrogated by the other,” and provides an opportunity for a “reintegration” of the self. Such an encounter transforms the darkness of pride into the light of humility. “Disgust, hatred, and terror,” writes Graaff, become “forbearance, tolerance, and empathy.” Graaff supports Taylor’s view that “good understanding entails a long and quite difficult process of coming to see our own prejudices. It is not a simple change of attitude that can transform our practical living from one moment to the next. It is a time-consuming journey of small steps and it involves asking continually what the equivalents are in our own lives of the ‘strange’ activity of the alien … [W]e recognize in the other some part of ourselves.” The task of a teacher, as Graaff sees it, is to establish the pedagogical conditions for such transformative encounters to take place.

In response to Graaff, I would argue that the encounter with the ‘other’ is a two-way street. The principle of reciprocity is in play when one is introduced to an unknown person. The dynamic of

73 Ibid., 758.
74 Ibid., 759.
75 Ibid., 760.
recognition involves at least three moves: that one make an effort to understand the other; that one make an effort to understand how one is understood from the other’s perspective; and that one make an effort to understand the relationship between these two perspectives. The principle of reciprocity, unmentioned by Graaff, is par for the course in contemporary dialogue between religious persons and secular persons, for example, that is, between those who hold to a more theological explanation of reality and those who hold to a more scientific explanation of that same reality. The future of multicultural societies, I think, will depend upon the sheer capacity of persons to relate to a variety of human contexts and perspectives. With that end in mind, the principle of reciprocity ought to be taught in all multicultural schools. The alternative is an impoverished dialogue, a dialogue in which a person transposes his/her own categories onto the other, making an effort to understand the other exclusively from one’s own paradigm. A richer dialogue is a dialogue in which a person not only projects his/her own paradigmatic categories in an effort to understand the other, but, at the same time, allows the other’s own paradigmatic categories to be projected in return. A proper evaluation of this reciprocity, in turn, leads to a fuller sense of recognition – on both sides of the pedagogical divide. Graaff’s claim, that the encounter with the ‘other’ is a potential source of self-transformation, is enriched by the principle of dialogical reciprocity, a principle which is fundamental to Taylor’s ideal of mutual recognition.

A second claim made by the ‘Recognition and Pedagogy’ strand of the School of Recognition is that the politics of recognition masks a politics of integration (Orwin, 1999). Orwin’s claim, which remains, without a doubt, the strongest and most perceptive critique of Taylor’s essay on multiculturalism, is that though Taylor’s program is a noble effort, it nonetheless represents “an attempt to square a circle: that it fails as it is bound to fail.” The argument runs as follows: ‘the politics of recognition’ finds its historical roots in the concept of ‘toleration’, a concept popularized by seventeenth century British philosopher John Locke. To tolerate someone, in Locke’s formulation, meant to peacefully accept the other’s difference, without celebrating it, for the sake of civil order. The purpose of such sympathy was to guard against a potentially violent intolerance. The key distinction, for Orwin, is that whereas Lockean toleration accepts the reality of diversity, the contemporary version of the politics of recognition celebrates it. According to Orwin, few on today’s university campuses would be wholly satisfied with the Lockean formulation: “Today, it is not so much a matter of affirming the validity of arguments as of ‘cultures’ or ‘lifestyles’, which are

77 Ibid., 232.
deemed more fundamental than arguments.\textsuperscript{78} The demand for ‘intellectual diversity’ on campus is, more often than not, viewed through the prism of the politics of recognition. Underlying both the inclusion and the celebration of a diversity of opinion from differing cultures and lifestyles is the presumption of equal worth, that is, the presumption that these cultures and lifestyles deserve equal respect, that each has something to offer, and that each is worthy of a hearing. Implicit in this presumption, Orwin argues, is the desire for the liberating freedom of marginalized voices. Those who refuse to acknowledge such voices run the risk of being denounced as ‘insensitive’ or as ‘ignorant.’ In his essay on recognition, Taylor hopes that a possible ‘fusion of horizons’ might result from an encounter with the unknown ‘other’. Yet, as Orwin points out, if the human situation is defined “not (by) ultimate synthesis but only (by) hard choices” one might be skeptical about any such fusion.\textsuperscript{79} The notion that the celebration of intellectual diversity might very well result in an idolatry of historicism and/or relativism is swept under the carpet altogether. Orwin’s line against Taylor’s politics of recognition, here, is that it is far more a political project than an intellectual one. Moreover, “Taylor’s rejection of relativism in theory cloaks its acceptance in practice.”\textsuperscript{80} For Orwin, then, the politics of recognition masks a politics of integration in as much as the West has had a far deeper cultural influence on the rest of the world than the rest of the world has had on the West; in as much as the concepts of ‘recognition’ and ‘multiculturalism’ are Western concepts; and in as much as “the pedagogy of recognition, like the politics of recognition … sets out to transcend Western parochialism, (while simultaneously being) in the service of Western parochialism.”\textsuperscript{81} In a nutshell, the implication of Orwin’s argument is that Taylor’s politics of recognition leads less to a fusion of horizons and more to a colonization of ‘other’ minds, hearts, and souls.

I see three main charges directed against Taylor in light of Orwin’s critique that ‘the politics of recognition’ masks ‘a politics of integration’. The first charge is the charge of ‘relativism’. This charge holds that Taylor’s presumption that all cultures are of equal worth necessarily leads to an emptying or flattening of an objective capital ‘T’ Truth. To presume a priori that all cultures are of equal worth is to negate the possibility that the content and/or form of one or many of these cultures might distort rather than clarify said Truth. (This assumes, of course, that there is such a thing as an objective capital ‘T’ Truth to begin with). To suggest that cultures are, despite their differences, de facto interchangeable insofar as their moral truth is concerned would, according to

\textsuperscript{78} Clifford Orwin, ‘Charles Taylor’s Pedagogy of Recognition’, in Canadian Political Philosophy: Contemporary Reflections, ed. Ronald Beiner and Wayne Norman (Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001), 235. Orwin neglects to mention that Locke had little (if any) tolerance for atheists or Roman Catholics.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 238.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 244.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 245.
Taylor’s critics, be an all too hasty assumption. The argument here is that insensitivity to an objective capital ‘T’ Truth is a graver sin than any insensitivity to cultures that differ from one’s own. To this charge, one might reply, in light of Taylor’s claims, that far from being an expression of a commitment to relativism, the presumption of equal worth merely ensures that an openness of spirit prevails in cultural dialogue for the sake of mutual understanding and co-operation. One might also add that cultural comparisons must defer to relevant debates in the public sphere. In addition to these counter-claims, one might further argue that what is at stake here is not relativism as such, but relationality, less a matter of how one culture is superior or inferior to another, and more of how one culture can live together with another and how, in the interaction of two cultures, new possibilities can emerge. Related to the charge of relativism is a second charge against Taylor, that of ‘historicism’. This charge asserts that Taylor is far too historical in his cultural analysis, that he sees objective truth as a function of dialogical relations between temporal cultures rather than as an atemporal transcendence above said cultures. To this charge one might reply that, far from being a historicist when it comes to the epistemology of truth, Taylor is in fact a realist. This means that he is far more open to the connections between immanence and transcendence than his critics allow for him to be and, moreover, that there is less likely to be any trans-cultural understanding of the connections between immanence and transcendence without dialogical relations between cultures on the horizontal plane of human history. A third charge against Taylor is that of ‘integrationism’. The first two charges against Taylor – ‘relativism’ and ‘historicism’ – are directly connected to this third charge. Is Taylor’s objective that of integrating ‘non-Western’ cultures into ‘Western’ civilization? This seems highly unlikely, as Taylor is more than open to a plurality of cultures in his writings. Yet it is true that he does not address, in any direct way, the criticism that the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ is itself a ‘Western’ concept. The question of whether there is an analogous term in ‘non-Western’ cultures, for example, remains unanswered. Having said this, however, the weakness of the charge of ‘integrationism’ lies in the false assumption of the non-hybridity of both ‘Western’ and so-called ‘non-Western’ cultures. Perhaps there is more common ground within, between, and among these cultures than is commonly admitted. If part of the greatness of the Western Tradition is its capacity for self-criticism, any forced integration of ‘other’ cultures into a Western mentality is sure to be criticized by at least some adherents of that same Western Tradition. A defender of Taylor’s position might respond to Orwin’s overall critique by suggesting that multiculturalism of the Western democratic sort calls, in its best sense, for a deeper recognition of human difference, a heightened awareness of the challenges of multi-contextuality, and, more importantly, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual humility.
The two claims of the ‘Recognition and Pedagogy’ strand of the School of Recognition – i) that the encounter with the ‘other’ is a potential source for self-transformation (Graaff, 2007); and ii) that the politics of recognition masks a politics of integration (Orwin, 1999) – beg serious questions about the dynamics of educational pedagogy. The two claims show two sides of the pedagogical coin: that the encounter with the other can be self-transforming and/or that the encounter with the other can be an exercise in the politics of integration. Despite there being a bright side and a dark side to pedagogical recognition, the challenge of acknowledging both must nonetheless be faced. With societies in the West and in the East becoming increasingly complex, there is a pressing need to train young minds in the art of pluralistic deliberation. How to decide between two contradictory propositions, how to understand from the perspective of another, how to live with those who do not share the same values as you do – these, Taylor would argue, are the capacities that are required to meet the challenges of the future.

1.6 ‘Blind Spots’ in the Conversation

I noted, at the outset, that the conversation among scholars interested in the educational implications of Taylor’s thought is fairly robust, based on the variety of theoretical approaches to Taylor’s writings on the politics of recognition. We have seen, in this overview of the literature, that there are four intellectual ‘strands’ within the School of Recognition itself: the identity strand, the multiculturalism strand, the globalization strand, and the pedagogical strand. We have learned, up to this point, that various configurations can emerge when the constitutive elements of identification are changed (recognition and identity strand); that a more realistic approach to the challenge of multiculturalism is called for, realistic in the sense that both theory and practice are important for a more comprehensive understanding of the past, present, and future promises and perils of multiculturalism itself (recognition and multiculturalism strand); that an emphasis on the student as citizen and as worker over and against the student as person suggests not only a certain superficiality of analysis, but a neglect of the more spiritual dimensions of education (recognition and globalization strand); and that with ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ societies becoming increasingly complex, there is a pressing need to train young minds in the art of pluralistic deliberation (recognition and pedagogy strand). In short, if one were to collate the four insights of this literature review into a single sentence, one could say that recognition of human difference in contemporary education cannot be accomplished without due attention to circumstantial variations, theories and practices, spiritual sensibilities, and pluralistic deliberations.
The question of how the four strands within the School of Recognition are connected still remains, however. How then, apart from the shared value of recognition itself, are the four strands of identity, multiculturalism, globalization, and pedagogy related? I see at least four connections, based on my own reading of Taylor. The first connection relates to immanence. All four strands are operative within the horizontal frame of immanence as opposed to the vertical frame of transcendence, that is, within the realm of the natural as opposed to the realm of the supernatural. The second connection relates to humanism. All four strands place the recognition of the human person, (rather than the recognition of nature or God for example), at the forefront of analysis. The third connection relates to community. All four strands presuppose the background of a community within which recognition is achieved. The fourth connection relates to dialogicality. All four strands assume that recognition is a dialogical and not a monological affair. In summary, then, the four strands within the School of Recognition – (i.e. identity, multiculturalism, globalization, and pedagogy) – are connected insofar as they relate to immanence, humanism, community, and dialogicality. These connections are significant for Taylor insofar as they deepen our understanding of the modern condition. An understanding of Taylor’s views on the modern condition, as we shall see, walks hand-in-hand with an understanding of Taylor’s views on modern education.

I want to underscore here, however, that my primary concern in this dissertation is less with the constitutive parts of the School of Recognition as descriptively outlined in the literature review above, and more with how the theme upon which the school is based, namely, ‘The Politics of Recognition’, applies as a whole to the architecture of Charles Taylor’s educational thought. As Taylor is as much an historian of ideas as he is a philosopher, intellectual motivation matters to him as much as the soundness of arguments. In other words, as far as ‘the politics of recognition’ is concerned, it is, for Taylor, not merely a case of understanding the analytical intelligibility of premises and conclusions therein; what is as much if not more at stake for Taylor is the raison d’être of the politics of recognition itself, (i.e. its ‘reason for being’ at all), that is, what has motivated the politics of recognition in modern Western societies and, more precisely, what are the intellectual currents in modern Western history that have contributed to its rise.

This leaves us with a view to finding the ‘blind spots’ in the academic conversation at hand. In setting the stage for the argument of this thesis, I want to argue that, in their respective interpretations of Taylor’s work, the scholars we have looked at in the literature review of this first chapter pay insufficient attention to historical context, thematic connections, and dialectical tensions, and, naturally, do not have the benefit of Taylor’s most recent scholarship that casts further light on his writings as a whole. First, the authors in question ignore the genealogy of ‘the
politics of recognition’ in Taylor’s own philosophical work. Second, they fail to see the relationship between ‘the politics of recognition’ and key themes in Taylor’s educational thought, themes such as ‘scientific rationality’, ‘exclusive humanism’, and ‘the ethics of authenticity’. Third, the philosophical sources behind these themes are neglected, namely, Descartes, Kant, Herder, and Hegel. Fourth, the dialectical tensions within each of these themes are left unexpressed. Finally, none of the arguments in the preceding literature review, by virtue of their dates of publication, could have addressed important insights in Taylor’s more recent scholarship. In an effort to offer a more well rounded perspective on Taylor’s educational thought, the chapters that follow seek to fill these gaps. By way of conclusion, I offer an interpretation of the significance of Taylor’s educational thought as a whole.

I claim, in the macro-argument of my thesis, that the four major themes in Taylor’s educational thought – scientific rationality, exclusive humanism, the ethics of authenticity, and the politics of recognition – are logically interconnected. The first development leads to the second, which leads to the third, which in turn leads to the fourth. (Carl Sagan’s gradual time-elaps ed depiction of Darwinian evolution in the film Cosmos immediately leaps to mind here). Another way to put this would be to say that a sort of ‘metamorphosis’ occurs along the road to recognition. A scientific rationality (via Descartes), which looks skeptically upon metaphysical reality, leads to an exclusive humanism (via Kant), which sees self-sufficient flourishing as the only true end of human life. An exclusive humanism (via Kant) leads, in turn, to an ethic of authenticity (via Herder), an ethic of self-expression that asserts the value of ‘being true to oneself’. An ethic of authenticity (via Herder) leads, finally, to a politics of recognition (via Hegel), a politics of claiming one’s legitimate rights in the public sphere. There is a striking development here that has not been properly identified, explained, or understood in the secondary literature on Taylor’s educational thought. Taylor juxtaposes two considerations for each development. The limits of ‘naturalism’ are juxtaposed with the possibilities for ‘hermeneutics’ in the case of scientific rationality. The closed ‘buffered self’ is juxtaposed with the open ‘porous self’ in the case of exclusive humanism. ‘Relative truth’ is juxtaposed with ‘objective truth’ in the case of the ethics of authenticity. ‘Individual rights’ are juxtaposed with ‘communal rights’ in the case of the politics of recognition. In each case, Taylor is calling for two things – a balance between rather than an either/or approach to the two tensions at hand, and an attempt to incorporate both tensions into a more holistic vision. I take up Taylor’s critics in due course, and evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of their refutations. The thesis concludes with reflections on the significance of Taylor’s educational thought for the field of Philosophy of Education.
Part II

Taylor’s Readings of Modern Philosophers
2 RÉNE DESCARTES

2.1 Taylor’s Reading of Descartes

Taylor’s reading of Descartes focuses on three important aspects of his writing – skepticism of God, skepticism of humanity, and skepticism of the natural world. We need to take up each of these aspects in turn, before advancing the argument at hand. The issues at stake here are as follows: What does Cartesian skepticism of God, of humanity, and of the natural world entail precisely? What are the related consequences of such skepticism? Is there a connection, in Taylor’s view, between Descartes’ skepticism of God, of humanity, and of the natural world, or not? While interpreting an interpretation runs the risk of distorting the original text, there is, as we will see, great insight to be won from the exercise.

2.2 Skepticism of God

Descartes’ argument for the existence of God is best expressed in his Fifth Meditation, *On the Existence of God*:

"… Because I cannot conceive God without existence, it follows that existence is inseparable from him, and hence that he truly exists; not that my thought can make this be so, or that it imposes any necessity on things, but, on the contrary, because the necessity of the thing itself namely, the necessity of the existence of God, determines my thought to conceive in this way. For I am not free to conceive a God without existence, that is to say, a supremely perfect being devoid of a supreme perfection, as I am free to imagine a horse with or without wings."

Descartes’ reasoning here relies upon the a priori ‘ontological argument’ for God’s existence, an argument first put forward by Saint Anselm in his eleventh century *Proslogion*. Anselm writes that “There is, then, a truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O Lord, our God.” Whereas Anselm writes as a theologian in the language of believing faith, Descartes writes as a philosopher in the language of skeptical reason. The central issue for both, as far as the ontological argument is concerned, is that perfection assumes existence. The strongest refutation of Descartes’ version of the ontological

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argument, by the philosopher Pierre Gassendi, in the accompanying ‘Fifth Set of Objections’ to the Meditations, argues that existence is not an attribute of perfection, but the very condition that enables perfection itself: “[F]or surely, what does not exist has no perfections or imperfections ... rather, its existence is that in virtue of which both the thing itself and its perfections are existent ... and if a thing lacks existence, we do not say it is imperfect, or deprived of a perfection, but say instead that it is nothing at all.”4 Descartes’ reply to Gassendi asserts that “in the case of God necessary existence is in fact a property in the strictest sense of the term, since it applies to him alone and forms a part of his essence as it does of no other thing ... To list existence among the properties which belong to the nature of God is no more ‘begging the question’ than listing among the properties of a triangle the fact that its angles are equal to two right angles.”5 In short, Descartes’ Anselm-inspired argument for the existence of God, in spite of its objections and replies, is wholly committed to the conclusion that God’s perfection implies God’s existence.

Interestingly enough, Charles Taylor’s own reading of Descartes is less concerned about the subtleties of Cartesian ontological reasoning and more concerned about the method Descartes adopts for the proof itself:

“The Cartesian subject loses the kind of depth which belongs to a ‘nature’ which is part of a cosmic order, where the discovery of what I really am requires that I come to grasp this nature by studying the orders of human social life and the cosmos. I can now supposedly make this discovery by purely immanent self-clarity, clear and distinct self-consciousness.”6

The Cartesian turn from theocentricity to anthrocentricity, from a God-centred way of knowing to a human-centred way of knowing, initiates the modern preoccupation with subjectivity. Taylor expends great amounts of intellectual energy detailing the cascade of consequences that follow from this radical turn to the subject. In the Cartesian system, the received Ideas of God (or ‘Forms’ in Platonic philosophy) become the constructed ideas of humanity. Divine Reason is morphed into human reason. This inward turn reduces human beings to rational thought, thereby ‘disengaging’ them from the reality that makes thought possible. Jacques Maritain, whom Taylor cites in A Secular Age, argues that “[t]he sin of Descartes is the sin of angelism ... because he conceived of human thought after the model of angelic thought. To sum it up in three words: what he saw in man’s thought was independence of things.”7 Cartesian philosophy effectively negates the traditional correspondence between mind and nature. Whereas the medieval perspective was one of faithful

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5 Ibid., 263.
belief in a hierarchical world of divine spirits, imbued in meaningful matter, which guided the human beings to their proper end, what we have with the rise of Cartesianism is a plunging into an ‘immanent frame’ where the spiritual connection between God and humanity has faded, all metaphysical weight has emptied away, and a more scientific understanding of the whole of reality has prevailed. In the process, the notion of a transcendent hierarchy becomes flattened, the world becomes disenchanted, and nature becomes an object to be controlled. The abstract move of Descartes’ *cogito* (‘I think therefore I am’) also leads to a selfish atomism. These after-effects of Cartesian philosophy, so Taylor argues, open the door to the providential Deism of the Enlightenment, from which the roots of modern atheistic unbelief begin to grow.

### 2.3 Skepticism of Humanity

Another aspect of Cartesian skepticism relevant for Charles Taylor is the problem of dualism, that is, the sharp distinction, in Descartes’ philosophy, between mind (or soul) and body. In a single passage in his ‘Sixth Meditation’, *The Real Distinction between the Soul and the Body of Man*, Descartes simultaneously argues for the unity of mind and body, for the distinction of mind and body, and for the preeminence of mind over body as far as his own existence is concerned:

> “Thus, simply by knowing that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing. It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.”

This passage is indicative of what many philosophers have come to regard as one of the weak points of Cartesian philosophy, Descartes’ lack of coherence on the dualist mind-body problem. We learn, for example, in Descartes’ ‘Sixth Meditation’, that “[n]ature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit.” (Descartes actually thought that the ‘pineal gland’ in the innermost part of the brain was the connecting point between mind and body). Yet we also learn, in the ‘Sixth

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9 Ibid., 56.
Meditation', that “there is a great difference between the mind and the body, inasmuch as the body is by its very nature always divisible, while the mind is utterly indivisible.”\textsuperscript{11} In Descartes’ ‘First Set of Replies’, we are told that the body has extension, shape, and motion while the mind doubts, understands, and wills, that none of the attributes of the mind are found in the body nor are any of the attributes of the body found in the mind, and that “this would be quite impossible if there were not a real distinction between the mind and the body.”\textsuperscript{12} What are we to make of these assertions?

If, as previously stated, Descartes is content on simultaneously arguing for the unity of mind and body, for the distinction of mind and body, and for the preeminence of mind over body as far as his own existence is concerned, as we have seen, these propositions could easily be interpreted as being in contradiction with one another. How can unity, distinction, and preeminence be simultaneously justified in the intermingling of mind and body? In the ‘Fifth Set of Objections’ to the Meditations, authored, once again, by Gassendi, the weakness of Descartes’ argument is revealed: “... [Y]ou (Descartes) still have to explain how that ‘joining and, as it were, intermingling’ or ‘confusion’ can apply to you if you are incorporeal, unextended, and indivisible ... if you are something separate, how are you compounded with matter so as to make up a unity?”\textsuperscript{13} Descartes’ reply to Gassendi is unconvincing: “Your comments on the union of the mind with the body are similar to what you have said earlier,” he writes. “At no point do you produce objections to my arguments; you merely put forward doubts that you think follow from my conclusions, though in fact they merely arise from your desire to call in the imagination to examine matters which are not within its proper province.”\textsuperscript{14} While a generous reading of Descartes’ reply might very well affirm that the mind-body problem is beyond the limits of human understanding, it would still be fair to say that Descartes’ attempt at a solution, as outlined in his writings, is more perplexing than illuminating. One reassurance for Cartesians, of course, must certainly be that philosophers of all stripes struggle, to this day, with the elusive mysteries of the mind-body dilemma.

Taylor’s reading of Cartesian dualism focuses on both the rationale for and consequence of Descartes’ mind-body distinction:

“Descartes took the step of supposing that we are essentially disengaged reason; we are pure mind, distinct from body, and our normal way of seeing ourselves is a regrettable confusion ... So it is all too easy for us in our culture to think of ourselves as essentially disengaged reason. This explains why so many people find it quite unproblematic that we should conceive human thinking on the model of the digital computer. This self-image is enhanced

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 238.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 266.
As Taylor rightly points out, a conception of the human person as pure disengaged reason finds its rationale in control of, power over, and freedom from the constraints, limitations, and restrictions of one's body and one's surrounding environment. The consequence of Cartesian dualism is such that instead of existing as an embodied agent in the world, one now exists as a disembodied agent in one's mind. We move, in Taylor's description, from an 'incarnation' to an 'excarnation.' Taylor draws on such twentieth century thinkers as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his refutation of Cartesian excarnation. These thinkers recognize the embodied rational (and emotional) agency of persons and the meaningful background of their actions, in contrast to a more scientific 'view from nowhere', which is indifferent to the embedded 'situatedness' of the human condition. For Taylor, the mind-body problem is more than a logical category mistake, more than what philosopher Gilbert Ryle, in his critique of the Cartesian dogma of 'The Ghost in the Machine', saw as a terminological absurdity, the "conjoining of terms of different types." Liberation from the captivity of the mentalist picture of reality requires more than a mere resorting of conceptual categories; what is needed is an account of the motivation behind the cogito itself. According to Taylor, the purpose of the cogito is self-generated certainty: The cogito adapts, bends, and shapes the mind to the cause of natural science: "... for Descartes the whole point of the reflexive turn is to achieve a quite self-sufficient certainty. What I get in the cogito, and in each successive step in the chain of clear and distinct perceptions, is just this kind of certainty, which I can generate for myself by following the right method." The difficulty with self-generated certainty, however, is that we are not mere Beings-in-the-mind, we are Beings-in-the-world. In order to understand the world around us, we need to be in contact with it. The relationship between the mental and the physical cannot merely be represented in the mind, it must be experienced in the real world. What is reality, for Taylor? Reality is what we are confronted with. It is the 'facticity' of our lives. The encounter with reality both limits us and frees us.

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meaning to our experience. The only way one will know whether there is cheese in the fridge, whether the portrait on the wall is crooked, or whether the neighbour’s cat is trampling through the garden, is by checking, by becoming involved, by engaging in the task at hand. Mere mental representations of the cheese, the portrait, or the cat, will not substitute for contact with their material realities. Put in another way, both a knower and a known, both a subject and an object, are presupposed in the corresponding act of knowing. As Taylor writes, “[e]ven to find out about the world and formulate disinterested pictures, we have to come to grips with it ... we are engaged as agents coping with things ... We can draw a neat line between my picture of an object and that object, but not between my dealing with the object and that object.”21 In short, Taylor’s solution to Cartesian dualism is the retrieval of epistemological realism. Only an epistemological realism can free philosophy from the pathologies of a purely mentalist approach to reality, from what Taylor provocatively calls “the Hydra whose serpentine heads wreak havoc throughout the intellectual culture of modernity.”22

The best overall critique of Taylor’s reading of Cartesian dualism is Susan James’ ‘Internal and External in the Work of Descartes’.23 James argues that ‘internal’ and ‘external’ are intertwined in human knowing, that the distinction between them is not nearly as sharp as Taylor allows, and that coming to know clear and distinct ideas is as much a process of discovery as a process of construction. For James, “[a]n appreciation of our internal power to reason thus depends on an appreciation of our part in a universe which extends outside us.”24 That universe, James claims, has more moral significance than Taylor is prepared to admit. She concludes that “[t]here is no clear transition from an external to an internal notion of reason or from an external to an internal source of moral value ... Indeed, the disengaged self may be a creation, not of Descartes ... but of a subsequent historiography.25 In his response to James, Taylor explains that he took Plato and Descartes as representative figures in the history of Western philosophy, and that the transition from a Platonic worldview to a Cartesian worldview “generated a strong human-centred ethic, with a strong view of human dignity.”26 It is not that the world becomes irrelevant to human action, as James’ argument asserts. As Taylor explains, “it is no longer that this world offers, as it were, patterns of goodness, but rather that paying close attention to it, and adapting to it, are essential to

22 Ibid., vii.
24 Ibid., 13.
25 Ibid., 19.
achieve our favoured goals, which now command our moral awe and admiration.”27 The transition from Plato to Descartes changes our moral relation to the world around us, and, in doing so, the very source of morality itself.

Underlying James’ critique of Taylor is the fundamental issue of Plato’s and Descartes’ understanding of God. Taylor’s reply to James is inadequate in this regard. While Taylor does admit that “I don’t mean to imply for a minute that Descartes himself was not genuinely devout,” and that “many anachronistic readings turn on the inability to recognize [Descartes’] real religious convictions,” he fails to justify these claims with solid evidence.28 There is no mention, for example, of Descartes’ correspondence with his friend Mersenne in 1630 in which he writes:

“The mathematical truths that you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on him entirely as much as all other creatures... Please do not hesitate to assert and proclaim everywhere that it is God who has laid down these laws in nature just as a king lays down laws in his kingdom.”29

As the quotation shows, Descartes’ willingness to subject the whole of reality to mathematical truths did not negate his firm belief in the God who created these truths. Nowhere in Taylor’s analysis, not even in his lengthy chapter on Descartes in Sources of the Self, do we see such an admission. Something similar is lacking in Taylor’s reading of Plato. Though Taylor is clear that there has been a transition in the history of ideas from Plato to Descartes, and that this transition has resulted in a change from a God-centred worldview to a human-centred worldview, he assumes that his reader is abundantly knowledgeable about what Plato’s God-centred worldview actually entails. There is no mention, for example, of Book VI of The Republic where Socrates addresses Adimantus on the question of divine order in the universe:

“For surely, Adimantus, the man whose mind is truly fixed on eternal realities has no leisure to turn his eyes downward upon the petty affairs of men, and so engaging in strife with them to be filled with envy and hate, but he fixes his gaze upon the things of the eternal and unchanging order, and seeing that they neither wrong nor are wronged by one another, but all abide in harmony as reason bids, he will endeavour to imitate them and, as far as may be, to fashion himself in their likeness and assimilate himself to them ... the lover of wisdom associating with the divine order will himself become orderly and divine in the measure permitted to man.”30

28 Ibid., 216.
Taylor more or less assumes his reader knows something about Plato’s notion of cosmic order, yet he fails to spell this out in any detail. Doing so would have led to a much richer understanding of the moral transition operative in the shift in worldviews from Plato to Descartes, that is, of how an imitation of divine forms in Plato is morphed into a designation of human forms in Descartes. Richard Rorty nuances Taylor’s analysis a step further when he writes that “Descartes himself was forever trying to hold on to standard Platonic and scholastic distinctions with one hand while deconstructing them with the other.”31 Though Rorty is unclear on the dynamics of Descartes’ performative contradiction, he is, at the very least, attempting to make sense of the way in which Descartes negotiates between divine forms and human forms, something noticeably lacking in Taylor’s analysis. There is no extended critique of the ‘cosmic order’ idea in Taylor’s corpus. Arguments to the effect that the universe is meaninglessly chaotic, that metaphysical blueprints are mere fictions, that there is no such thing as an eternal a priori reality fixed in time and space, that historical determinism does not account for the free will of human beings, that every society faces perpetual and unrelenting change, that such flux can never be eliminated let alone managed, and that the very notion of a ‘cosmic order’ is prone to authoritarian abuse - none of these criticisms, (whether persuasive or not), are given an entirely fair hearing in Taylor’s work.

Arguments that question the notion of a ‘cosmic order’ can be found in the writings of contemporary cosmologists. Nobel-Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg, for example, has had this to say about the ‘insignificance’ of human existence:

“It is almost irresistible for humans to believe that we have some special relation to the universe, that human life is not just a more-or-less farcical outcome of a chain of accidents reaching back to the first three minutes [of the universe’s existence], but that we were somehow built in from the beginning ... It is very hard to realize that [the entire earth] is just a tiny part of an overwhelmingly hostile universe. It is even harder to realize that this present universe has evolved from an unspeakably unfamiliar early condition, and faces a future extinction of endless cold or intolerable heat. The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.”32

From a different angle, Royal Astronomer Sir Martin Rees (and, following him, the Columbia University String Theorist Brian Greene) have proposed a theory of the ‘multiverse’, a theory which, if true, would contradict the assumption that there is a single set of laws for the cosmos as a whole. According to this theory, the cosmos is made up of a vast multiplicity of universes, where each universe behaves according to its own set of laws:

"The apparent fine-tuning on which our existence depends could be a coincidence. I once thought so. But that view now seems too narrow. What's conventionally called 'the universe' could be just one member of an ensemble. Countless others may exist in which the laws are different. The universe in which we've emerged belongs to the unusual subset that permits complexity and consciousness to develop. Once we accept this, various apparently special features of our universe—those that some theologians once adduced as evidence for Providence or design—occasion no surprise... This new concept is, potentially, as drastic an enlargement of our cosmic perspective as the shift from pre-Copernican ideas to the realization that the earth is orbiting a typical star on the edge of the Milky Way, itself just one galaxy among countless others... our entire universe may be just one element—one atom, as it were—in an infinite ensemble: a cosmic archipelago. Each universe starts with its own big bang, acquires a distinctive imprint (and its individual physical laws) as it cools, and traces out its own cosmic cycle. The big bang that triggered our entire universe is, in this grander perspective, an infinitesimal part of an elaborate structure that extends far beyond the range of any telescopes." 33

So, on one side of the cosmological debate we have Steven Weinberg who argues that there is no such thing as a 'cosmic order'. On the other side of the cosmological debate we have Martin Reese who argues that there may very well be many 'cosmic orders'. While it is true that both Weinberg and Reese are operating at the level of physics, and Taylor at the level of metaphysics, it is nonetheless the case that both Weinberg and Reese present intellectual challenges to Taylor's taken-for-granted assumption of a single spiritual/physical 'cosmic order', which, (in all fairness to Taylor), has been the prevailing assumption for much of human history.

2.4 Skepticism of Nature

The third and final aspect of Cartesian philosophy that is significant for Taylor is Descartes' understanding of 'nature'. In his 'Sixth Meditation,' Descartes defines physical nature to be "something which is really to be found in things themselves." 34 In his Principles of Philosophy, where Descartes equates 'nature' with 'matter', we also learn that matter is defined by 'division', 'shape', and 'motion', and, by implication, that all natural phenomena can be explained mathematically:

"I recognize no kind of matter in corporeal objects except that matter susceptible of every sort of division, shape, and motion which geometers call quantity and which they presuppose as the subject matter of their proofs. Further, the only properties I consider in it are those divisions, shapes, and motion; and about them I accept only what can be derived from indubitable true axioms with the sort of self-evidence that belongs to a mathematical proof. All natural phenomena, as I shall show, can be explained in this way." 35

What we see in Descartes' reflections, then, is a tendency to view nature from a purely scientific point of view. What interests Descartes is material reality. Material reality can be studied by the

senses, its physical composition observed and its quantifiable effects measured. The move Descartes makes is to translate the science of matter into mathematical formulae. The whole of physical reality is thus reduced to the laws of algebraic geometry. These laws, are, for Descartes, the very foundation of certainty, and it is in studying the matter subject to such laws that we arrive at true knowledge. The interplay of matter and motion in nature is, according to Descartes, a mechanical operation. Everything in the world - including human beings - is analogous to a machine. Witness this remarkable excerpt from Descartes' *Treatise on Man*:

"The nerves of the machine that I am describing can be compared to the pipes in the mechanical parts of these fountains, its muscles and tendons to various other engines and springs which serve to operate these mechanical parts, its animal spirits to the water that drives them, the heart to the source of the water, and the brain's cavities to the apertures. Moreover, respiration and similar actions which are normal and natural to this machine, and which depend [on] spirits, are like the movements of a clock or mill, which the normal [level] of water can make continuous. External objects, which by their mere presence act on the organs of sense and thereby cause them to move in many different ways, ... are like strangers on entering the grottoes of those fountains (who) unwittingly cause the movements that take place before their very eyes."  

What bothers Taylor, more than any single idea in Descartes' corpus, is precisely the reduction of humanity to the workings of a 'machine'.

Taylor confesses to being a philosophical anthropologist fiercely opposed to 'naturalism', that is, to the reduction of all explanation to states of affairs in the observable world. He writes in the introduction to his first volume of philosophical papers that, "I (want) to argue against the understanding of human life and action implicit in an influential family of theories in the sciences of man. The common feature of this family is the ambition to model the study of man on the natural sciences. Theories of this kind seem to me to be terribly implausible."  They are implausible for Taylor because they treat the human being "as an object among other objects, characterizing him purely in terms of properties which are independent of his experience - in this case, his self-experience."  Taylor adds that, "our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality."  It is with these considerations in mind, then, that Taylor proceeds, in his essay on 'Self-Interpreting Animals', to make five related claims. These claims are as follows: "i) that some of our emotions involve import-ascriptions; ii) that some import-ascriptions are subject-referring; iii) that our subject-referring feelings are the basis of our understanding of what it is to be human; iv) that

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38 Ibid., 47.
39 Ibid.
these feelings are constituted by the articulations we come to accept of them; and v) that these articulations, which we can think of as interpretations, require language." What these claims amount to, in effect, is a scathing indictment of a ‘naturalized epistemology’, and, by extension, of the Cartesian worldview.41

2.5 A Naturalized Epistemology

The heart of Taylor’s difficulty with a naturalized epistemology is its conception of nature “as ‘disenchanted’, as mere mechanism, as devoid of any spiritual essence or expressive dimension.”42 In the modern stance toward nature, the medieval notion of a ‘cosmic order’, which orients humanity toward the good, becomes meaningless. Human reason is disengaged from God:

“Many traditional doctrines saw human beings as realizing themselves fully only when they were in touch with, or rightly situated vis-à-vis, the wider cosmic order. The idea that a human could understand himself correctly without reference to this wider order was inconceivable. What is new in the modern sense of the self is the faith that I can properly understand and define myself in the absence of any attachment to this wider and more ultimate reality that surrounds me. Hence the image of the modern self as disengaged.”43

There is no intrinsic teleological end or ultimate pre-ordained purpose for human beings in a radically naturalized world.44 Nature mutates into a neutral object to be controlled in accordance with human will. We become, in Descartes’ words, “comme maîtres et possesseurs de la nature.”45 Innate human tendencies as well as intentional action and direction are rejected in favour of an explanation of human behaviour as a physical response to stimuli in the environment. We are reduced, in philosopher John Searle’s understanding, to a ‘brain-in-a-vat’.46 And yet, a naturalized epistemology is not morally neutral. It is, in many ways, necessarily entwined with morality. The primary lesson in Taylor’s critique of Descartes can be summed up in a single phrase: a flawed epistemology = a flawed morality. As we shall see, Taylor applies this same lesson to his deconstruction of ‘scientific rationality’ in education.

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40 Charles Taylor, Human Agency and Language (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 75-76.
41 One cannot help but notice the shadow of empiricist Willard Quine in the background of Taylor’s first claim. There is, in Quine’s now-famous essay 1969 essay ‘Epistemology Naturalized’, a rejection of mental and/or spiritual realities as they relate to human beings, who are viewed by the author as ‘sense receptors’ reacting to stimuli in their environment. Taylor’s humanist frustration with a naturalized epistemology is made clearer through a reading of Quine. See Willard Quine, Ontological Relativity & Other Essays, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969), 69-91.
3.1 Taylor’s Reading of Kant

Taylor’s reading of Kant focuses on four issues — Kant’s epistemology and moral theory, and, to a lesser extent, Kant’s political philosophy and aesthetics — all of which are relevant to the theme of ‘exclusive humanism’. Precisely how they are relevant remains to be seen. By exclusive humanism, Taylor means a humanism without God, a humanism of pure immanence, a humanism committed solely to human flourishing. In what follows, I will elaborate on Taylor’s interpretation of each of the four aforementioned issues, and show how each contributes to a richer understanding of what exclusive humanism entails. While insights from Kant’s lesser known works are brought to the fore from time to time, the bulk of Taylor’s reading of Kant is centred on Kant’s three critiques — the Critique of Pure Reason, the Critique of Practical Reason, and the Critique of Judgment. Taken together, these critiques constitute the soul of Kantian philosophy. Kant tells us, in his first critique, which sets the stage for his trilogy of critiques, that “[a]ll interest of my reason (the speculative as well as the practical) is united in the following three questions: What can I know?; What should I do?; What may I hope? … the first question is merely speculative … the second question is merely practical … the third question … is simultaneously practical and theoretical.”¹ These are the central concerns of the Kantian project. Let us see, then, how Taylor’s readings of Kant’s epistemology and moral theory, and, to a lesser extent, Kant’s political philosophy and aesthetics, play their respective parts in helping to shape the contours of ‘exclusive humanism’.

3.2 Kant’s Epistemology

Taylor’s interpretation of Kant’s epistemology underscores Kant’s rejection of Hume’s ‘atomistic’ account of knowledge. It is unclear, in retrospect, as to just how much of Hume Kant actually read. We do know that he would have had access to German translations of parts of and/or wholes of both Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* and of Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature*.² In both these texts, Hume argues that we have no sensible knowledge of any apparent connection between causes and effects in the natural world. He writes, in his *Enquiry*, for example, that “[o]ur

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idea ... of necessity and causation arises entirely from the uniformity observable in the operations of nature, where similar objects are constantly conjoined together, and the mind is determined by custom to infer the one from the appearance of the other ... Beyond the constant conjunction of similar objects, and the consequent inference from one to the other, we have no notion of any necessity or connexion.” He further writes, in his Treatise, that “[w]e cannot penetrate into the reason of the conjunction. We only observe the thing itself, and always find that from the constant conjunction the objects acquire a union in the imagination.” Another way of phrasing Hume’s claim, as represented in the excerpts from his Inquiry and Treatise, might be to say that there are no necessary connections in nature but for the connections that the mind imposes upon nature itself. The relation between mind and nature and/ or between nature and mind is, then, central for Hume. Kant, in his Prolegomena, published shortly after the Critique of Pure Reason as a clarification of that work, admits that Hume “was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy.” In the Critique of Pure Reason itself, Kant criticizes Hume for denying the reality of synthetic a priori knowledge, that is, knowledge grounded in fact (i.e. synthetic), yet independent of experience (i.e. a priori). According to Kant, “I soon found that the concept of the connection of cause and effect is far from being the only concept through which the understanding thinks connections of things a priori; rather, metaphysics consists wholly of such concepts.” Kant’s rejection of Hume’s ‘atomistic’ account of knowledge, then, rests largely on Kant’s case for the legitimacy of the synthetic a priori.

Though Taylor is clearly on the side of Kant in Kant’s epistemological debate with Hume, he nonetheless finds serious shortcomings in Kant’s philosophy. Taylor agrees with Kant (contra Hume) that the empirical reception of raw, atomic, uninterpreted data, without relation to context, is essentially incoherent: “Plainly we couldn’t have experience of the world at all if we had to start with a swirl of uninterpreted data. Indeed, there would be no ‘data’, because even this minimal description depends on our distinguishing what is given by some objective source from what we merely supply ourselves.” Taylor is particularly astute on the implications of Hume’s atomistic theory of knowledge for an understanding of ‘the self’. The self, for Hume, as for many

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6 Ibid., 10.
Enlightenment thinkers, was a mere object for scientific observation. Yet if all our knowledge is fragmented, as Hume believed, so too is our knowledge of the self. Taylor, for his part, has difficulty in taking Hume seriously on this point: "It was because Hume was dealing with the self as a set of phenomena that he could say such an outrageous thing ... that the self was a mere 'bundle of perceptions' with no visible principle of unity."8 Taylor asserts, in this remark, not only a strong conviction in the self as a unified whole, but also in the notion that one's epistemological view affects one's understanding of the human person. Kant's philosophy is important for Taylor in as much as it is attuned to the 'background' of human subjectivity. "With hindsight," Taylor writes, "we can see (Kant's philosophy) as the first attempt to articulate the background that the modern disengaged picture itself requires for the operations it describes to be intelligible."9 The modern disengaged picture of the subject requires such a 'background' for its actions to make sense. Kant's philosophy is also important for Taylor in that Kant took a step forward in seeing the mind as active rather than passive. For Taylor, "Kant has thus discovered the real nature of thought; it is not passive, not simply what contemplates and draws inferences (for rationalists) or registers concomitances (for empiricists). It is the active principle which shapes the things of experience."10 In Kantian terminology, experience is shaped by the understanding through 'categories' in time and space - the conditions necessary for thought to occur (e.g. quantity, quality, relation, modality, and their subdivisions). As deduced in Kant's transcendental argumentation, these conditions frame the limitations of the human mind. Though his support of the Kantian position contra Hume is clear enough, Taylor's reading of Kantian epistemology is, however, far short of a ringing endorsement. Kant's distinction between the phenomenal (i.e. appearances) and the noumenal (i.e. things-in-themselves) is problematic for Taylor in that Kant assumes that only the former and not the latter can be known. Taylor writes that for Kant, "the nature of this ultimate (noumenal) reality is a closed book to us."11 He further writes that "Kant's great discovery is still incomplete. It lacks one thing. It still sees this thought, the active, shaping concept, as subjective, as the thought merely of self-consciousness; whereas in fact it is the ontological base of reality ... The only possible objectivity is one structured by thought. But (Kant) sees this as a demand of subjective knowledge, not an ontological principle."12 For Kant, epistemology governs ontology - not vice-versa. In Taylor's eyes, Kant's fixation on the internal workings of a monological self-consciousness means that he has still

11 Ibid., 31.
12 Ibid., Pg. 528-529.
not managed to escape the shadow of the modern epistemological construal, the shadow Descartes himself had paved the way for in the Cogito.

Taylor's reading of Kant's epistemology, which centres on the phenomenality and intra-subjectivity of Kant's approach to knowledge, underscores Kant's rootedness in immanence. Kant's denial of the human capacity for knowledge of the noumenal, and his profoundly monological understanding of self-consciousness, are consistent with both the naturalistic and the humanistic tendencies of his philosophy. As we have seen, however, Taylor finds an immanent commitment to a purely 'naturalistic humanism' somewhat problematic. Such a commitment is problematic for Taylor because, in its bracketing of ontological and/or transcendental reality, it limits one's moral horizon, and, in turn, one's moral vision. In his engagement with Kant's writings, Taylor is persistent in his claim that the epistemological and the moral are intertwined, that one's epistemological view has direct implications for one's moral view. An immanent epistemology leads to an immanent morality.

**3.3 Kant's Moral Theory**

Does Kant, in fact, have an immanent morality? Taylor's reading of Kant's moral theory, which relies largely on two works – *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) – focuses on three key aspects: 'dignity', 'will', and 'duty'. These three key aspects are linked throughout Kant's moral treatises.

Firstly, Kant defines dignity in terms of "inner worth."\(^{13}\) This inner worth, in turn, is synonymous with humanity's "rational nature."\(^{14}\) It is from humanity's rational nature that all moral concepts are derived: "... all moral concepts have their seat and origin completely apriori in reason ... in this purity of their origin lies their dignity."\(^{15}\) Kant takes a final step in clarifying the meaning of 'dignity' by associating it with 'autonomy': "[a]utonomy is therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational creature."\(^{16}\) 'Dignity', for Kant, then, is a human capacity for independent rationality. What is significant about this claim is its profoundly monological rather than dialogical quality, for to argue on behalf of a wholly self-sufficient rationality would be to foreclose all rational advances made by way of person-to-person relationships.

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\(^{14}\) Ibid., 88.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 65.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 85.
Secondly, Kant defines will as “nothing other than practical reason.” Choosing what is practically necessary requires that reason be trained to produce not just any will, but a ‘good’ will: “… the true vocation of reason must be to produce a will that is good, not perhaps as a means to other purposes, but good in itself.” A good will, for Kant, is a free will, with ‘free’ construed as “the will’s property of being a law to itself.” A free will is an end in itself; it ought never to be used as a means to someone else’s end. Far from advocating immoral selfishness, Kant explains that conformity with one’s own will ought, at the same time, to be in accordance with what he calls ‘universal law’: “the human being … is subject only to laws given by himself but still universal.” Kant is arguing here that objectivity can and ought to be arrived at through a universally-attuned mode of subjectivity. In doing so, Kant sets the stage for his well known ‘categorical imperative’, the touchstone for his moral thought: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” A connection is made, elsewhere, between the ‘universal law’ and the will of God. Kant regards universal laws as “commands of the supreme being.” He further argues that, “[t]he moral law commands me to make the highest possible good … the final object of all my conduct. But I cannot hope to produce this except by the harmony of my will with that of a holy and beneficent author of the world.” Kant’s elaboration on the co-operative relationship between human will and divine will is, unfortunately, slim at best here, and one is left wondering just how autonomous the will really is in Kantian terms if the will’s capacity to formulate universal maxims is dependent upon a higher harmony with a divine lawgiver.

Thirdly, Kant defines duty as a relation to the moral law. Duty is “the determination of (one’s) actions through respect for this (moral) law … “ All have an obligation to conform their actions to the moral law for the sake of the good. This, for Kant, involves a subjection of the heart. Kant describes the human heart as “more powerful than all other incentives.” It is subjection of the heart that gives rise to moral principles. One of the more important principles associated with duty is the principle of self-denial: “Duty … strikes down all arrogance as well as vain self-love, (and is)

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18 Ibid., 52.
19 Ibid., 94.
20 Ibid., 82.
21 Ibid., 73.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 206.
the supreme life-principle of all morality in human beings.”

Kant describes the happiness derived from the satisfaction of one’s own needs as “a great temptation to transgression of duty.” Only self-denial can lead to noble acts of sacrifice which, according to Kant, “may indeed be praised.”

Kant, however, distinguishes between self-sacrifice and self-annihilation, for to destroy one’s own life rather than preserve it would “altogether oppose the supreme principle of all duty.”

Kant admits, throughout his writings, that orienting one’s conduct in accordance with the moral law is by no means an easy task, but rather a task filled with pain and suffering, trials and tribulations, and great hardship. How, then, can one be persuaded to do one’s duty at all in light of this? Are Kant’s appeals to respect, for both ‘the moral law’ and ‘the sake of the good’, sufficient reasons to inspire the performance of one’s duty? Kant might be criticized here for failing to appreciate the complexity of motives by which persons act. Acting out of love, rather than out of duty, for example – assuming, for the moment, that the two are mutually exclusive – could, by way of choice, present itself as far more appealing to many.

The concepts of dignity, will, and duty then, are essential for understanding Kantian moral theory. In short, the three concepts are linked insofar as one’s rational dignity, if properly directed by a good will, is, by way of an objective moral law, in active service of one’s duty. The connection between these Kantian concepts seems intelligible enough, if one were to claim, against Charles Taylor’s reading of Kant, that intelligibility is indeed enough. I want to outline, in what follows, Taylor’s identification of the shortcomings in Kantian moral theory.

Though conscious of their merits, Taylor does not shy away from criticism of the three aspects of Kant’s moral theory: dignity, will, and duty.

On the issue of dignity, Taylor is critical of Kant’s neglect of the order, laws, and demands of ‘nature’. Taylor reads Kant as placing the capacity of rational creatures to conform to their own laws on a higher level than the limitations imposed by nature. “Rational agents have a status that nothing else enjoys in the universe,” Taylor writes. “They soar above the rest of creation. Everything else may have a price, but only they have ‘dignity’. And so Kant strongly insists that our moral obligations owe nothing to the order of nature. He rejects vigorously as irrelevant all those qualitative distinctions which pick out higher and lower in the order of the cosmos or in human

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27 Ibid., 54.
28 Ibid., 209.
29 Ibid., 74.
While Kant’s view may seem morally empowering to some, Taylor sees it as fundamentally flawed. It is flawed because the claim that rational nature is an end in itself is suspect if everything else in the order of nature is treated instrumentally, that is, solely for one’s own purposes. Taylor argues that different notions of human dignity are inevitably tied to conceptions of the human good (e.g. What is a good person? What is a good life?) and that these conceptions, in turn, are related to “whether and in what way human beings can realize the good alone, or … in what way they must be part of society to be human in the full sense …”

There can be no notion of human dignity, for Taylor, apart from community. Taylor further points out that, since Kant, there has been a widespread disagreement about the meaning of human dignity as such. One of the central assumptions of the Enlightenment, for example, was that growth in rationality “somehow releases a fund of benevolence in us.”

Given Kant’s awareness of evil in the ‘crooked wood’ of humanity, however, the claim that growth in rationality leads, automatically, to an increase in benevolence would seemingly contradict Kant’s own moral theory. According to Taylor, then, neglect of the order of nature, indifference to community, and assumptions about the benevolence of rationality, all compromise Kant’s notion of human dignity.

On the issue of the will, though Taylor admits that the Kantian notion of self-determination by a rational will can appear to be ‘exhilarating’, he nonetheless finds Kant’s understanding of the will as “radically anthropocentric,” as “a veritable revolution in moral consciousness,” and as “a root and branch rejection of all ancient moralities.” Taylor writes that, for Kant, “[t]he proximate source of this transformation of the will is not God, but the demands of rational agency itself which lie within me.” According to Kant, the dictates of a rational will are entirely self-determined, and are safeguarded from the influences of God, from the influence of nature, or, for that matter, from the influence of any external authority. The only guide to which reason can turn is the will itself. Taylor further argues, in his sympathy with Hegel’s critique of Kant, that the workings of a pure rational will, as exemplified in Kant’s categorical imperative, are empty and vacuous. “The problem with Kant’s criterion of rationality is that it has purchased radical autonomy at the price of emptiness … The vacuity of this demand for freedom as such, what Hegel calls ‘negative freedom’ or the ‘freedom of the void’ which flies ‘from every content as from a restriction’, we have seen on a

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33 Ibid., 366, 94, & 364.
34 Ibid., 366.
philosophical level in the emptiness of Kant’s criterion of universalization."\textsuperscript{35} Taylor finds more legitimacy in competing moral frameworks, such as the Platonic and the utilitarian, for example, which are, in his view, more concrete guides to human action. As Taylor explains:

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\text{“Kant attempted to avoid any appeal to the way things are, either to an order of ideas or a constellation of de facto desires. The criterion of the right is to be purely formal. Kant believed that this gave him a viable theory because he thought that the formal criterion would actually rule some actions in and others out. But the arguments to this effect are very shaky, and once one loses faith in them, one is left with a criterion which has no bite at all, which can allow anything as a morally possible action. Moral autonomy has been purchased at a price of vacuity.”}\textsuperscript{36}
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In Taylor’s eyes, Kant’s will-driven categorical imperative - act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law - is far too indeterminate and offers insufficient guidance on moral action. Taylor acknowledges, nonetheless, that “Kant’s (moral) theory is really one of the most direct and uncompromising formulations of a modern stance.”\textsuperscript{37} As such, Taylor is conscious of both its strengths and its weaknesses. As we have seen with Kant’s rational will, however, Taylor is far more attuned to its weaknesses than to its strengths.

On the issue of duty, Taylor criticizes Kant on two points, first, for his distinction between duty and inclination, and second, for his neglect of the plurality of goods. First, Taylor argues that Kant makes an unnecessarily sharp distinction between duty and inclination, which Taylor reads as a distinction between motives, namely, the respect for moral law (i.e. duty) and the desire for happiness (i.e. inclination). “Nothing rules out the spontaneously good person,” Taylor writes, “one who is benevolent out of love of human beings.”\textsuperscript{38} Taylor suggests here, I think, that the fulfillment of one’s duty need not be a fully conscious act. Taylor’s stronger criticism, however, is directed toward Kant’s neglect of the plurality of goods. Taylor takes Kant to task for basing the whole of morality on a single principle. Reducing the whole of morality to one’s dutiful adherence to a categorical imperative diminishes the richness of the moral life, and the plurality of goods within that life from which one must choose:

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\text{“... there is more than one good; this is not recognized by Kant ... and all those who try to derive morality from a single source-principle. These goods can conflict in certain circumstances: liberty and equality; justice and mercy; commutative justice and comity;}
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\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 371.
efficient success and compassionate understanding; getting things done bureaucratically (requiring categories, rules) and treating everyone as a unique person; and so on.\textsuperscript{39}

Taylor’s view is that Kant does not fully appreciate the tragic aspect of the moral choices that are part and parcel of the human condition. These choices are ‘tragic’ in that they inevitably involve a loss or sacrifice of one good for another. A choice on behalf of liberty over and against equality would be one such example of this. In his concern for inner morality, Kant fails to recognize the tensions between these external goods. In these two criticisms, then, the criticism regarding the distinction between duty and inclination and the criticism regarding the plurality of goods, Taylor is cognizant of both the lack of subtlety and the lack of breadth in the Kantian conception of duty.

What do Kant’s moral notions of dignity, will, and duty have in common for Taylor? The simple answer to this question is that all three notions are aspects of an entirely immanent view of morality. Whether one talks about the dignity of a rational nature, or about a will-generated categorical imperative, or about a duty to actively conform to a moral law, the fact remains that the human dynamics of Kantian moral theory reside, for Taylor, within the frame of immanence. According to Taylor, “As the Kantian case shows, an entirely immanent view of the good is compatible with recognizing that there is something the contemplation of which commands our respect, which respect in turn empowers. Whatever fills this role is playing the part of a moral source; it has an analogous place in the ethical life of Kantians to that of the Idea of the Good among Platonists.”\textsuperscript{40} Taylor’s juxtaposition here of Kantian and Platonic morality is not insignificant. Whereas Kantian morality is committed to an immanent humanism, Platonic morality is committed to a metaphysical idealism. Judging from Taylor’s criticisms of Kant, however, the juxtaposition Taylor makes between Kant and Plato is not merely descriptive; it is also normative. If forced to choose between the two, Taylor would likely opt for the latter philosopher as his standard-bearer for morality.

Is there a connection between immanence and exclusive humanism? Joining our two analyses together, we can see that on both the epistemological side as well as the moral side, Kant’s thought is, as Taylor points out, well placed in an immanent frame. How this immanent frame relates to exclusive humanism, however, is less clear. In a revealing passage from A Secular Age, in the context of a discussion on post-Cartesian philosophy, Taylor writes that, “What moves us now (i.e. in the post-Cartesian period) is no longer a sense of being in tune with nature, our own and/or that in the cosmos. It is something more like the sense of our own intrinsic worth; something clearly self-referential. The Kantian notion of ‘Wurde’ (i.e. ‘Dignity’) is not far off. A crucial element of the


\textsuperscript{40} Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 94.
coming exclusive humanism is in place.” 41 The word ‘exclusive’ in Taylor’s phrase ‘exclusive humanism’ has a double meaning, I think. ‘Exclusive humanism’ is ‘exclusive’ in the sense that it is fully and/ or wholly humanistic; it is also ‘exclusive’ in the sense that it is limited and/ or restricted to the humanistic. That which is fully and/ or wholly humanistic, that which is limited and/ or restricted to the humanistic, can only be human; it cannot be divine, cosmological, metaphysical, transcendental, ontological, or any such thing. It must, by implication, be ‘immanent’ in the sense that it is solely contained within the boundaries of the human.

3.4 Kant’s Political Philosophy

Taylor is also interested, to a lesser extent, in Kant’s political philosophy and in Kant’s aesthetics. Since these two branches of Kantian philosophy are better understood as particular manifestations of Kant’s epistemological and moral theory, and, more importantly, since they are less relevant for the connection Taylor makes between exclusive humanism and modern education, I will limit my treatment of each to a few brief remarks. In terms of Kant’s political philosophy, Taylor argues that Kant’s views have been highly influential for contemporary notions of a self-sustaining liberal democracy, (e.g. in the work of Rawls and Habermas), and that Kant is a prominent exponent of freedom, human rights, the protection of civil liberties, and equal dignity for all. “Sapere aude! Have courage to use your own understanding!” writes Kant in his famous essay What is Enlightenment?42 In his rejection of paternalistic government, Kant asserts that a liberal society must remain neutral on the question of the good life, allowing each citizen to live as he/ she sees fit, so long as the orderly rule of a rational and consensual law peacefully prevails. Taylor argues that the problem of Kantian political philosophy (which is “disappointingly familiar” for him) “remains that of harmonizing individual wills.”43 From Taylor’s point of view, the Kantian political state is self-sustaining, free, exclusively humanistic, and, in as much as it is disembedded from a political theology, rooted, for all intents and purposes, in the framework of immanence.

3.5 Kant’s Aesthetics

In terms of Kant’s aesthetics, Taylor sees Kant’s notion of the beautiful, as presented in the Critique of Judgment, as “a certain kind of feeling or subjective reaction … another way we are in touch with

the supersensible in us." \(^{44}\) Taylor sees Kant’s interpretation of aesthetic experience as “the experience of pleasure which comes from the harmony between imagination and understanding when we contemplate an object."\(^ {45}\) Each work of art is experienced as unique, one of a kind, sui generis. Taylor finds Kant’s attempt to link aesthetic beauty with teleological purpose in the Critique of Judgment unpersuasive insofar as it makes the “anti-intellectualist point that no conceptual formulation of the finality of an object of beauty is possible.”\(^ {46}\) Kant’s aesthetic theory is, for Taylor, subjective and empirical; it is a theory that does not give proper place to teleology. According to Taylor, “Kant most of the time wants to see the beauty of objects as something quite unconnected with what we see in or through them.”\(^ {47}\) Taylor disagrees with Kant’s claim that one cannot infer and/or have insight into higher properties beyond what is experientially revealed. For Taylor, then, Kantian beauty is an identifiably human rather than divine quality, more a quality of immanence than of transcendence.\(^ {48}\)

### 3.6 In Summary

Taken together, then, the line of thinking pursued in Taylor’s readings of Kantian political philosophy and aesthetics is consistent with his interpretations of Kantian epistemology and moral theory. As we have seen, each of these four aspects of Kant’s philosophy points to an immanent frame in which ‘exclusive humanism’ is allowed. As far as Taylor is concerned, Kant’s ‘correction’ of Cartesian epistemology is itself in need of correction. In as much as it is ‘buffered’ from the possibility of transcendence, it too falls victim to the modern epistemological construal.

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\(^{45}\) Charles Taylor, Hegel (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 468.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 469.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 470.

\(^{48}\) There are, of course, a variety of approaches to ‘transcendence’, a variety of approaches to ‘immanence’, and a variety of approaches to the relation between ‘transcendence’ and ‘immanence’, in different philosophical and religious traditions. Many of these traditions distinguish between a ‘vertical’ transcendence, (i.e. a longing for contact with a mystery beyond time and space – as in the metaphysical writings of Karl Jaspers), and a ‘horizontal’ transcendence, (i.e. a longing for an escape from self consciousness to a mystery within time and space – as in the ethical writings of Emmanuel Levinas). Vertical transcendence is often associated with an encounter with the divine and/or with God, whereas horizontal transcendence is often associated with an encounter with another human being, and/or with art or nature. Vertical transcendence is synonymous with transcendence of immanence, while horizontal transcendence is synonymous with transcendence within immanence. Taylor’s critique of Kant’s ‘exclusive humanism’ is offered from the perspective of vertical transcendence. Taylor rejects Kant’s claim that though the phenomenal (i.e. appearances) can be known, the noumenal (i.e. things-in-themselves) cannot. For a rich treatment of these topics see Ingolf Dalfért’s essay on ‘The Idea of Transcendence’, in Robert Bellah and Hans Joas (eds.), The Axial Age and its Consequences, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 146-188.
4.1 Taylor and Herder

Taylor's key philosophical source for the theme of 'authenticity' in contemporary education is Johann Gottfried von Herder. Herder's biography overlaps with that of his teacher, Immanuel Kant. Notwithstanding Kant's influence on him, however, Herder's life and works take on a quite different direction. Herder's place in Western intellectual history has certainly been overshadowed by Kant's, yet Herder's own legacy is no less important to an understanding of Taylor's educational thought.

4.2 Taylor's Debt to Herder

Taylor's philosophical indebtedness to German philosopher Herder is made clear in a passage from *Reconciling the Solitudes*:

“When I was a student in Europe, in a foreign country therefore, I felt a very strong affinity with Herder, the eighteenth-century German philosopher and one of the founders of modern nationalist thinking. Herder devoted much thought to language, the difference between languages, and the distortion in the thinking of a given language group when a language claims to be superior and better able to express universality, and when it therefore represses other languages. At the time, that language was French, which was invading the German intellectual world and was marginalizing German. In Herder I found inspiration, ideas that were very fruitful for me, precisely because I was from here (i.e. Canada). I was able to understand him from the situation I had experienced outside school, outside university, and I was able to engage with his thought, internalize it, and (I hope) make something interesting of it.”

Taylor's interest in the connection between Herder's philosophy of language and Herder's political thought, as it is described in this passage, is very much influenced by Taylor's bilingual, French-English, Canadian background, which can readily identify with the tensions between the French language and the German language on the European intellectual scene. The point here is that linguistic differentiation, which grounds nationalistic thinking, can, in its lesser light, justify repression and/or marginalization of actual human beings. The added implication is that a better understanding of the workings of language might help mitigate the potential for one national community to dominate another.

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4.3 Herder in Taylor’s Counter-Enlightenment

Taylor’s interpretation of Herder, which focuses primarily on the Treatise on the Origin of Language, is grounded in the claim that Herder is a “hinge figure” in the history of philosophy who “originates a fundamentally different way of thinking about language and meaning,” a way, Taylor adds, that has had “a tremendous impact on modern culture.” In Taylor’s view, Herder’s ‘Counter-Enlightenment’ reaction against the basic anthroplogy of the eighteenth century was basically a response to a mind-body dualism which divorced cool objective reason from passionate subjective emotion. With Herder, language is no longer understood, as it once was in the classical tradition, as an expression of universal ‘ideas’; it is now understood as an expression of a particular ‘self’. As Taylor puts it, with the arrival of Herder, “[t]he human centre of gravity is on the point of shifting from logos (divine reason) to poesis (human creation).” Taylor goes so far as to classify Herder as a ‘nominalist’, that is, a holder of the view that ‘universals’ are merely abstract names, terms, or words, which do not correspond to metaphysical essences, forms, or realities. Taylor explains that prior to Herder, language was understood in a representative way, in terms of words signifying things; after Herder, language is understood in a constitutive way, in terms of an expression of thought. According to Taylor, the Herderian shift opens up a new kind of consciousness:

“Herder’s discovery adds a new dimension. If language serves to express a new kind of awareness, then it may not only make possible a new awareness of things, an ability to describe them; it may also open new ways of responding to things, of feeling. If in expressing our thoughts about things we can come to have new thoughts, then in expressing our feelings we can come to have transformed feelings … The revolutionary idea implicit in Herder was that the development of new modes of expression enables us to have new feelings, more powerful or more refined, and certainly more self-aware. In being able to express our feelings, we give them a (richer) reflective dimension that transforms them. The language animal can feel not only anger but indignation, not only love but admiration.”

Herder is a “hinge figure” in that he inaugurates a turn from language as empirical description to language as creative expression, from language as ‘mirror’ to language as ‘lamp.’

4.4 Herder’s Treatise on the Origin of Language

The key source for Taylor’s take on ‘expressivism’ is Herder’s Treatise on the Origin of Language. The treatise, which claimed a prestigious prize in philosophy offered by the Berlin Academy, was a response to a two-part essay question, the first of which was formulated, by Herder, as ‘Were

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human beings, [when] left to their natural abilities, able to invent language for themselves?" and the second of which was formulated as 'In what way [was] the human being most suitably able to and obliged to invent language for himself?' Herder's treatise runs some one hundred pages long and is still considered by many scholars to be a classic text in the philosophy of language. We need to unpack the central claims of Herder's treatise to appreciate Taylor's own interpretation of Herder.

Part One of Herder's Treatise on the Origin of Language, as mentioned, is entitled 'Were human beings, [when] left to their natural abilities, able to invent language for themselves?' Herder's reply here is sub-divided into three sections.

The first section reveals Herder's main intention in the treatise: to demonstrate, by way of argument, contrary to a variety of rival theories, including those expounded by Condillac and Rousseau, that language is of human and not of divine origin. Herder writes that "language arose not from letters of God's grammar but from savage sounds belonging to free organs." Herder's intent, inspired by Cicero, is to show how language is a product of natural processes, that is, how words are signs of things - vocabula sunt notae rerum.

In section two, Herder asks: "How can the human being learn language through divine instruction if he has no reason?" The implication here is that there can be no reason without language. According to Herder's argument, language cannot precede reason. Rationality is interwoven within language. Herder sees rational language not as a divine gift received, but as an evolving human creation.

The third section deals with the 'sounds' of language. For Herder, it is the ear which is the great teacher of language. The sounds of nature - the rustling of trees, the trickling of water, the whistling of wind - all are impressed upon the soul, not by an arbitrary act of heavenly intervention, but by the very presence of nature itself. Living, speaking, and acting are possible for a sensuous human being because of the sounds of nature. Herder connects sight with hearing, colour with word, and scent with sound, in arguing for a sensorium commune, a collective organ of sensation. Herder mentions "Hurons, Brazilians, Easterners, and Greeks" as examples of sensory communities reflecting "traces of the human spirit." Herder's response to the first part of his treatise - 'Were human beings, [when] left to their natural abilities, able to invent language for themselves?' - is a definitive 'yes.'

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6 Ibid., 72.
7 Ibid., 65.
8 Ibid., 92.
9 Ibid., 123.
Part Two of Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language* is entitled 'In what way [was] the human being most suitably able to and obliged to invent language for himself?' Herder sub-divides his reply here on the basis of what he calls four 'natural laws'. He opens Part Two with the assertions that “nature gives no forces in vain” and that “nature not only gave the human being abilities to invent language, but also made this ability the distinguishing trait of his essence ...” Herder’s assumption in these assertions, once again, is that it is nature, not God, which gives such abilities to human beings.

The first ‘natural law’ in Herder’s philosophy of language is that “the whole chain of conditions in the human soul is of such a kind that each of them forms language further.” As “nature’s apprentice,” a human being’s awareness is linguistic in the sense that thoughts progressively become words. According to Herder “[t]o think entirely without words one would have to be the most obscure mystic or an animal, the most abstract religious visionary or a dreaming nomad ... a human being who ... could not even in his soul think words ... would be the saddest, most senseless, most abandoned creature of creation – and the greatest self-contradiction.” For Herder, then, the human being is essentially a language-speaking animal.

Herder’s second ‘natural law’ is that “the human being is, in his destiny, a creature of the herd, of society, (and hence) the progressive formation of a language becomes natural, essential, (and) necessary for him.” No person exists solely for him or her self, but is rather “inserted into the whole of the species.” Language is a communal activity. Even within the family, mothers and fathers pass their thoughts and words onto their children. Networks of relationships outside the family lend further refinement to language.

Herder’s third ‘natural law’ is that “[j]ust as the whole human species could not possibly remain a single herd, likewise it could not retain a single language either. So there arises a formation of different national languages.” Herder mentions differences in climate, air, water, food, drink, ethics, and habits within the group as having “an influence on the linguistic organs and naturally also on language.” The varieties of dialects and pronunciations correspond to the natural environments from which they emerge. A sense of belonging is nurtured within each language

11 Ibid., 129.
12 Ibid., 131.
13 Ibid., 132-133.
14 Ibid., 139.
15 Ibid., 141.
16 Ibid., 147.
17 Ibid., 148.
community, which gives it its ‘sense of soul’. Herder is well aware of the tendency in human nature to treat foreign languages as somehow less worthy than one’s own. As Herder puts it, with a touch of sarcasm: “[w]hoever is not with and of us is beneath us! The foreigner is worse than us - a barbarian.”

Herder’s fourth and final ‘natural law’ is that “[l]anguage reproduces itself and forms itself further with the human species.” Herder finds it telling that there are so many people spread around the world, yet so few alphabetic systems. He acknowledges the Chinese language as an exception to his claim. This exception aside, however, Herder is amazed at the relatedness of many if not most human languages: “[j]ust as there lives only a single human people on earth,” he argues, “likewise only a single human language; but just as this great kind has nationalized itself into so many little types specific to a land, likewise their languages no differently.” As with human beings, languages reproduce themselves in a quite human (as opposed to divine) fashion. Herder concludes that “[t]he origin of language hence only becomes divine in a worthy manner insofar as it is human.”

Herder’s response to the title of the second part of his treatise – ‘In what way [was] the human being most suitably able to and obliged to invent language for himself?’ – is a fundamentally anthropological one. Languages evolve over time in accordance with fundamental laws of nature.

### 4.5 Expressivism in Herder

Taylor argues that there is a close connection between Herder’s expressive theory of language and Herder’s expressive theory of humanity. The former is an essential part of the latter. Language is not merely descriptive; it also embodies a particular consciousness. Language and thought are intimately linked. Each language represents a certain way of being, a certain way of experiencing the world. Herder refers to this crucial property in his writings as *Bessonnenheit* (i.e. ‘reflection’). It is *Bessonnenheit* which allows human persons to mirror themselves within themselves, to achieve self-understanding, self-realization, and self-fulfillment, all of which are necessary conditions on the road to self-expression, and, ultimately, to self-liberation. As Taylor puts it, “the different natural languages express the uniquely characteristic way in which a people realizes the human essence. A people’s language is the privileged mirror or expression of its humanity. The study of language is

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19 Ibid., 159.
20 Ibid., 158.
21 Ibid., 163.
the central and indispensable road to the understanding of human variety.” The implication in Herder’s expressivist anthropology, then, is that there are as many ways of defining what it is to be a human being as there are languages with which to define.

In discussing the theory of ‘expressivism’, Taylor relates Herder’s insights to the philosophies of Humboldt and Wittgenstein. Humboldt compares language to a web of words within a particular speech community – to touch a part of the web is to make the whole resonate. Wittgenstein asserts that words have holistic meaning within a lexicon, a context of practices, and a form of life. As far as Taylor is concerned, Humboldt and Wittgenstein share similar views to those of Herder.

It is the French philosophe Condillac, however, who attracts most of Taylor’s Herderian attention. In his Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge (1756), Condillac tells a fictional story of how two children in a desert gradually come to invent language through natural expressions of emotion. The sound emerging from a cry of distress from one child to the other, for example, is a sign of some cause. This, in turn, inspires a word of reference. Further natural expressions inspire further words of reference until a full vocabulary emerges. Language is thus built up, one word at a time. According to Taylor, Condillac’s perspective was very much in line with the traditional ‘designative’ view of language according to which sounds are endowed with meaning and are used as signs to ‘designate’ states of affairs in the natural world. Yet Herder rejects this view. The problem, as articulated by Taylor, is that Condillac presupposes too much. Condillac “endows his children from the beginning with the capacity to understand what it means for a word to stand for something, what it means therefore to talk about something with a word. But that is the mysterious thing ... what is this capacity which we have and animals don’t, to endow sounds with meaning, to grasp them as referring to, and used to talk about, things?” Herder’s critique of Condillac argues, therefore, that the human capacity for language acquisition cannot be taken for granted when providing an explanation for language as such.

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26 Ibid., 81.
4.6 Herder and Authenticity

Taylor sees Herder as the major articulator of the modern ideal of ‘authenticity’. Taylor equates ‘authenticity’ with being true to one’s self, being true to one’s originality. Each person is his or her own ‘measure’; each person has his or her own standard of ‘rightness’. There is, as Taylor claims in his exposition of Herder, “a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else’s life. But this notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for me.”

In Herderian terms, “the artist (is) a creator God.” One is judged ‘authentic’ in as much as one fulfills the natural potential one has for creative self-expression.

Herder’s conception of authenticity applies as much to national cultures as it does to individual persons. Herder is generally regarded as one of the founders of modern nationalism, most notably of German nationalism, yet he is much less concerned with the political life of a ‘nation’. In expressivist terms, a ‘nation’ of people (or Volks) bears a special cultural character which is formed by its language. Language creates a common bond of understanding among those who share it, brings cohesion to the society it rests in, and reflects a particular vision of the world. Language is, in effect, the heart and soul of a culture. Different national cultures have, by virtue of their respective languages, different ways of being, thinking, and feeling; different sensibilities; different attitudes, beliefs, and values; different standards of conduct; and different assumptions and expectations. To be an ‘authentic’ nation is to be true to the traditional qualities which are constitutive of that culture. An Englishman should not impose his culture upon a Frenchman, nor should a Frenchman imitate the culture of an Englishman. As Taylor points out, “nationalism in its chauvinist mode can destroy its original justification in Herderian expressivism.” Herder’s ideal is one of a diverse variety of national cultures living together in peaceful harmony, with a deep current of sympathy underlying their unity. This is, on the weight of historical evidence, more than an optimistic ideal, but it is indeed the view that Herder held. As Ruth Abbey perceptively notes, “[b]ecause it militated against the imposition of uniformity, (Herderian expressivism) was a potentially liberating doctrine, and one compatible with democratic ideas.”

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28 Ibid., 30.
30 Ibid., 415.
4.7 Taylor's Critique of Herder

Taylor is both inspired by and critical of Herder's thought. On the one hand, he draws inspiration from Herder's emphasis on cultural differences in his opposition to the human sciences which seek to bracket out such differences in favour of 'absolute laws' which "are everywhere and always valid." Taylor finds this view unpalatable because it fails to appreciate that human beings are self-interpreting animals, that their self-interpretations depend not only on the laws of nature, but also on the particular linguistic and cultural environments in which they find themselves. Redhead nicely sums up Taylor's position in the following way: "a self-interpretative agent is a dialogical creature who is dependent upon the common language of the culture in which she resides, not only to articulate her self-understandings of her world and her feelings but for much of the semantic dimension of these understandings and feelings as well." If, in Taylor's eyes, true selfhood can only be realized in a shared community, one can begin to see how a detached, scientific, 'law of nature' approach to cultural understanding would be deficient, deficient in as much as it ignores the dynamic relationship (and tensions) between the human person and his/her communal identity. On the other hand, Taylor is critical of the Herderian shift away from the classical conception of rationality as conformity with cosmic order, to a new Romanticist conception of rationality as self-expression or Besonnenheit. There is both a gain and a loss in this shift, or as Taylor describes it, both a "filiation and yet (a) break with the classical tradition." Taylor's use of the word 'yet' is significant here. There are at least two possible readings of this. One reading is that, as an historian of ideas, Taylor is merely describing, in philosophically neutral terms, a shift from one worldview to another. Another reading here, however - the one to which I subscribe - is that Taylor is in fact making a (admittedly subtle) judgment upon the very intellectual shift which he describes. The weight of the word 'yet' tips on the side of the 'loss' rather than the 'gain', on the side of the 'break' rather than the 'filiation'. Another way to put this would be to say that the loss of the classical conception of rationality as conformity with cosmic order is more profound, more consequential, more epistemologically and morally significant than the gain of the new Romanticist conception of rationality as self-expression. The insight to be gained here, is that in his exposition of Herder's philosophy of language, Taylor's own choice of language unveils the trajectory of a certain intellectual project at work.

4.8 Designative Theories of Language

Taylor's basic critique of the analytic approach to language is that one cannot properly learn a language as a detached observer. "To understand a language you need to understand the social life and outlook of those who speak [it]," argues Taylor. Designative theories of language, such as those of Quine and Davidson, which are adapted to the canons of modern natural science, "promise to make language unpuzzling and unmysterious." For Taylor, however, a theory of language, which merely analyzes the truth conditions of particular utterances, is insufficient for understanding; one needs to immerse oneself in the practice of language, as well.

The heart of Taylor's criticism of designative theories of language is that they reject an expressive theory of meaning. A purely designative theory of language is flawed on two accounts: "first in rejecting the expressive theory of the cosmos, in refusing to see the things which surround us as embodiments of the (Platonic) ideas; and secondly, in seeing words as acquiring meaning only in being used as names for things. Words mean because they designate something. So we cease to see everything which exists as a sign." Taylor's claim is that in the ontological worldview that was dominant in the West until the 17th Century Scientific Revolution, creation was understood as a meaningful expression of the will or logos of the Creator. As Taylor puts it, "the Platonic ideas are the thoughts of God." Things in the world were seen semiotically, that is, as signs of divine communication. According to Taylor, the semiotic way of seeing was radically challenged by medieval nominalism: "[m]edieval nominalism ... denied that there are real essences of things, or

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37 For Davidson, words only have meaning in the context of other words (i.e. in a sentence). The meaning of a sentence is 'true' if it meets certain pre-agreed linguistic conditions. The 'reference' of a sentence (i.e. the entity it stands for), "plays no essential role in explaining the relation between language and reality." Donald Davidson, 'Reality Without Reference,' in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1984), 225. Analytic philosophers, such as Hilary Putnam and Michael Dummett, who advocate an 'externalist' approach to language, take issue with Davidson's 'internalist' theory. Putnam argues that "[t]raditional philosophy of language, like much traditional philosophy, leaves out other people and the world; a better philosophy and a better science of language must encompass both." Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of Meaning', in Mind, Language, and Reality: Philosophical Papers Volume 2, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 271. Dummett argues that "[a] language, as a social institution, is external to any individual speaker. The meanings of its words are not subjectively associated with them: they are objectively constituted by the common practice of speaking the language." Michael Dummett, The Nature and Future of Philosophy, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001), 83. Putnam and Dummett are more aligned with Taylor's 'epistemological realism' than they are with Davidson's 'internalism'. Even A.J. Ayer, the father of logical positivism in Britain, would have difficulty with Davidson's line of thinking here. In his discussion of the 'verification principle' in Language, Truth, and Logic, for example, Ayer writes that "no statement (including a metaphysical statement) is literally meaningful unless it describes what could be experienced ..." Alfred Jules Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic, (New York, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 1952), 14. Empirical verification is significantly absent from Davidson's 'internalist' theory.
39 Ibid., 223.
universals ... The universal is not a feature of the world, but an effect of our language.\textsuperscript{40} In other words, universals are no longer part of the ontological reality of creation; they are now understood as mere constructions of the mind. It was nominalism’s rejection of the semiological view that gave heightened importance to actual human language, which, in turn, led to a thoroughly designative theory of meaning. The upshot of this development is clear. If a human being is a ‘language animal’, one cannot begin to understand that human being without an understanding of the language he/she speaks. If the language that said human being speaks is understood in a purely naturalistic way – (that is, designatively rather than semiologically) – then it is likely that said human being will be understood in a similar way. For Taylor, the naturalization of language is a necessary consequence of a naturalized epistemology.

\textbf{4.9 The Relevance of Herder}

In short, Herder’s rejection of Condillac’s designative theory of language appeals to Taylor’s anti-naturalistic, semiological expressivism. Herder is important for Taylor in so far as Herder understands the mutual relationship between language and culture. Precisely how this mutual relationship between language and culture relates to Taylor’s notion of ‘the ethics of authenticity’ in education, of course, remains to be seen.

Taylor’s interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy stands out from the crowd, strikingly, as a definitively metaphysical reading. Frederick Beiser, who wrote his Oxford D.Phil. on Hegel under Charles Taylor’s supervision, who has taught courses on Hegel at Harvard and Yale, and who has published widely (and lucidly) on all aspects of Hegel’s thought, concludes that many non-metaphysical renderings of him have attempted “to rehabilitate Hegel - to make him viable in the light of contemporary concerns - by reading the metaphysics out of his philosophy (italics mine) ... To understand Hegel in his individuality and integrity demands first and foremost restoring metaphysics to its central role in his thinking.”¹ Beiser adds that it is the concept of Geist, or self-positing spirit, which, for Taylor “is the central theme of that metaphysics ... What held every part of the system together, what made it into a unified whole, was the idea of an absolute spirit that posits itself in and through history and nature.”² In his introductory essay on ‘The Puzzling Hegel Renaissance’, Beiser explains how, after a lengthy decline, Hegel’s reputation was revived, in the 1960s, courtesy of a new-found interest in Marxism. Beiser wonders, however, how Taylor’s book on Hegel could have possibly been as well-received in the anglophone world as it was, in 1975, when it was first published, and have inspired new growth in Hegel studies, as it did, thereafter, given the dominant popularity, at the time, of (anti-metaphysical) analytic philosophy within academic establishments in both Britain and the United States. How, in other words, could Taylor’s metaphysical reading of Hegel have been so successful in a profoundly secular, anti-metaphysical environment?

Though Beiser asks the right questions here, his answers are not altogether satisfactory. He neglects to mention, first, that there had been a long-standing ‘gap’ in metaphysically-inclined Hegel scholarship, since the early 1900s, due, in large part, to the ubiquity of non-metaphysical ‘positivism’. Second, Taylor’s intellectual mentor at Oxford, Isaiah Berlin, (who acted as one of the readers of Taylor’s book on Hegel), had published a biography of Marx’s life and thought in 1939, and, with the resurgence of interest in Marx in the 1960s, there was a definite interest in seeing a

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gifted student like Taylor clarify, in a new way, the intellectual debt owed by Marx to Hegel.3 (Berlin’s interest in Counter-Enlightenment thought and in the intellectual origins of the Holocaust, may have provided a further incentive for him to ‘gently’ encourage Taylor to pursue a German thinker, like Hegel, in greater depth; the fact that Berlin’s own writing had shifted from philosophy proper to the history of ideas would also have appealed to Taylor). Third, Taylor’s book on Hegel was admittedly written with a view to convincing scholars of analytic philosophy of the intellectual merits of Hegel’s thought, which Taylor managed to do, in a bold new way, by reading Hegel’s place in the history of philosophy through the lens of the Hegelian dialectic. And fourth, Taylor’s contribution to the debate in 1975 naturally provoked scholars on the opposite side to retreat to the trenches and defend their own non-metaphysical accounts of Hegel. That there are fluctuations of interest in the interpretive histories of all philosophers should come as no surprise, of course.

The reasons behind such fluctuations are another matter. Beiser wonders, (rightly), how, with the (post-1975) toppling of the Berlin Wall and the fall of Communist Russia, interest in Hegel studies grew. If the Marxism of the 1960s was largely responsible for a renaissance in Hegel studies, (given the intellectual debt Marx owed to Hegel), how could Hegel studies survive, in the wake of a discrediting of Marxism in the 1980s and beyond? The answer Beiser gives is as follows: “[f]or all its merits, this had little to do, I believe, with Taylor’s book. Instead, it had much more to do with the fact that scholars began to ignore or underplay that aspect of Hegel’s philosophy that Taylor had placed centre stage: metaphysics.”4 Beiser’s use of the word ‘little’ is, I think, an underestimation of the intellectual influence of Taylor’s Hegel. That Taylor’s Hegel remains highly regarded in the world of philosophical scholarship, even by its fiercest opponents, is testament to its longevity as an interpretive work.5 Beiser is quite correct, however, in distinguishing what he calls ‘anachronistic’ readings of Hegel from ‘antiquarian’ readings of Hegel: “[t]he more we interpret historical figures from our standpoint and according to our interests, the more we commit anachronism, imposing the present upon the past; but the more we interpret them from their standpoint, the more we engage in

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3 “For most of the 20th century, the densely knotted philosophy of Hegel was screened from public view by Karl Marx and his vast army of followers. After all, Marxism came out of Hegel, even if it came by a route that Hegel wouldn’t have followed. Marx seized on Hegel’s theory of history and turned it into a theory of revolution, giving Lenin and Stalin the arguments that produced their despotic empire. This made it hard to think about Hegel without thinking about the Gulag and other atrocities.” Robert Fulford, ‘Review of Hegel: A Biography by Terry Pinkard’, (Toronto: The National Post, July 29, 2000).


5 As David MacGregor recounts in his 1994 article ‘Canada’s Hegel’, “reviewing an edited version of the symposium, Hegel and Legal Theory, a British academic complained that nearly every contributor doffed a cap toward Taylor’s position. ‘One begins to get the impression,’ the reviewer wrote bitterly, ‘that the German was somehow the author of a book on the Canadian philosopher, rather than the other way around.’” David MacGregor, ‘Canada’s Hegel’, Literary Review of Canada, February, 1994.
antiquarianism, as if any historical facts were interesting for their own sake." Beiser seeks to avoid either extreme by way of a 'middle path' of interpretation where "the real historical Hegel and our contemporary interests coincide." Beiser finds a great deal of contemporary Hegel scholarship "self-deceiving," "confusing," and "repetitive;" a false (non-metaphysical) image of Hegel is all-too-often championed in today's academic circles, an image that gets Hegel only half-right. "There is a strong case to be made for bracketing our own contemporary philosophical interests and examining Hegel in his historical context," argues Beiser. "In this case, we reconstruct Hegel's position as a contribution to a past conversation. We will fully understand the point and meaning of Hegel's philosophy only when we see it in discussion with the positions of others." Like Taylor, Beiser seeks to present Hegel in a balanced way, which mediates between the interpretive extremes of anachronism and antiquarianism, without neglecting Hegel's metaphysics.

No true attempt at an understanding of Hegel's influence on Charles Taylor can be complete without a serious grappling with Taylor's 580-page study on Hegel, first published in 1975. There are brief observations on Hegel in other writings of Taylor's corpus, to be sure, though these pale by comparison to the insights found in his book on Hegel. But for a brief preface, in which Taylor acknowledges that Hegel offers insight "into the dilemmas of modern societies," the book is divided into six parts: 'The Claims of Speculative Reason', 'Phenomenology', 'Logic', 'History and Politics', 'Absolute Spirit', and a 'Conclusion'. At some 140 pages, Part III, 'Logic', is the longest section of the book, a fact owing to the hold 'logical positivism' had on Oxford philosophy in the mid-1970s; interestingly enough, Taylor's 1979 Hegel and Modern Society, a more condensed version of Hegel, leaves 'Logic' out altogether, and reworks the aforementioned six parts of Hegel into three shorter, more accessible sections: i) 'Freedom, Reason, and Nature'; ii) 'Politics and Alienation'; and iii) 'The Issue of Freedom'. Taylor does include a new preface in Hegel and Modern Society in which he asserts that Hegel is "relevant and important to contemporary philosophers," that Hegel "still provides the terms in which we reflect on some contemporary problems," and that Hegel "has helped shape the terms in which I think." Since Taylor's earlier study on Hegel remains the primary source from which Hegel and Modern Society is derived, our focus here will be on the former of these two works. Other notable aspects of Taylor's Hegel include references in abbreviated form, a glossary of German words used in the text, a two-page biographical note at the end of the book, a
short bibliography, an analytical list of main discussions, and an index of names. In his acknowledgements, Taylor testifies to the quality of his philosophical circle. He mentions four major philosophers who assisted him, at various stages, in the preparation of his book - Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire, A.J. Ayer, and Bernard Williams. Let us turn, then, to an analysis of each of the six parts of Taylor’s earlier study in an effort to better understand Taylor’s interest in and interpretation of Hegel.

Part I of *Hegel* treats ‘The Claims of Speculative Reason’. Here, Taylor examines the intellectual influences of a ‘new epoch’, the 17th century’s Radical Enlightenment, a time of great upheaval and awakening. According to Taylor, both the French Revolution and the Scientific Revolution had the combined effect of enhancing human confidence in its own powers, and shifting the subject’s identity from one of relation to a cosmic order to that of self-definition. As Taylor sees it, the world of the 17th century was desacralized; it was a world where nature was objectified and stripped of intrinsic meaning. The zeitgeist of the 17th century was such that meaning was no longer understood to be given to human beings; it was now understood to be made by them. The forces of mechanism, atomism, and utilitarianism had become dominant. As Taylor explains, Romantic ‘expressivism’, championed by Herder, developed as a reaction to the forces of the Enlightenment. “It was Herder and the expressivist anthropology developed from him,” Taylor writes, “which added the epoch-making demand that my realization of the human essence be my own, and hence launched the idea that each individual has its own way of being human, which it cannot exchange with that of any other except at the cost of distortion and self-mutilation.”11 Romantic expressivism was strongly anti-dualist, and therefore strongly anti-Cartesian; it held to a unity of body and soul, as well as a unity with humanity and nature.

A second, closely associated idea that emerged during the 17th century, was that of Kant’s notion of a rational autonomous will. As Taylor explains, “expressivist theory makes freedom a, if not the central, value of human life. Freedom becomes an important value with the modern notion of self-defining subjectivity.”12 What Hegel offers, in Taylor’s estimation, is a synthesis of Herder’s idea of ‘expressive unity’ and Kant’s idea of ‘rational autonomy’. Taylor sees Hegel’s effort at repairing the division between ‘object’ and ‘subject’, an effort highly relevant to modern culture, as “perhaps the central and most ‘mind-blowing’ idea of the Hegelian system.”13 Hegel’s mission, as presented by Taylor, is a religious one. It is a mission that seeks, like the Jesus of Christianity, to restore love to a lost unity, to heal the brokenness between nature and humanity. Hegel’s mission, then, amounts to

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12 Ibid., 24.
13 Ibid., 49.
a restoration of wholeness. As Taylor puts it, “reuniting with the whole must mean regaining contact with a cosmic spirit.”

Unlike Descartes, who thought that the reality of the world was dependent on the human mind, one of the central threads of Hegel’s writings is that the world (including all things human) is an emanation of a cosmic spirit (or Geist). In accordance with Geist, world history unfolds rationally, and necessarily, on the path toward greater self-awareness. All contradictions between the infinite and the finite are resolved and find their place in Geist. Taylor acknowledges that Hegel “only accepted a Christianity which had been systematically reinterpreted to be a vehicle of his own philosophy,” adding that “Hegel’s position was in a sense on a narrow crest between theism and some form of naturalism or pantheism.”

Hegel’s position, as Taylor points out, has also been described as ‘panentheist’. In Greek translation, ‘pantheism’ means God-is-all while ‘panentheism’ means all-in-God. Whereas pantheism equates God with the universe, panentheism holds that God and the universe are distinct yet mysteriously connected entities. However one interprets Hegel’s thought - and it has been subject to no shortage of misinterpretations - one point remains clear as far as Taylor is concerned: Hegel’s concept of Geist served to counteract the claims of speculative reason that emerged during the 17th Century’s Radical Enlightenment.

Part II of Hegel is simply titled ‘Phenomenology’. It focuses primarily on what Taylor calls ‘the dialectic of consciousness’. Taylor is particularly interested in Hegel’s description of the growth of Spirit from consciousness to self-consciousness. The path to such growth is marked by a dialectic Taylor characterizes as “the play of affirmation and denial.” Yet self-consciousness can only be fulfilled, as Hegel argues, in another self-consciousness, that is, in relationship with other members of a community. Taylor sees this step as Hegel’s refutation of Kant: “[H]ence Hegel seems to reverse totally the verdict of Kant who made of autonomy the very touchstone of all morality.”

Taylor is in sympathy with Hegel’s concern for the common good, within which “the citizens’ fullest moral and spiritual aspirations [are] answered.” Cut off from the life of the community, “humanity wither[s].” One of the mistakes the Enlightenment makes, in Taylor’s opinion, is its commitment to a transcendence-denying utilitarianism, to an ethic which sees nature as ‘useful’ for other ends, but as otherwise void of intrinsic meaning. “Utilitarianism is,” Taylor asserts, “the ethic of the Enlightenment.”

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15 Ibid., 102.
16 Ibid., 130.
17 Ibid., 169.
18 Ibid., 171.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 181.
religion, where objects of faith are reduced to material substances (e.g. a sacred host = a mere piece of bread). “Now, of course, this is absurd,” exclaims Taylor.21 “In denouncing the one-sidedness of religion, [the Enlightenment] fails to see its own one-sidedness.”22 It bows to immanence, but not to transcendence. It fails to see that Spirit (Geist) is embodied in material reality; that “reason is bound up with the ontological structure of things.”23 The incarnation of Jesus Christ, the union of human and divine natures in a single person, is, for Hegel, a unique event in the history of Geist. A God separate from the world, is, on the contrary, “the very paradigm of the unhappy consciousness.”24 What we have then in Part II of Hegel, is Taylor’s rendering of Hegel’s refutation of a (Kantian) phenomenology that cannot see beyond material reality to the noumenal, that is, to the transcendence of a self-conscious Geist.

Part III, the longest, most technical, and most difficult part of Taylor’s Hegel, focuses on the German philosopher’s ‘Logic’. Taylor is intent here on a clarification of Hegel’s notions (inspired as they are by Platonic, Aristotelian, and other Greek philosophical affinities) of ‘being’, ‘essence’, and ‘concept’, notions that, according to Hegel, ground the whole of reality. The first of these notions, that of ‘being’, is synonymous with existence; it is existence with a determinate nature. According to Taylor, with the notion of ‘being’, “Hegel manages to express his basic ontological vision.”25 It is a vision that understands finite being to be a necessary reflection of infinite being. Being includes both qualitative and quantitative features. These features are what limit and/or define the existence of a particular entity; they are features that distinguish particular entities from one another. Yet, as Taylor explains, the qualitative and quantitative features of being “cannot penetrate to the core of reality ... to penetrate to the core is to enter into the dialectic relation of inner and outer, both identical and yet opposed to each other, which is central to Hegel’s ontology.”26 Though Taylor is not entirely clear on this, there is a close dialectical connection in Hegelian thought between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’.

Which brings us to the second notion, that of ‘essence’. In outlining Hegel’s understanding of essence, Taylor cites Bishop Butler’s quotable line that “everything is what it is and not another thing.”27 Things are what they are on account of their relation to other things. Parts are related to the whole, just as the whole is related to its parts; the two are linked by a deeper unity (i.e. by Geist).

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22 Ibid., 184.
23 Ibid., 192.
24 Ibid., 208.
25 Ibid., 232.
26 Ibid., 252.
27 Ibid., 261.
For Hegel, the ‘essence’ of a thing is its inner nature and/ or its inner necessity, made manifest in the order of the world. ‘Essence’ is both rational and purposeful.

A third Hegelian notion is that of ‘concept’. Not unlike Kant, Hegel argues that concepts structure the world. But whereas Kant sees concepts as tools of human knowledge, Hegel sees concepts as active principles within material reality.28 Things that are true correspond to their concepts. Things that are false do not. Pointing to Wittgenstein, Taylor notes that all concepts are inter-related. Just as a private language is an impossibility, so too is a private concept. As Taylor writes, “a concept is necessarily bound with other concepts: no concept can be introduced on its own.”29 What is important about the Hegelian notion of a ‘concept’ is that it precedes its corresponding material reality. For Hegel, concepts precede things in divine creation. Since all concepts ultimately stem from God, all concepts are also imbued with teleological significance. The Hegelian system is premised on the unfolding of divine purpose in human history, and in as much as concepts are a part of human history, they too are subject to divine purpose. Concepts are fulfilled, however imperfectly, stage by stage, in human existence. “The whole (Hegelian) system hangs together,” Taylor writes, “by contradiction and struggle ... (in an) endless incapacity to reach the goal ... For if the world were quite transformed to conform with the good, then there would be no more striving.”30 Just as concepts emerge from God, they ultimately point back to God. To seek to know a concept is to seek to know God. As we have seen, Hegel is much more confident than Kant is that God can be known, and if God can be known, so too can God’s concepts. In concluding his exegesis, Taylor quotes Hegel to the effect that the science of logic reveals “the inner life of God before the creation of the world.”31 Taylor’s attempt at a clarification of Hegel’s notions of ‘being’, ‘essence’, and ‘concept’, in Part III of *Hegel*, then, is an attempt to understand the meaning of this phrase, that is, what ‘the inner life of God before the creation of the world’ amounts to philosophically.

Moving from the more abstract to the more concrete, Part IV of Taylor’s *Hegel* links the topics of ‘History and Politics’. One of the implications of the Hegelian system of a rational cosmic order is that the state is also a vehicle through which Spirit (i.e. Geist) becomes self-conscious. “That is why,” Taylor explains, “the state as the highest articulation of society has a touch of the divine in Hegel’s eyes.”32 Hegel also theorizes about two other public institutions, namely, the family and ‘civil society’ (i.e. the market economy), yet it is the state, which, on the basis of Taylor’s

29 Ibid., 305.
30 Ibid., 336.
31 Ibid., 340.
32 Ibid., 366.
commentary, gains most attention. Though Hegel was certainly influenced by the effects of the French Revolution, he was also a critic of the empty idea of radical autonomy, as expressed, most forcefully, by Kant. Whereas Kant’s philosophy relies heavily upon the freedom of the human will, Hegel’s philosophy relies upon the freedom of the divine will, that is, Geist. Taylor is well aware that Hegel’s political theory has the potential to be viewed as overly conservative. But he is quick to point out that it is a political theory without precedent in the Western tradition. Hegel’s state is “not an order beyond man which he must simply accept,” writes Taylor. “Rather it is one which flows from his own nature properly understood. Hence it is centred on autonomy, since to be governed by a law, which emanates from oneself, is to be free. The order thus gives a central place to the autonomous, rational individual.”33

For a Kantian, Taylor’s remarks might very well be interpreted as ‘spin’—to borrow a word from contemporary parlance. “What do the words ‘nature properly understood’ mean precisely?” a Kantian might ask. Obedience to laws determined by one’s own rational will, (and not by one’s own nature as with Hegel), is, for the Kantian, the true path to freedom. Taylor runs into difficulty with some of the more problematic passages in Hegel’s political theory. One passage, in particular, is worthy of mention: “[e]verything that man is he owes to the state;” Hegel writes, “only in it can he find his essence. All value that a man has, all spiritual reality, he has only through the state.”34 A charitable reading of this passage (along with Hegel’s accompanying position on the necessity of war) might highlight, as Taylor does, the importance of citizen participation in the life of the polity. But Taylor is far too forgiving toward Hegel here. Taylor is too content to coolly side step a difficult passage that appears to be in contradiction with his own rendering of Hegelian freedom. Taylor opts, instead, to examine the effects of ‘alienation’ in the context of Hegel’s political theory. Alienation “comes about when the public experience of my society ceases to have any meaning for me,” he explains.35 This is all well and good, and certainly underscores the dignity intrinsic to human beings with or without a state. Taylor adds, however, that a citizen alienated from his state can never be fully in touch with the Absolute, in other words, with the ontological structure of things. The elephant in the room remains: ‘Is Hegel’s view of the state a healthy one or, in fact, quasi-totalitarian?’ Is Taylor unwilling to acknowledge Hegel’s darker side? Should the citizen sacrifice his/her life unquestioningly at the altar of the state? Taylor seems more concerned with the darker side of the Enlightenment than he is with the darker side of Hegel. “The man of the Enlightenment rejects all authority and sets out to shape reality to reason, i.e. to himself,” argues

34 Ibid., 379.
35 Ibid., 381.
Taylor. “[He] is ready to master the world, and to shape it, but [has] lost the plan. In [his] desperation to find an alternative [he] tear[s] things to pieces.”36 These are profound insights, to be sure, but they do not address the apparent heavy-handedness of Hegel’s conception of the state.

Like Hegel, who distinguishes between the institutions of the family, civil society, and the state, Taylor favours a more traditional, hierarchically structured society, a society where differentiation in rank is reflective of a higher cosmic order. Modernity rejects differentiation: “[a]fter the (French) revolution of modern, self-defining subjectivity, these conceptions of cosmic order came to be seen as fictions, and were denounced as fraudulent inventions of kings, priests, aristocrats, etc. to keep their subjects submissive,” Taylor writes. “But however much they may have been used, consciously or not, as justifications of the status quo, these conceptions also were the ground of men’s identification with the society in which they lived. Man could only be himself in relation to a cosmic order; the state claimed to body forth this order and hence to be one of [the] principal channels of contact with it.”37 With the rise of modern democracy, Taylor adds, states are no longer seen to be expressions of a higher moral order; they are now founded on constitutional rights and judged according to their ability to meet the needs and interests of productive citizens. Nationalism becomes the common glue which holds modern society together, yet it is a glue of identification which often comes undone, as segments of the population fragment in a variety of directions, furthering their own alienation. Modern (Western) societies are egalitarian and participatory, Taylor argues; they flatten and homogenize differentiation in a way Hegel could not have foreseen. The cure for this modern malady, Taylor suggests, is a recovery of a ‘meaningful’ differentiation that allows for alienated groups to be reconnected to the whole.

And yet, however one judges the legitimacy of the modern state, the key principle of Hegel’s philosophy of history, according to Taylor, is that “what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.”38 In Hegel’s eyes, human history, as manifested by Geist, is rational. Taylor’s critique of modern society, along with his calls for a recovery of differentiation, might very well be interpreted as itself calling into question the rational unfolding of history as posited by Hegel. But if we allow for dialectical opposition and contradiction in the Hegelian system, as Taylor does, we can begin to understand how Taylor’s critique might make sense: “[f]or Hegel ... man is never clear what he is doing at the time; for the agency is not simply man. We are all caught up as agents in a drama we do not really understand. Only when we have played it out do we understand what has been afoot all

37 Ibid., 410.
38 Ibid., 422.
the time. The owl of Minerva flies at the coming of the dusk.”

The reason of history is not fully understood until it has been played out and reflected upon. Hindsight is 20-20. Taylor warns that “we must resist the natural tendency to understand and judge Hegel’s work simply out of the experience of our own time.” If we acknowledge, then, that the experience of Hegel’s time is defined by monarchy, while the experience of our own time is defined by democracy, the question remains as to which of these two forms of government is intellectually, morally, and practically superior. Taylor suggests that each of these two forms of government has its strengths and its weaknesses. There is a tendency in monarchy to emphasize the fulfillment of duty at the expense of individual rights, just as there is a tendency in democracy to emphasize individual rights at the expense of the fulfillment of duty. In keeping with Hegel’s idea of the rational unfolding of history, Taylor advocates a modern state where rights and duties are checked and balanced, where the highest qualities of both monarchy and democracy are positively promoted. He acknowledges, however, that marked ecological deterioration and rapid technological growth in today’s world are among the (possibly irreversible) challenges calling for a meaningful reinterpretation of contemporary political theory.

Part V of Taylor’s *Hegel* focuses on ‘Absolute Spirit’, and three of its forms, namely, art, religion, and philosophy. According to Taylor, art, in Hegel’s view, is the truth of *Geist* presented in “sensuous reality.” Whereas for Kant, art is “the experience which comes from the harmony between imagination and understanding when we contemplate an object,” for Hegel, art is “a vehicle of ontological vision.” For Hegel, each work of art, like each human being, is a revelation of truth; each possesses an “inner teleology” which points beyond itself. Apart from the “three-dimensional” media of architecture and sculpture, Hegel is also interested in the more “inward” media of painting, music, and poetry. For Hegel, Absolute Spirit manifests itself in and through such artistic media. In Taylor’s estimation, the importance of art for moderns has reached a point where art has become the ultimate expression of truth, an expression that has “taken over from religion.” Taylor laments this move and sees it as a radical departure from the redeeming qualities of Hegelian philosophy.

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40 Ibid., 447.
41 Ibid., 468.
42 Ibid., 470.
43 Ibid., 472.
44 Ibid., 478.
45 Ibid., 479.
On the issue of religion, the second form of Absolute Spirit, Hegel is critical of the more artistically-inclined Romantic movement, for its tendency toward excessive feeling and ungodliness. Hegelian religion advocates reconciliation with God, not separation from God. In Hegel’s reinterpretation of Christian teaching, union with God is achieved through sacrifice, the sacrifice of one’s “separate subjectivity.” Though he acknowledges that religion plays an important role for the citizenry, Hegel, a Lutheran Christian, is opposed to the idea of a confessional state. As Taylor points out, “[Hegel] is even for giving full rights to Jews, which was very far beyond the conventional wisdom of his day.” Taylor’s rendering of Hegel’s rationale for the secularization of the state is as follows: “[the state] has to be founded fully on reason, and hence cannot be grounded on mere faith in the truth.” Taylor mentions the division of churches in passing, implying that in as much as the Hegelian state is a self-conscious manifestation of Geist, it must be inclusive of the whole. The implication here is that since the truth of Geist is not exclusive, the state, as a manifestation of Geist, cannot be, either. As far as Hegel’s Lutheranism is concerned, Taylor shows how, by way of the philosophy of Geist, Hegel reinterpreted central Christian doctrines including those of the Creation, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Fall, and the Resurrection with a view to refuting the dehistoricization of Christianity which Enlightenment thinking had perpetuated. For the Enlightenment critic, (including the philosopher Lessing, whom Taylor mentions), religion was pure mythology, pure superstition. Taylor is not fully convinced of Hegel’s attempts to uphold Christian orthodoxy, however, for Hegel lacks “the idea of God as giver” and “has no place for divine love in the Christian sense.” Taking issue with Emile Fackenheim’s reading of Hegel’s philosophy of religion, Taylor wonders how a Hegelian philosopher can thankfully pray in light of such omissions. The mere contemplation of a cosmic spirit is not synonymous with Christianity. Taylor concludes from this that “the Hegelian ontology in which everything can be grasped by reason because everything is founded on rational necessity is ultimately incompatible with Christian faith. Hegel’s philosophy is an extraordinary transposition which saves the phenomena (that is, the dogmas) of Christianity, while abandoning its essence.” Taylor goes so far as to characterize Hegelian religion as “de-theologized Christianity.”

This brings us to philosophy, the third form of Absolute Spirit. Hegel believed that philosophy was a higher discipline than theology. Philosophy was not the ‘handmaid’ to theology, as the

47 Ibid., 484.
48 Ibid., 485.
49 Ibid., 493.
50 Ibid., 494.
51 Ibid., 495.
medievals had proposed. Philosophy was, by definition, free thought, and could not be in service of any authority except reason itself. According to Hegel, antiquity and modernity are the only true philosophical eras. In modernity, writes Taylor, “man moves away from external authority to the inner testimony of his own spirit.”  

Taylor cites Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant as primary philosophical influences on Hegel. With Descartes, radical skepticism is infused into the human mind, and thought and being are opposed. With Spinoza, thought and being are reunited, and the Absolute is grasped as a single substance. With Kant, we reach a stage in the history of philosophy where God is thought to be beyond the reach of reason. Taylor concludes that Hegel’s arrival on the scene brings with it a self-professed clarity, one in which “[t]he struggle of finite self-consciousness with absolute consciousness seems to have come to an end.” Like art and religion, philosophy, too, is a revelation of the truth of ‘Absolute Spirit’.

In his concluding insights to Part VI of *Hegel*, Taylor addresses the significance of Hegel’s philosophy for our own day and age. After a short excursus on the history of Hegelianism in England, France, and Italy, Taylor affirms that a “renewed interest [in Hegel] continues unabated to this day.” Despite this renewed interest, however, he argues that Hegel’s “actual synthesis is quite dead.” The synthesis referred to here is Hegel’s attempt to combine, through the concept of *Geist*, Herderian expressivism with Kantian autonomy. Today, Taylor adds, “no one actually believes [Hegel’s] central ontological thesis, that the universe is posited by a Spirit whose essence is rational necessity … no one holds the Hegelian ontology.” Part of the reason for the modern rejection of the Hegelian thesis is “the development of [a post-Enlightenment] civilization in an increasingly industrial, technological, [and] rationalized direction.” Since the scientific revolution, Taylor explains, the idea that the world is a reflection of a cosmic order to which human beings are essentially related has been gradually replaced by the notion that nature is a neutral object to be manipulated for humanity’s own purposes. The post-Enlightenment objectification of nature has extended to the objectification of human beings and their societies, to “a certain vision of man, an associationist psychology, utilitarian ethics, atomistic politics of social engineering, and ultimately a mechanistic science of man.” Taylor’s more detailed observations on the post-Enlightenment objectification of nature are worthy of mention:

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53 Ibid., 533.
54 Ibid., 538.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 539.
58 Ibid.
“[I]ndustrial civilization enforced repeated re-organizations of society and men’s way of life in the name of efficiency and higher production. Urbanization, factory production, depopulation of countryside and sometimes whole regions, mass emigration, the imposition of a rationalized, rigidly measured pace of life at the expense of the former seasonal rhythm; all these changes and others, whether induced by planning or arising through the hazards of the market and investment patterns, are explained and justified by their greater efficacy in meeting the goals of production ... In this civilization, social relations and practices, as well as nature, are progressively objectified.” 59

Taylor claims that modern industrial society would not have ‘progressed’ in such a fashion had Hegel’s ontology been accepted.

Taylor argues that the search for the meaning of nature becomes “futile and misguided” with the expansion of the modern sciences. 60 One of the effects of modern industrial society’s objectification of nature is an accompanying distortion of human identity. “Since the end of the eighteenth century,” he writes, “there has been a continuing stream of complaint against modern civilization as Philistine, productive of mediocrity and conformity, timidly egoistical, as stifling originality, free expression, all the heroic virtues, as dedicated to a ‘pitiable comfort’ ... producing a world in which all acts, objects, institutions have a use, but none express what men are or could (potentially) be.” 61

The modern result of the rejection of a vision of nature and history as expressions of Spirit, Taylor contends, is profound alienation. But if Hegel’s synthesis is dead, as Taylor affirms that it is, how then can Hegelian philosophy be relevant in this day and age? Taylor’s answer is that the Hegelian synthesis is still relevant because it has been “anthropologized – transferred from Geist onto man.” 62

The transfer of the Hegelian synthesis onto humanity, he affirms, has given rise to power struggles and liberation movements, that is, “to a new kind of indignant protest against the injustices of the world.” 63 He is especially lucid on this point:

“It is one thing to bear one’s lot as a peasant if it is one’s appointed place in the hierarch of things as ordered by God and nature. But if the very idea of society as the embodiment of such a cosmic order is swept aside, if society is rather the common instrument of men who must live under the same political roof to pursue happiness, then the burdens and deprivations of this station are a savage imposition, against reason and justice, maintained only by knavery and lies.” 64

For Hegel, alienation is synonymous with a division of Spirit and world. A reconciliation between Spirit and world can only be effected by way of recognition. 65 Spirit must come to be recognized by the world, and the world must come to be recognized by Spirit; only then can a genuine reconciliation between Spirit and world arise. In the end, Taylor sees Hegel’s philosophy as “an important step in

60 Ibid., 543.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 546.
63 Ibid., 547.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 550.
the development of the modern notion of freedom.” It is a notion that sees the subject as free from the claims of a cosmic order, that is, as self-defining and as self-destined. Hegel “helped to develop a conception of freedom as total self-creation, which indeed was attributable in his philosophy only to cosmic spirit, but which only needed to be transposed on to man to push the conception of freedom as self-dependence to its ultimate dilemma.” Hegel’s radically self-creating Spirit has thus been ‘transposed’ to a radically self-creating humanity.

What remains absent in the aforementioned transposition, however, is a sense of co-operation between Spirit and humanity. Though Taylor is astute in his observation that, for Hegel, mutual recognition is the path to reconciliation between Spirit and humanity, his conclusion to Hegel misses an opportunity to critique Hegel’s overall misreading of Christian Trinitarian doctrine. There are three persons of the Trinity in the Christian tradition - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - yet Hegel overemphasizes the latter person at the expense of the two former, and says little about the inner workings of the Trinity itself. Indeed, in Hegel’s de-theologized philosophy, the word ‘Spirit’ (Geist in German) is substituted for the words ‘Holy Spirit’. At one point in his study, Taylor quips that Hegel’s God is a “Münchhausen God.” What could he mean by this? Taylor cryptically recounts the story of Baron Münchhausen, a man, who, “after falling from his horse in a swamp, extricated himself by seizing his own hair and heaving himself back on his horse.” This is a humorous story to be sure, but Taylor leaves the reader hanging. He offers no explanation of the story’s theological importance or of its philosophical connection to Hegel. Why, precisely, is Hegel’s God a Münchhausen God? Is it, as the story goes, because God does not intervene to prevent the Baron’s fall, or because the Baron has no need of God in saving himself from falling? Perhaps there is some truth in both of these readings, but whatever truth is implied in the story remains absent in Taylor’s exegesis. His Münchhausen story is relevant insofar as it bypasses any commentary on Hegel’s understanding of the Christian Trinity. How might the Christian Trinity be related to Hegel’s idea of mutual recognition as the path to reconciliation between Spirit and humanity? Taylor’s conclusion to his otherwise thought-provoking study of Hegel is moot on this question.

5.2 Hegel’s Theory of ‘Recognition’

Having looked at the arguments presented in Taylor’s Hegel, we can now turn to a closer examination of the theme of recognition. In the introductory pages of his influential essay on ‘The

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 101.
69 Ibid.
Politics of Recognition’, Taylor remarks that “the topic of recognition is given its most influential early treatment in Hegel.”

This statement is accompanied by a footnote, which references chapter four in Hegel’s classic text, The Phenomenology of Spirit. Chapter four of this study, on ‘Self-Consciousness’, examines the now-famous ‘master-slave’ dialectic. Taylor’s footnote provides the necessary evidence for the philosophical source of his concept of recognition. The evidence points directly to Hegel, and, more particularly, to the master-slave dialectic as outlined in chapter four of The Phenomenology of Spirit (on ‘Self-Consciousness’). In short, Taylor’s work links the concept of recognition to Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. In order to better understand Taylor’s use of Hegel as his philosophical source for the concept of recognition, then, we need to revisit Part II of Taylor’s book on Hegel in greater detail. Part II of Hegel includes an exegesis of Hegel’s chapter on ‘Self-Consciousness’ and its accompanying master-slave dialectic. If one wants an intelligible answer as to why Hegel is Taylor’s philosophical source for the concept of recognition, one must come to terms with Taylor’s reading of the dialectic of master and slave.

Taylor begins his exegesis of the master-slave dialectic with Hegel’s observation in The Phenomenology of Spirit that “[s]elf-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.” Taylor interprets this observation as encapsulating the basic idea in the dialectic of the master and the slave. “[M]en seek and need the recognition of their fellows. If [man] is to be fully at home,” writes Taylor, “[his] external reality must reflect back to him what he is ... [and] this he finds in other men in so far as they recognize him as a human being.” Self-consciousness is fulfilled when it unites with another self-consciousness in mutual recognition. The recognition of myself in another person in turn leads to a universal recognition of Geist (i.e. Spirit), to the unity of “an ‘I’ that is a ‘we’ and a ‘we’ that is an ‘I’.”

There is, for Taylor, however, a contradiction in the dialectic of the master and the slave. The contradiction is that while human beings strive for recognition, they cannot achieve it on their own. Recognition requires reciprocity. Both parties must contribute to the recognition of the other. In doing so, the “canceling of otherness” is accomplished. The other is no longer a stranger, but a

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71 Hegel’s master-slave dialectic in the Phenomenology has been subject to a variety of interpretations. As Sybol Cook Anderson writes, “far from encapsulating the theory [of recognition], the relation of mastery and slavery is manifestly a deficient mode of the pure concept of recognition - a failure of recognition ... for Hegel, mutual recognition grounded in recogitive understanding generates relations of moral equality and reciprocity ... Spirit is finally resolved into a unity, but it is a differentiated unity, one constituted of diversity.” Sybol Cook Anderson, Hegel’s Theory of Recognition: From Oppression to Ethical Liberal Modernity, (London, UK: Continuum, 2009), 101-102.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 153.
75 Ibid.
A one-sided oppositional form of recognition can lead to an armed struggle between the two rivals of master and slave. The claim to recognition is itself a risk to one’s life. The likelihood of conflict is enhanced when human beings act as beings-for-themselves rather than beings-for-others. But radical selfishness cannot be the condition for true recognition. If the other has been ‘negated’, even to the point of death, no recognition can be won. What is needed, according to Taylor’s reading of Hegel, “is a standing negation, one in which my opponent’s otherness is overcome, while he still remains in being.” A movement beyond opposition is initiated when both parties acknowledge, in a non-coercive way, one another’s place in a rational necessity greater than themselves.

The case of slavery frustrates the path to recognition. While the master’s relation to the material reality, which surrounds him, is one of ‘pure consumption’, the slave’s relation to the material reality, which surrounds him, is one of ‘preparation for consumption’. Recognition of the slave is of no value to the master here since the master cannot identify with the slave: “[r]ather [the master] is reduced to the parlous condition of being surrounded by beings which to him cannot be self-conscious; so that the surrounding world on which he continues to depend cannot reflect back to him a human visage. His integrity is thus radically undermined just when it seemed assured.” The inhumane objectification of the slave by the master harms the master as well as the slave; each does to himself what he does to the other. The irony in terms of recognition, however, is that the slave is ultimately better off than his master. Though the slave is not ‘recognized’ by the master, the master is ‘recognized’ by the slave. The slave’s environment “is not reduced to the sub-human, as is the case with the master.”

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 154.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
Both master and slave are transformed by the fear of death. It shakes them from their attachment to the ‘particular’ and orients them toward the ‘universal’. In war, which Hegel thought was necessary for the protection of the state, the fear of death is present. Taylor describes Hegel’s notion of death as “the final outer negation [which] shows the true status of all the external particularity of [human] life, it shows it as necessarily passing, as destined to be negated, and thus invites the negation in thought which is the return to the universal.”

But the vulnerability of the working slave, who is at the mercy of his domineering master, causes the slave to suffer the fear of death more acutely than the master. The slave has no control over what his master might do.

Subjugated by his master, fated to a life of disciplined work, and fearful of death, the slave becomes, in Taylor’s words, “a universal consciousness.” The alienated condition of the slave facilitates “the grasp of himself as free thought.” The slave awakens to himself as a thinking being, awakens to the creative power of thought. Unlike the self-confident master, the slave’s struggle transforms him into a higher mode of being. It is a mode of being, Taylor argues, which anticipates Marx’s historical materialism where “conceptual thinking arises out of the learned ability to transform things. We learn to know the world of material reality, and ultimately our own minds, in trying to bend this matter to our design.” Whereas Hegel seeks recognition in a higher order of Geist, Marx seeks to subjugate nature for the creative purposes of humanity. Marx turns Hegel on his head, as it were, with his pronouncement that the point is not merely to understand the world but to change it. Both Marx and Hegel offer unique philosophies of history: in Marx’s case, a theory of dialectical materialism, in Hegel’s case, a theory of dialectical idealism.

In Taylor’s view, it is Hegel’s dialectical idealism, (as illustrated in the relation between master and slave), that offers the better source for a renewed understanding of recognition in a diverse modern society.

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84 Ibid., 157.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 One of the more influential interpreters of the master-slave dialectic in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the French philosopher Alexandre Kojève. Kojève taught courses on Hegel at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris in the 1930s and influenced a generation of important thinkers, including Leo Strauss, Alan Bloom, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Georges Bataille, and Jacques Lacan. In his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Kojève applied the master-slave relationship to the whole of human experience writing that “history must be the interaction between Mastery and Slavery: the historical dialectic is the dialectic of Master and Slave.” Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr., (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1969), 9. Taylor is surprisingly silent on the question of Kojève’s influence on contemporary interpreters of Hegel. Note that Marxist scholar Frederic Jameson, who is in sympathy with Kojève’s reading, finds his ‘reinvention’ of Hegel ‘path-breaking’. See Frederic Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit*, (London, UK: Verso, 2010), 78. Note also that Frederick Beiser, (who worked on Hegel at Oxford under Charles Taylor’s supervision), writes in a commentary on Hegel that “[w]hile sometimes illuminating, Kojève’s reading of the text is partisan and limited; and he had little appreciation of its metaphysical dimension.” Frederick Beiser, *Hegel*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 334. It would be fair to say that Taylor’s own rendering of Hegel is far closer to Beiser’s sensibility than to Jameson’s. Taylor may very well have chosen to understate the influence of Kojève’s secular reading of Hegel in order to highlight his own metaphysical interpretation.
Reformulated, the point is to understand and affirm the difference of the ‘other’, not to change or oppress it.

5.3 Taylor on Hegel’s Legacy

Hegel’s legacy, according to Taylor, is an ambiguous one for modern liberalism. In a 1988 keynote address on ‘Hegel’s Ambiguous Legacy for Modern Liberalism’, presented at a symposium on ‘Hegel and Legal Theory’, Taylor asserts that Hegel’s contribution is “complicated, ambivalent, and double-sided. There is something very important in it,” he adds, “and also something potentially disastrous.”

The argument he puts forward in this address is clear and straightforward. The argument runs as follows. What we have witnessed in modern times is a shift from a theory of law based on the priority of ‘the good’, where the proper form of a society is at issue, to a theory of law based on the priority of ‘the right’, where procedural consent is at issue. Taylor distinguishes between two types or models of a free society – liberalism and civic humanism. In a liberal society, no particular conception of the good can be endorsed by the state. In a civic humanist society, the operative principle is the self-rule of the citizenry. According to Taylor, a liberal society is based on “a structure which, in invisible-hand fashion, behind the backs of the subjects and independent of the forms of motivation, will lead actions towards certain patterns that preserve freedom.”

A civic humanist society, on the other hand, “makes common meanings and shared goods absolutely central to the preservation of the society.” One can easily discern which side of the fence Taylor is on by virtue of the way these two social models are articulated. Favouring the civic humanist model, Taylor then proceeds to argue, (against legal theorist Ronald Dworkin), “why the liberal society ... is, in a sense, impossible.”

In defense of the civic humanist model of society, Taylor invokes Hegel’s concept of Sittlichkeit or ‘ethical life’. Membership in a community of shared history, culture, and value, is an important moral obligation of Sittlichkeit. “A free society cannot remain a free society without these elements of bonding,” writes Taylor. For Hegel, the concept of recognition is itself an important aspect of ethical life. To truly recognize a person is to treat that person with dignity and respect both in private and in public. What is fascinating in Hegel’s philosophy of recognition, Taylor argues, is the contention that recognition of persons in a free society is given in the space of a common language: “I become a person by entering the space of value, and this space

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89 Ibid., 350.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 352.
of value is one elaborated in a common language; so I cannot flourish as a person if this space of value is so laid out as to negate or denigrate me." 93

Yet Taylor is at odds with how Hegel views ‘the many’ (i.e. the public at large). “In The Philosophy of Right,” notes Taylor, “Hegel writes: ‘[t]he many ... are of course something connected, but they are connected only as an aggregate, a formless mass whose commotion and activity could therefore only be elementary, irrational, barbarous, and frightful.’” 94 Taylor disagrees. “It is the point where one can see how the whole Hegelian model is flawed ... It is a model for a kind of unity of society which, in the end, gives no place to the agon, to competition, to unresolvable differences.” 95 The difficulty with Hegel’s political theory is its unrealistic assumption of public consensus:

“Hegel had this completely unrealistic view about how representative institutions could work simply in a one-way direction to bring people in and create a consensus, rather than to be the arena in which deep dissensions can be worked out in a way that nevertheless helps to bond to a common allegiance. I think that is one way of framing one of the great realizations of liberal democracies when they work - that they manage to achieve.” 96

For Taylor, then, Hegel’s legacy is a difficult one. On the positive side, he argues that Hegel attunes us to the problems of a proceduralist state, where the dignity of citizens is sought in participation with the rule of law, rather than in the shared values of a community. On the negative side, he argues that Hegel’s metaphysical vision of a free society is a less than adequate model for a political society in as much as the virtue of civil democratic disagreement is bracketed out of the equation. Taylor concludes that “we have very good reason to use Hegel, but we have to use him with great care.” 97 For Taylor, then, Hegel’s legacy is an ‘ambiguous’ one for modern liberalism in as much as his political theory both attracts and repels.

5.4 Taylor as a ‘Post-Liberal’ Theorist

Taylor’s most astute interpreter, Ruth Abbey, (whose dissertation on Nietzsche was supervised by Taylor), sums up the influence of Hegel on Taylor’s anti-atomistic, pro-holistic, ‘post-liberal’ thinking:

“Hegel is, in fact, an important influence on Taylor’s rejection of atomism in general because of the importance he imputes to locating the individual within his or her wider community. Taylor’s immersion in Hegel’s thought helped him to identify the ubiquity of atomist assumptions in western culture generally and within the social sciences more particularly. So tight is the hold of atomism on

94 Ibid., 356.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
the modern western social and political imagination that it comes to be taken for granted as the ‘natural’ or default position.”

In her essay on ‘Charles Taylor as a Post-Liberal Theorist’, Abbey points to the fact that, notwithstanding his aversion to ‘atomism’, Taylor has admitted to being “unhappy with the term ‘communitarianism’.”

“It sounds [like an] all-embracing principle, which would ... exalt the life of the community over everything,” he adds. “Really the aim (as far as I’m concerned) is more modest: I just want to say that single-principle neutral liberalism can’t suffice. That it has to allow for other goods.”

Taylor is, in a real sense, neither a liberal, nor a communitarian, but a (qualified) pluralist. Pluralists hold that there is a plurality of goods from which to choose, that these goods often clash, and that the decision of how to proceed, when choosing one good over another, is not always clear.

To be classified as a ‘liberal’ or as a ‘communitarian’ is to privilege a single principle above all others – ‘rights’ in the case of the liberal, and ‘duties’ in the case of the communitarian. Yet Taylor “finds this whole mode of thinking unreal ... We don’t and couldn’t live our lives this way,” he argues, either individually or socially.

Indeed, the very idea of pluralism must itself be qualified: “I have no difficulty with the idea that offering the greatest scope for different modes of life and conceptions of the good is an important goal,” writes Taylor. “I cavil at the idea that it can be the goal; that is, that it doesn’t have at certain points to compose with other ends, which will require its limitation.”

The defense of ‘thick cultures’ (like Québec) is a case in point. What is needed, according to him, is a more complex understanding of modern liberalism.

Taylor’s appeal to Hegel’s political philosophy, in general, and, to his theory of recognition, in particular, attempts to offer such understanding.

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99 Though Taylor resists the communitarian label, he is nonetheless in sympathy with the communitarian cause: “One might say that the (most recent) communitarians are concerned social democrats who are worried about the way that various forms of individualism are undermining the welfare state (or preventing its development in the U.S. case). They see the need for solidarity, and hence for ‘community’ on a number of levels, from the family to the state. I have a lot of sympathy for this group, and have signed on to various of their statements.” ‘Communitarianism, Taylor-made - An Interview with Charles Taylor’, [Interview with Ruth Abbey], Australian Quarterly, 68/1 (1996), 2.


101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.


104 Taylor’s ‘complex liberalism’ is particularly evident when it comes to the Canada-Québec relationship: “There is nothing illegitimate in Québec’s push for independence in my view. But I’m against it because I think there is a better way to be in this turn of the century than organizing oneself in one’s own narrow nation state, following the classical model of the last century and a half. There are much better chances for openness, for complex identities, for the kind of universalism and mutual enrichment which comes from co-existing differences, within multinational states than within the classical nation-state ... we [can] have a richer and more human future together.” ‘Communitarianism, Taylor-made - An Interview with Charles Taylor’, [Interview with Ruth Abbey], Australian Quarterly, 68/1 (1996), 8.
Part III

Key Themes in Taylor’s Educational Thought
6

SCIENTIFIC RATIONALITY

6.1 The Inadequacies of Modern Education

In taking up the Descartes-inspired theme of scientific rationality in Taylor’s educational writings, we need to turn to one of his earlier books, published in 1970, entitled The Pattern of Politics. Reviewed, at the time, as “brilliant in analysis and criticism” and as “thoughtful, outspoken ... with many bold new ideas,” The Pattern of Politics includes Taylor’s first comprehensive statement on the inadequacies of modern Canadian education. According to commentator Nicholas H. Smith, The Pattern of Politics was published “in response to the landslide victory of Pierre Trudeau’s Liberal Party in the 1968 federal elections.” Smith is only half-right, however. While an intelligent response to ‘Trudeaumania’ was certainly in order at the time, the real purpose of the book was to showcase Taylor’s views on a range of policy questions, in advance of his party’s Leadership Convention in 1971, at which he served as the campaign organizer for David Lewis, who eventually went on to become the new Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada (N.D.P), a party committed to social reform in a host of areas (e.g. medicare, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, family allowance, labour legislation, and human rights). For a time, Taylor was touted as a future leader of the party. As a candidate for the N.D.P., which had succeeded the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (C.C.F.) in 1961, Taylor had been defeated four times during the federal elections that took place between 1962 and 1968, losing to future Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in the riding of Mount Royal in 1965. Trudeau had been a good friend of Taylor’s, and had actually campaigned on his behalf in 1963. The two had been academic colleagues at l’Université de Montréal – Taylor taught classes there, from time to time, in addition to his commitments at McGill University – and had also crossed paths at Cité Libre, an influential current affairs journal co-edited by Trudeau and Jean Pelletier, and, later, by Taylor himself. Cité Libre was one of the key intellectual touchstones of the ‘Quiet Revolution’ in Québec during the 1960s. Taylor also contributed to Canadian Dimension, a magazine of the English-Canadian left, during said time. It was during the decade of the 60s that Taylor helped to establish the N.D.P. in the Province of Québec, acting as a

policy consultant to the party, and serving as its Vice President from 1966 until 1971, the year party founder and Baptist pastor Tommy Douglas was replaced as leader of the federal N.D.P. by Oxford-trained social activist David Lewis. It is worth noting that Taylor distanced himself from active politics after 1971, devoting the bulk of his time, thereafter, to his philosophical research. These biographical facts are significant in as much as they shine light on the historical context leading up to the eventual release of The Pattern of Politics. And yet, as helpful as the aforementioned facts are to a well-rounded understanding of Taylor's pre-1970 activity, these facts alone tell us little about the genealogy of Taylor's social and political views, views that have a direct influence, as we will see, on his educational critique in The Pattern of Politics.

6.2 Taylor’s Pre-1970 Intellectual Preoccupations

We need to probe more deeply. What were some of Taylor’s intellectual preoccupations in advance of 1970? According to Smith, “[e]arly on, in the 1950s and 1960s, Taylor’s addressees are mainly radicals, reformists, and revolutionaries on the left.” This is not only an exaggerated claim, but, once again, only half-right. While it is true that Taylor’s writings as far back as the late 1950s – in left-wing British journals such as New Reasoner, Universities and Left Review, and New Left Review – are not without the zeal of a flourishing Oxford Marxist, these writings, in addition to those dating from 1962-1970, in both Cité Libré and in Canadian Dimension, are far more accessible, humane, and reasonable, than Smith’s description allows. Ian Fraser shows himself to be a much more astute critic of Taylor’s Marxism than Smith, arguing that Taylor’s commitment to freedom from domination, exploitation, and oppression and to a search for a common social good are deeply influenced by Marx’s humanism. Fraser writes that “along with Lukács and Marx, Taylor also sympathizes with Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer, for their opposition to the ways in which commercial-industrial-capitalist society forces people to see and experience the world in a mechanistic, instrumental manner, resulting in atomized individuals.” Well aware of the potential dangers in the distortion of Marxist doctrine, as evident in Stalinist and Leninist Russia particularly, Taylor is nonetheless indebted to Marx for the perceptiveness of his social theory.

The main intellectual preoccupation which emerges from Taylor’s writings during this time is that of the theoretical and practical implications of socialism. Virtually everything Taylor’s pen comes into contact with in advance of 1970 is marked by the ink of a socialist paradigm, be it the ambiguities of

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Marxist doctrine, alienation and community, the frailties of capitalism, the politics of Hungarian emigration, clericalism in Québec, the Cold War, the potential for nuclear annihilation, nationalism and independence, federal-provincial relations, domestic and foreign policy, economic equality, George Grant’s Lament for a Nation, the meaning of Expo ’67, alternatives to continentalism, the struggle in Vietnam, impending globalization, the need for a ‘dialogue society’, a new vision for Canada, and so on. All of these issues are important for Taylor on account of their sociological implications.

Taylor’s pre-1970 writings are packed with reflections on the nature and nurture of socialism in Canadian society. In 1960, for example, in an article on the weaknesses of capitalism, he writes: “One has only to scratch the surface of our society to see that our priorities are all wrong. They are not only unjust: they are divorced from any real sense of human need, and strikingly irrational. It is not just that too little is spent on welfare ... It is that our society puts production for profit before welfare every time.” In 1966, in an article on the end of ideology, he remarks: “I don’t think you can find any trace at all in this Conservative party of the sense of an organic whole of a community, some sense that those in authority have an obligation to lead and to take care of the welfare of the whole.” And in 1969, in an article on the future of socialism, he observes: “In brief summary, socialism today means an analysis of corporate capitalism which shows its basically irresponsible power and its opposition to our social priorities. Our program becomes one of planning which breaks with the ground-rules of corporate autonomy, and which involves a substantial amount of government control and initiative over investment.”

9 Among the more colourful pieces included in this list is Taylor’s engaging review of George Grant’s now-classic text, Lament for a Nation, a review in which Taylor accuses Grant of confusing ‘the death of Canada’ with the demise of the Conservative Diefenbaker government. See Charles Taylor, ‘Bâtir un Nouveau Canada,’ [Review of Lament for a Nation by George Grant], Cité Libre, 16 (August, 1965), 10-14.
Before 1970, with the exception of a single essay – ‘Nationalism and the Political Intelligentsia: A Case Study’ – Taylor has surprisingly little to say about education in his published writings. Apart from a few scattered comments here and there about the importance of public spending on the development of educational institutions, there is nothing approximating a thorough treatment of the issue. In 1964, for example, in an article on the fracture of socialist political parties in Québec, Taylor writes that: “As far as Québec is concerned, the present priorities of our national expenditure should be turned away from defense, say, and into education, which means, of course, spent by the provincial rather than the federal government.” This assertion is indicative of the sort of way in which education is addressed, for the most part, in Taylor’s pre-1970 corpus. The phrase ‘for the most part’ is crucial, however, in the face of a single exception – the aforementioned essay on ‘Nationalism and the Political Intelligentsia: A Case Study’. Since it represents the only real engagement with educational matters before Taylor’s 1970 book on The Pattern of Politics, this essay warrants a closer analysis.

In his essay on ‘Nationalism and the Political Intelligentsia: A Case Study’, published in Queen’s Quarterly in the Spring of 1965, Taylor focuses on a wave of nationalism that swept French Québec during the early 1960s, with the purpose of drawing more general conclusions about nationalism as a political reality in the modern world. In doing so, he makes a sharp distinction between an ‘old’ nationalism, based on the traditional defense of the Roman Catholic religion and the preservation of the French language, and a ‘new’ nationalism, with the aim of building a modern society on the continent of North America. Taylor argues that the new form of nationalism that emerged in Québec during the early 1960s was “largely the result of a change in the class of French Canada that could be designated by the word ‘intelligentsia’” and to “the social and economic developments that brought about the rise of this new group.” Taylor is well aware of the fact that the word ‘intelligentsia’ has its roots in nineteenth century Russia, where it designated the wide gap between highly and poorly educated citizens. Taylor’s use of the word ‘intelligentsia’ takes on a different meaning, however, when applied to Québec society in the early 1960s. Factors such as intense growth in population; greater industrialization and urbanization; the rise of a francophone business, professional, and managerial sector; the decline of English dominance in the economy; widespread mobility; developments in the area of media and communications; democratization by way of trade and credit unions; and an expansion in middle-class schooling, combined with a rejection of the

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traditional model of the elite-minded Collège Classique, all had their part to play in flattening the gap between the highly and the poorly educated in Québec society during the so-called ‘Quiet Revolution’ of the 60s. These factors threatened the Church’s clerical hold on Québec and, according to Taylor, no longer permitted the “isolation” and “authoritarian pattern” of French-Canadian society under Premier Maurice Duplessis.\(^{16}\) On the ecclesiastical front, the advent of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and its calls for greater openness to the modern world, increased participation of the laity, liturgical reform, a commitment to ecumenical dialogue, and religious freedom, ushered in a new, more humble era for the Québec church. In short, the modernization of Québec society during the 1960s relieved French-Canadians of their “collective inferiority.”\(^{17}\) This led, in time, to a strengthening of the Québec state, and, moreover, to a demand for independence in the form of separation from the rest of Canada and the creation of a new country. Maitres chez nous was the ultimate rallying cry of the Quiet Revolution.

The educational transformation in Québec during the 1960s was pronounced. In ‘Nationalism and the Political Intelligentsia: A Case Study’, Taylor vividly describes the educational situation under the ‘old nationalism’:

“It was a fact in French-Canadian society - and had been since the Conquest - that the children of the upper income brackets were given the kind of training that fitted them to operate with comparative ease in an Anglo-Saxon environment. They were taught good English at an early age, given the chance to travel, given a sense of their own cultural superiority in the Collège Classique, along with the necessary social graces to maintain this sense, both in their own eyes and very often in the eyes of their English-Canadian interlocutors. Totally different was the position of someone born in the rural areas, in a working-class or peasant family, who had very little opportunity to learn English up to the standard required, and even less experience of operating in another world than his own.”\(^{18}\)

Under the old nationalism, then, Québec society was sharply stratified, and the gap between the highly educated and the poorly educated, was wide. Taylor’s emphasis on the acquisition of English language skills for integration into Québec society is significant when one considers that the Francophone majority vastly outnumbered the Anglophone minority in the province throughout the 1960s. Under the new nationalism, however, mass education replaced the model of the Collège Classique, and, in turn, the dominance of church-run schooling:


\(^{17}\) Ibid., 14.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 12.
Thus, the national awakening certainly contributed to the creation of a ministry of education in an attempt to wrest education from the control of the antediluvian clerical machinery which had hitherto governed it in Québec.”  

What we see in Taylor’s account of Québec society’s awakening in the 60s, then, is a conscious effort to link a transformation in education with the passions of nationalism.

### 6.3 The Pattern of Politics

Which brings us, alas, to The Pattern of Politics. The book is, in its essence, a collation of Taylor’s social and political views up to 1970. The Pattern of Politics can indeed be read as a reaction, by Taylor, to the election of Pierre Trudeau as Prime Minister of Canada in 1968, and as an analysis of the media-generated phenomenon of ‘Trudeaumania’ that swept through the country during that time. In addition, The Pattern of Politics contrasts liberal and socialist policies on a range of issues, arguing that, unlike the Trudeau Liberals, only the New Democratic Party of Canada can properly serve the interests of all Canadians. Taylor distinguishes between two ways of political governance: the politics of consensus and the politics of polarization. He is critical of the former and supportive of the latter. He associates consensus politics with the Trudeau Liberals, defining it as hinging on “the relative ignorance or mystification of those in a society who are most disadvantaged by it.”

Whereas the politics of consensus thrives on compromise, concession, and the avoidance of offense, the politics of polarization relies on a challenge to the status quo and holds that “there are structural faults in our society which make it almost inevitable that the usual policies will fail to serve the well-being of large numbers of people.” The bulk of Taylor’s critique of the politics of consensus in The Pattern of Politics is of particular institutional political and economic structures, often endorsed and supported by the Liberal Party, that allow for such an approach to take hold. Taylor is critical of Trudeaumania throughout his book, bemoaning the media-generated obsession with a ‘charismatic personality’. What is lost in the fog of all of this, according to Taylor, is any real discussion of public policy. The common good of Canadian society, not the spotlight on a rising political star, is what ought to be at stake for Canadians.

Taylor admits, in the course of applauding the receding of right-wing federal politics, that neither the liberal nor the socialist model encompasses the whole truth about Canadian society. In a society as complex as Canada’s, both models have something to offer. Taylor criticizes the liberal model, however, for its neglect of corporate power. The large corporation is, for Taylor, the dominant fact

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21 Ibid., 5.
in modern capitalist society. The priorities of a corporation - autonomy, non-interference, free enterprise, pragmatism, efficiency, effectiveness, etc. - are, however, frequently in conflict with the priorities of a society: “In a system in which corporate power is unchallenged, our priorities are constantly out of joint, and we effectively operate very often with a set of collective preferences that are close to insane.”

Taylor argues that the rules of the game need to be changed to ensure that checks and balances are placed on corporate power and social needs are prioritized. A consensual politics, in synch with the dictates of the corporate elite, is no longer an option. Only a politics of polarization, with the courage to confront the dominance of corporatism in Canada, will do.

Taylor’s critique of corporatism is attentive to ‘two faces of affluence’, one that benefits, and one that suffers. Corporatism is tied to consumerism, that is, to the buying and selling of goods in the marketplace. Consumer activity takes on a quasi-religious significance in a secular, desacralized society. Salvation is assured, not through faith and works, but through goods and services. Responsible citizens of a consumer society are those who buy and sell, with the extent of their well-being dependent upon their capacity to do so. In keeping with consumer logic, the more one is able to buy or sell, the more fulfilled one becomes; the less one is able to buy or sell, the less fulfilled one becomes. We in contemporary society are, as Taylor writes, persistently surrounded by images “which confer a sacramental significance on consumer goods. It is hardly possible to be sold a beer or a deodorant without confronting the vision of a deeply fulfilling life led by perfect human specimens.” When the values of the society in which we live are too easily accepted, Taylor writes, the consequences of such blind acceptance can be “absurd and repellent.”

Taylor expresses a particular concern for American ownership in the Canadian economy, which, as he sees it, is intertwined with an unquestioned reverence for the capitalist system. He views an over-reliance on American entrepreneurial investment as increasing Canada’s political dependence on ‘Uncle Sam’. The United States’ powerful military capability, combined with Canada’s rich natural resource stock, breeds fear in the hearts of Canadian protectionists. Economic absorption into continent-wide free trade can only lead, they warn, to political, social, and cultural absorption, as well. Canadians must recover their economic independence, claims Taylor: “The recovery of our independence requires that we take control of the economy in order to give it our own design, in place of the one that is now being shaped for it under foreign initiative.” In countering the great American drift, Taylor calls not only for the creation of a national development fund, but for a

23 Ibid., 57.
24 Ibid., 65.
25 Ibid., 89.
tightening of foreign investment laws and a greater oversight of corporate involvement in the Canadian economy.

The weakening of traditional touchstones of authority, is, for Taylor, a defining feature of modern society. "The idea that some men or groups or institutions command our obedience in their own right seems more and more foreign to us," he explains.26 The waning of the sacred, along with the rise of pluralism, have diluted traditional social meanings, leaving many feeling alienated, disillusioned, and frustrated. Developments in technology have furthered the fragmentation of communal bonds. There is little to collectively celebrate in a modern technological society, where lives are led autonomously and routinely. Taylor is not unhopeful for a way out of this civilizational malady, however. He outlines a third way - 'the dialogue society' - which stands between totalitarian conformity and absolute privatization. The dialogue society "would start from the fact of pluralism, from the fact that we are of many different faiths, beliefs, and moralities but it would also start from the fact that we are all less satisfied and dogmatic in our possession of the truth; that we are all therefore in some way searchers; and that the fact of pluralism has entered into the very content of our varied beliefs so that we are already in dialogue within ourselves with the ideas of others."27 A dialogue society would make use of technology for the enhancement of social communication, collective identity, and the promotion of democracy. Taylor therefore sees possibilities for new forms of public participation in modern society in the midst of the weakening of traditional authority.

Taylor's vision for a Canadian future recognizes, on the one hand, that there are many ways of being a Canadian in a modern pluralist society, and, on the other hand, that a concern for unity remains. What ultimately holds Canada together? Vicarious attachments to English, French, and American realities can only take us so far in this regard. What we need, argues Taylor, is a unique Canadian model of citizenship, one where "people of different regions, backgrounds, languages, and cultures can come together around some common project."28 Common projects, outlined in a new constitution, can serve as the basis for a truly Canadian future. "The experience of self-organization for collective benefit acquired in these movements," Taylor concludes, "spills over into the political field in support for a non-elite party," namely, the New Democratic Party.29

Taylor's appeal for a politics of polarization, for a critique of corporatism, for public policy based on communal need, and for a dialogue society, help frame the educational agenda outlined in The

27 Ibid., 125.
28 Ibid., 29.
29 Ibid., 159.
One of the recurring themes in Taylor’s book is the need to provide higher levels of education to greater numbers of people in order to keep up with the demands of a rapidly growing society. “Everyone recognizes that one of the keys to economic survival in the last third of the twentieth century is education,” Taylor writes. “The level of general and specialized education required to run a modern economy is out of all proportion to what was needed a century ago.”

Education must therefore be a top priority for provincial governments in Canada, notwithstanding the fact that educational success in public policy terms is difficult to ‘measure’: “Gross National Product does not give us a way to measure the degree of clean air and drinkable water, nor the quality of education, nor the justice of the distribution of our wealth.”

The great irony in all of this, however, is that in a corporatist society, where free enterprise and the consumption of goods and services reign supreme, yet where education must be subsidized by taxpayers in order to provide an adequate level of funding for the community as a whole, the better educated in modern society, who are aligned with the status quo of the private corporatist mindset, are less willing to invest taxpayer money into the public education system. The implication of Taylor’s premise here is that the better educated in Canadian society are frequently less committed to education than they ought to be, even in the face of sound economic logic. One would think that cause for blame would be directed to systemic constraints as well as a failure of commitment on the part of individual persons, but Taylor’s emphasis is on the former over and against the latter, except, interestingly enough, in the case of ‘student revolutionaries’ who are “rarely interested in listening to real flesh-and-blood members of the working class. There is little room in their ‘revolution’ for those who might want a washing machine and a socialist society. As a result, far from building an alliance, they create a void around themselves. The ultimate effect of this can only be to strengthen the status quo.”

Though Taylor acknowledges that increased democratic participation is a welcomed result of a narrower gap between the elite and mass society, one should seek to influence the political process, on behalf of education, in a socially intelligent way.

6.4 Taylor’s Views on Scientific Rationality in Education

The third chapter of The Pattern of Politics constitutes the heart of Taylor’s published reflections on education prior to 1970, and it is here that the connection between his reading of the philosophy of Descartes and his socialist critique of education is best elucidated. Taylor writes of the signs of

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31 Ibid., 41.
32 Ibid., 58.
33 Ibid., 67.
rebellion on campus among young university students in the late 1960s. These students occupied
centre stage in a rejection of what he describes as an ‘uptight’, ‘competitive’, ‘work-oriented’
civilization. That the university should become a target of dissatisfaction is not entirely surprising
for Taylor, as the institution has long been the source of an inner tension between the goal of social
utility and the goal of personal vocation. But in a corporate-dominated society, the function of the
university is more or less reduced to research and training for technological progress. Taylor is
anxious about the unprecedented growth in the size of the university “which itself is partly a
function of its role in providing personnel for an increasingly complex and technologically oriented
economy.”34 Young people in university are defined less as ‘students’ passing through a stage of life
and more as ‘undergraduates’ in line for a career in the professions. Taylor laments that the modern
bureaucratization of mass education leaves less room for contact between teacher and student, for
spontaneous expression and feeling, for rigorous intellectual debate, and for true community. On-
campus demonstrations against corporate involvement in the university of the late 1960s protested
against the integration of the university into the operative power structure of society:

“The intellectual cast of much of our thought is deeply influenced by these
values. How could it be otherwise? This is very evident in the sciences of
man. The tremendous vogue of mechanistic explanations; the (often
pathetic) desire to imitate the natural sciences in ‘producing’ results; the
resultant rush towards quantitative methods and narrow-gauge analyses
which promise such ‘hard’ findings, regardless of relevance - all these are
not without relation to the reigning values of productive efficiency and
technological rationality.”35

The educational trends Taylor makes mention of here - ‘mechanistic explanations’, ‘the desire to
imitate the natural sciences’, ‘quantitative methods’, ‘technological rationality’, - all find echoes, as
we have seen, in Cartesian philosophy. As outlined in his reading of Descartes, Taylor finds a
certain emptiness in this approach. Taylor writes that the student uprisings of the 60s seemed more
a symptom of and less an antidote to the sickness of the surrounding society. He chastises his own
civilization for its narrow vision of reason geared to calculated production, its shallow utopianism in
the name of social engineering, its unidimensional idea of time which renders the past irrelevant, its
environmental ruthlessness, and its unreflective economic development. What we have in The
Pattern of Politics then, is a full-fledged polemic against the consequences of a social philosophy that
sees corporatist affluence, an affluence inspired by the values of scientific rationality, as a fell-swoop
cure for educational ills.

35 Ibid., 62.
6.5 A Critique of Taylor’s Views

Taylor’s analysis of educational change in the *Pattern of Politics* is found wanting, however, in so far as it neglects the dynamics operative within educational institutions during the 1960s. This is especially true in the case of Taylor’s home province of Québec where he has little to say about the relations between church and state in the field of education during the ‘Quiet Revolution’ of the 1960s. Up to 1964, after which the Québec government created its own Ministry of Education, the education of Québec students was the exclusive purview of the Roman Catholic Church and its associated religious orders of priests and nuns.36 In his study of the history of Catholic education in Québec, Spencer Boudreau notes that “[d]uring the Quiet Revolution, the position of the Church vis-à-vis Québec society, and in particular what role the Church would have in the public education system, was part of a wider and deeper transformation of Québec society.”37 What the province of Québec saw during this time was a massive increase in population due to the post-war baby boom; a strengthening of the Québec state and a weakening of the Québec church; modernization, liberalization, and democratization; the secularization of a variety of social services; and intense economic and technological growth. As Boudreau explains, “[a] modern Québec required a modern educational system that would prepare the young for positions in industry, commerce, and science.”38 The school system in Québec could no longer limit itself to the traditional training of would-be doctors, lawyers, and priests. Under the leadership of Premier Maurice Duplessis (1944-1959):

“... more than $400 million was spent in 15 years building 4,100 schools accommodating 780,000 students in 37,000 classrooms ... the number of Québec students in night schools went from 7,577 to 19,078; in craft schools from 6,853 to 17,818; in technical and specialized schools (graphic arts, applied arts, textile, marine, paper-making, automotive, furniture, etc.) from 6,005 to 11,611. Fine arts enrolment tripled; polytechnical studies were admitting five times as many students as in 1944; business administration registrations doubled ... The University of Sherbrooke and Sir George Williams University were founded from scratch ... the number of faculty members in Québec universities increased from 1,522 in 1944 to 7,281 in 1958-9, and the number of students to whom they lectured multiplied from 23,493 in 1944 to 64,119 in 1959.”39

The changes in the education system of Québec society during La Révolution Tranquille were dramatic, indeed, yet Taylor has little to say about them. This is somewhat surprising given that his critique of scientific rationality in education would have benefited, in theoretical terms, from a greater attentiveness toward such changes, in the context of larger social and historical forces.

37 Ibid., 20.
38 Ibid., 20.
6.6 Scientific Rationality and the Enlightenment Tradition

Taylor’s philosophical attack on scientific rationality relies, in *The Pattern of Politics* and in other works, upon a certain reading of the Enlightenment tradition. It is a reading that is inhospitable to the tradition’s ‘new science’ of humanity, a science committed to an explanation of human behaviour compatible with the laws of physics and of chemistry and of other disciplines in the natural sciences. Otherwise known as ‘naturalism’, this is a view that attempts to make sense of human behaviour in the same way as other ‘objects’ in nature (e.g. clouds, turtles, and orchids), through such methods as the observation of sense data, its testing, and its verification. Taylor holds that naturalism brackets out important aspects of human beings, such as their background conditions, their subjective particularities, their moral motivations, their self-interpretations, their dialogicality, and their respective teleologies. The detached Enlightenment scientist pays little if any heed to these aspects, gazing at human beings in a ‘neutral’ environment from the lens of a purely ‘objective’ third-person point of view. Human behaviour itself is reduced to purposeless movement. In short, Taylor spends vast amounts of intellectual energy refuting the Enlightenment project of ‘a science of humanity’. He does so, as we have seen, with a view to how such a science can distort, reduce, and eventually harm a proper notion of human subjectivity, from which a whole host of negative political, economic, social, cultural, and, of course, educational consequences follow.

6.7 Interpretations of Taylor

Interpreters of Taylor’s educational philosophy have taken up his critique of scientific rationality in the form of what might best be described as ‘a pragmatic, empirical approach to learning’. In ‘Behaviour Strata and Learning’ by L.B. Daniels, for example, the author shows how Taylor’s deconstruction of the behaviourist argument – which, in its rejection of teleological explanation, relies on cognitive terms such as ‘stimulus’, ‘response’, and ‘reinforcement’, which are translatable into a ‘neutral’ data language and subject to intersubjective agreement – as “a ‘sham’ masking a series of largely unwarranted epistemological assumptions which, when revealed, show that the behaviourist position is at least as biased as any other.”

Daniels is interested in the empirical dispositions that are manifested in changes from non-teleological to teleological learning behaviour. Similarly, in ‘Education as Initiation into Practices’ by Paul Smeyers and Nicholas C. Burbules, the authors re-examine the notion of ‘practices’ in education with a view to questioning the implicit and explicit assumptions behind their ‘narrativization’. Narrativization of educational practices “involves

how a practice becomes aestheticized, how it is given moral weight, how it comes to be seen as having a history behind it, and how it becomes an object of excellence.” 41 In proposing a different way of thinking about practices in education, Smeyers and Burbules look to Taylor for his perspective on the validation of a social theory: “Thus, for Taylor, a social theory is validated not by seeing how well it describes the practices as a range of independent entities, but rather by judging how practices fare when informed by the theory.” 42 The authors make a distinction between education into a practice versus education about a practice. One’s relation to the nature of the educational practice at hand, how one is brought into it, and how one thinks and acts as a participant in it, becomes crucial. What is distinctive about Daniels’ approach in ‘Behaviour Strata and Learning’, and about Smeyers’ and Burbules’ approach in ‘Education as Initiation into Practices’, is their concern for a pragmatic, empirical approach to learning, one that is conscious of the role of scientific rationality in education, and, indeed, of Charles Taylor’s own position on the issue.

6.8 Is Taylor Hospitable to Science?

An inattentive interpretation of Taylor might lead one to the conclusion that he is indifferent toward all scientific values in education, that his humanism casts a dark shadow on all things scientific. Yet is this, in fact, the case? Or is scientism – the notion that the scientific worldview is the only justifiable way to view reality – his real target? This will become clearer, in due course, as we take up various objections and replies to Taylor’s relationship to the natural sciences.

42 Ibid., 343.
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EXCLUSIVE HUMANISM

7.1 Taylor’s Marianist Award

The phrase ‘exclusive humanism’ first appeared in A Catholic Modernity?, a lecture Taylor gave at the University of Dayton, Ohio, on January 25th, 1996, on the occasion of his acceptance of the Marianist Award. The annual award is presented by the university in honour of “a Roman Catholic whose work has made a major contribution to intellectual life.” 1 Prominent Catholic scholars are invited to the campus of the university on an annual basis and asked to speak from the perspective of their vocation as Catholic intellectuals in modern times “about how their religious faith has affected their scholarship and how their scholarship has affected their religious faith.” 2 The Marianists, who are members of The Society of Mary, a Catholic religious order founded in 1817 in Bordeaux, France, founded the University of Dayton in 1850. In his opening remarks, Taylor thanked the University of Dayton for “this chance to raise with you today some issues that have been at the centre of my concern for decades. They have been reflected in my philosophical work,” he adds, “but not in the same form as I raise them this afternoon, because of the nature of philosophical discourse (as I see it, anyway), which has to try to persuade honest thinkers of any and all metaphysical or theological commitments.” 3 If, until A Catholic Modernity?, Taylor’s Roman Catholicism had been carefully guarded, the Marianist Award lecture would serve to lift that guard from his philosophical writings.

7.2 A Catholic Modernity?

Taylor’s A Catholic Modernity? takes up the question of what it means to be a Catholic in the modern world. He defines Catholic, from its original root καθολικός as “universality through wholeness.” 4 Universality without wholeness, he argues, is not true Catholicism. The point is not to be a ‘modern Catholic’, asserts Taylor, but to see what it means to be a Catholic in the time and place in which one is situated, and live accordingly. Taylor is mindful of the fact that this is no simple task, however, since much of modern culture shuns Christianity. Christianity is regarded as ‘the other’, alienated, and pushed to the margins of society. “With this in mind, it’s not hard to feel like an

1 See ‘The Marianist Award’ @ (www-secure.udayton.edu/rector/documents/the-marianist-award.php)
3 Ibid., 13.
4 Ibid., 14.
outsider,” writes Taylor. Yet Taylor finds reassurance in the claim that there can never be an absolute fusion between Christianity and society. Modern culture’s break with Christendom, Taylor argues, has developed certain aspects of Christianity further than they would otherwise have developed under Christendom itself. Modern freedom and the rights culture that upholds it, is one such development that, “for all its drawbacks, … has produced something quite remarkable: the attempt to call political power to book against a yardstick of fundamental human requirements, universally applied. As the present Pope (John Paul II) has amply testified, it is impossible for the Christian conscience not to be moved by this.” Yet, the consequential weakening of Christianity in modern society due, in part, to the end of a traditional form of identity, has gradually led to a view “that human life is better off without transcendental vision altogether.” The yearning for something more than human life itself is deemed an illusion “because the peaceful coexistence of people in freedom has already been identified as the fruit of waning transcendental visions.” Taylor identifies modern freedom with the rise of what he calls ‘exclusive humanism’, that is, a view of life that recognizes no higher goal than that of human flourishing. To a Catholic like Taylor, however, such a humanism, void of a transcendental vision, seems stifling, imprisoning, even dangerous, while at the same time being “very underexplored in modern thought.” It also seems partial, partial in that it is a humanism that can be forgetful of the meaning of suffering and death, for instance. Taylor also equates modernity with “the destruction of traditional horizons, of belief in the sacred, of old notions of hierarchy, [and with] the disenchantment of the world.” Taylor asks whether a “spiritual lobotomy” is really necessary to enjoy the fruits of modern freedom. In arguing that Western modernity “is very inhospitable to the transcendent,” Taylor is critical of the ‘Enlightenment story’ that the rise of modern science has meant the death of modern religion. The debate about modernity includes both ‘boosters’ and ‘knockers’, those who support and those who reject modernity, yet Taylor is unwilling to be polarized in the debate; rather, his task is one of rescuing admirable ideals – such as a notion of ‘transcendence’ – from distortion and corruption.

There are, for Taylor, four competing positions in modern culture: i) the secular humanists; ii) the neo-Nietzscheans; iii) those who acknowledge transcendence and argue for a metaphysical primacy; and iv) those who acknowledge transcendence and argue for a practical primacy. According to

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6 Ibid., 18.
7 Ibid., 19.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 106.
11 Ibid., 19.
12 Ibid., 25.
Taylor, both the secular humanists and the neo-Nietzcheans “condemn religion and reject any good beyond life.” The difference between them rests in their choice of worldly goods. Secular humanists affirm the value of ‘ordinary life’, are generally egalitarian in sensibility, and see the preservation and perpetuation of human existence as worthy goals. Neo-Nietzcheans affirm the value of ‘an enhanced life’, are generally elitist in sensibility, and see courage, greatness, and excellence as worthy goals. Those who acknowledge transcendence and argue for a metaphysical primacy are critical of modernity and long for a return to a more traditional outlook. Those who acknowledge transcendence and argue for a practical primacy - Taylor places himself in this category - are more supportive of the redeeming features of modernity and, according to Taylor, “think that the metaphysical primacy of life is wrong and stifling and that its continued dominance puts in danger the practical primacy.” The final two positions both acknowledge transcendence, then, but disagree on whether ‘primacy’ should be given to the metaphysical or the practical. Though Taylor’s brief sketch of the four competing positions in modern culture is a fascinating one, it is nonetheless problematic, I think. Taylor’s definition of the word ‘primacy’ is unclear. A number of questions arise here: What is the meaning of the phrase ‘the practical should have primacy over the metaphysical?’ Does the phrase mean something to the effect that the visible realm of the natural ought to matter more to human beings than the invisible realm of the supernatural? If so, why? Instead of a ‘primacy’ either way, why does Taylor not argue for a fifth position, that is, an acknowledgment of transcendence along with a co-operative relationship between the practical and the metaphysical? While Taylor wants modernity to be open to transcendence, he nonetheless argues for ‘primacy’ to be given to the practical over the metaphysical. Can these two propositions be simultaneously held without contradiction, that is, can an openness to transcendence co-exist with a practical primacy? Taylor fails to offer a persuasive answer to this question. Indeed, it is as if Taylor is arguing here that moderns should break out of their exclusive humanist shell and open themselves up to the teleology of transcendence but, after having done so, realize that transcendence is not so important after all, and that ‘primacy’ ought to be given to the practicality of a humanistic outlook. In the end, Taylor’s sketch of the four competing positions in modern culture is as problematic as it is fascinating.

Taylor makes generous use of the phrase ‘exclusive humanism’ in his lecture A Catholic Modernity? and in the concluding reflections appended to his text. Exclusive humanism is used in a variety of ways by Taylor: in reference to “the anti-Christian rebellion” of modernity, in the identification of

14 Ibid.
modern Western culture as the site of “the only large-scale attempt in human history” to put such an experiment into practice, as a product of the eighteenth century Enlightenment’s attempt to rid itself of the distinction between “higher and lower,” as a secular affirmation of “ordinary life,” as a rejection of the Christian doctrine of “Original Sin” in favour of a more optimistic outlook on human nature, and as a lack of “openness” to God. All of these uses enrich our understanding of what Taylor means by ‘exclusive humanism’.  

More often than not, Taylor uses the phrase ‘exclusive humanism’ in a pejorative way. There are three particularly vivid examples of this in A Catholic Modernity? The first example is Taylor’s admission that “by virtue of living through this experiment [with exclusive humanism], we will be in a better position to understand why ... no one else ever tried it.”[^16] The implication here is that the absence of evidence in history is a likely indicator that exclusive humanism is doomed to fail, that it has not been successful in the past and that it will not be successful in the future. The second example is Taylor’s assertion that “[e]xclusive humanism closes the transcendent window, as though there were nothing beyond - more, as though it weren’t a crying need of the human heart to open that window, gaze, and then go beyond; as though feeling this need were the result of a mistake, an erroneous world-view, bad conditioning, or, worse, some pathology.”[^17] Here we see an appeal, by Taylor, to an instinct of human nature; for Taylor, a denial of transcendence is akin to a denial of a yearning for a higher power in human nature. The third example is Taylor’s warning that an exclusive humanism which sets unreachably high standards “encourages force, despotism, tutelage, ultimately contempt, and a certain ruthlessness in shaping refractory human material.”[^18] Critics have often underscored this darker side in their negative assessments of the Enlightenment project. It is clear, by virtue of the three aforementioned examples, all of which detail his pejorative use of the concept, that Taylor has, at best, serious reservations about both the theoretical and practical legitimacy of ‘exclusive humanism’.

Taylor’s reservations about the legitimacy of exclusive humanism are particularly evident in his observations on the insufficiencies of modern education. These insufficiencies are made clear in the concluding reflections of A Catholic Modernity? At issue for Taylor here is “the place of Christians in contemporary academic and intellectual life.”[^19] Taylor admits that Christian scholars, including himself, have all too often masked their views to gain acceptance from ‘mainstream’ audiences. The reasons for this - reputation, tenure, promotion, conformity - are, for Taylor, “not very

[^16]: Ibid., 106.
[^17]: Ibid., 27.
[^18]: Ibid., 33.
[^19]: Ibid., 118.
Part of what underlies this problem, Taylor argues, is “the remarkable fact that academic culture in the Western world breathes an atmosphere of unbelief.” Taylor chooses not to elaborate on the historical causes of this. In a foreshadowing of his later study on *A Secular Age*, however, he does say that offering an historical explanation “is perhaps one of the most important intellectual tasks of our time.” According to Taylor, young undergraduates in today’s universities frequently look for ways to find and/or strengthen their faith in their respective courses but are inevitably led to frustration and even confusion in doing so. Even in contemporary moral philosophy, certain issues for discussion, such as the quality of one’s will in doing what one ought to do, are entirely off the table. The connection with Kant here is crucial. Taylor interprets Kant in *A Catholic Modernity?* as having a “conception of an imminentized higher motivation,” one that maintains “the distinction between lower and higher,” but within a purely immanent frame. With Kant, Taylor adds, the quality of one’s will had “already begun to be separated from the determination of what (one) ought to do.” If contemporary moral philosophy is heavily influenced by Kantian assumptions, one can then begin to see how and why certain moral concerns are being nudged aside, both inside and outside the classroom.

### 7.3 Taylor on Exclusive Humanism in Education

Taylor finds some of the post-Kantian moral and epistemological theories on offer today “embarrassingly naïve.” As resonances of past Enlightenment sensibilities, certain elements within contemporary thought are “highly therapeutic” about notions of good and evil, for instance. Taylor attributes much of the secular transformation in Western academic culture to the rise of exclusive humanism:

> “Much of our academic thinking takes place in a climate that has been set by the rise of exclusive humanism. It is not that people think explicitly about the issue of higher versus lower and then decide that it’s not relevant to philosophical ethics. In spite of having read Plato in Ethics 101, this is almost never presented as a possible option today. Rather the whole thing is just off the agenda, and the very attempt to raise it sounds indescribably quaint and dated, if not a little sinister. And so the beginning student I invoked earlier doesn’t know where to start or how to get a word in edgewise. The structure of the discussion (find the principle determining the right) might invite frontal attack: you just

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 119.
23 Ibid., 121.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 123.
26 Ibid.
In confronting exclusive humanism in the academy, Taylor advises Christian scholars to move to widen the agenda of an otherwise narrow intellectual debate, to introduce issues into the discussion that relate to Christian faith and/or moral philosophy, to critically engage with modern culture, and to challenge those who would defend ‘mainstream’ positions.

7.4 Matteo Ricci as a Hermeneutical Key

One of the hermeneutical keys to unlocking the message of *A Catholic Modernity?*, a message with defining implications for contemporary education, I think, is Taylor’s interpretation of the life of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), a sixteenth century Jesuit priest renowned for his missionary work in China. Taylor sees Ricci as a model for how Catholics should cope with the modern world. Like Ricci, Catholics too should discriminate between “what in the culture represents a valid human difference, and what is incompatible with Christian faith.” “We have to struggle to make a discernment as [Ricci] did, Taylor writes. “He wanted to distinguish between those things in the new culture that came from the natural knowledge we all have of God and thus should be affirmed and extended, on one hand, and those practices that were distortions and would have to be changed, on the other.” Separating the wheat of modernity from the chaff of modernity is, as Taylor admits, no easy task. The twentieth century itself bears witness to the fact that modern history can be read “either in a perspective of progress or in one of mounting horror.” Taylor cites

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28 Pope Benedict XVI has spoken highly of Matteo Ricci’s legacy: “The history of the Catholic missions includes figures important because of their zeal and courage in bringing Christ to new and distant lands; but Fr. Ricci is a unique case of a felicitous synthesis between the proclamation of the Gospel and the dialogue with the culture of the people to whom he brought it; he is an example of balance between doctrinal clarity and prudent pastoral action. Not only his profound knowledge of the language but also his assumption of the lifestyle and customs of the cultured Chinese classes, the result of study and its patient, far-sighted implementation, ensured that Fr. Ricci was accepted by the Chinese with respect and esteem, no longer as a foreigner but as the Master of the Great West.” ‘Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the Occasion of the 400th Anniversary of the Death of Fr. Matteo Ricci’, May 29, 2010, (www.vatican.va). Julia Ching, the renowned scholar of World Religions, has also written favourably on Matteo Ricci. In her entry for Ricci in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, she observes that “Ricci’s gentle personality, his expertise in Western science and philosophy, and his knowledge of Chinese culture made him one of the great cultural mediators of all time.” Julia Ching, ‘Matteo Ricci’ in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Vol. 12), ed. Mircea Eliade, (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 378.
30 Ibid., 36.
31 Ibid., 37.
examples such as Amnesty International and Médecins sans Frontières, as well as Auschwitz and Hiroshima. A proper discernment requires that one stand, to some extent, at a distance from one's culture, and "approach this civilization as we would if we really came from outside, without preconceptions, and [allow] ourselves to be both enthused and horrified by its different facets." Discernment will fail, Taylor warns, "if we think we have it all figured out from the start and know what to affirm and what to deny," or, if we think that "no further inquiry seems necessary." For what is truly at stake in the debate on modernity is how to rescue admirable ideals, such as the recognition of human rights, "from sliding into demeaning modes of realization."

7.5 Matteo Ricci and Taylor’s Educational Thought

Is there a connection between Taylor’s interest in the life of Matteo Ricci and Taylor’s educational thought? I would argue that there is. As far as Taylor is concerned, Ricci is, first and foremost, a model of cross-cultural understanding. Such understanding is, as Taylor claims, much needed in modern pluralist societies. If cross-cultural understanding is much needed in modern pluralist societies, the logical implication here is that it is much needed in modern education, as well. On this line of thinking, Taylor’s lament of the rise of ‘exclusive humanism’ and the decline of ‘transcendence’ in the modern classroom can be seen as a lament of cross-cultural misunderstanding. Bridging the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar is, for Taylor, essential to sustaining a peaceful society. If one takes this perspective as a clarification of Taylor’s position, then it is a position which is more favourable to a ‘weak ontology’ reading than it is to a ‘subsumption’ reading. The real question here, however, is this: ‘What does an educational pedagogy with a ‘weak ontology’ look like precisely?’ If by ‘weak ontology’ one means something like a modest stance on the nature of Being, or a modest stance on capital ‘T’ Truth, or even a modest stance on propositional claims about God, one can begin to sense what Taylor, as a professed Catholic, might be up to in A Catholic Modernity? Far from the proselytizing indoctrinator that his critics sometimes make him out to be, Taylor is, for my mind, an advocate of an ‘open commitment’ in matters of cross-cultural understanding, ‘open’ in the sense of a willingness to learn from the unfamiliar, and ‘committed’ in the sense of being aware of the limits of one’s own preconceptual background, in the process. A ‘weak ontology’ in the Taylorian sense is synonymous neither with doctrinal infidelity nor with a

33 Ibid., 107.
34 Ibid., 16.
35 Ibid., 36.
lack of conviction; it is rather a way of carrying oneself in a post-modern climate, by way of a humble disposition toward certainty in a radically pluralist environment.

7.6 Exclusive Humanism and its Educational Interpreters

It is somewhat surprising that Taylor’s interest in the educational implications of exclusive humanism has not caught the eye of his interpreters. An exception to this is Carl Hedman’s piece on ‘Promoting the Autonomy of Another Person: The Difficult Case of the High School Dropout’. Hedman, concerned about the high dropout rate in large American cities, writes about the dilemma facing the educator who, on the one hand, must strive to promote the autonomy of the student by accepting his/her decision to drop out of school, and who, on the other hand, knows very well that dropping out of school will likely hinder the growth of autonomy in the student. Hedman rejects both a strategy of ‘benign neglect’ and a strategy of ‘benign compulsion’ in dealing with the potential high school dropout. Hedman cites the case of ‘Bill’, a sixteen year-old student who, upon receiving a failing grade in a required algebra course, opts to reject his prior plan to pursue a college engineering degree and affirm, instead, his desire to be an auto mechanic in a local garage. Hedman argues that Bill’s ability to provide reasons for his decision must be honoured: “[i]ndeed [Bill’s] ability to give reasons constitutes strong prima facie evidence that his decision is exactly the kind of thing I must honour if I am committed to promoting his autonomy.”

Hedman brings Taylor’s notion of ‘strong or deep evaluation’ into his analysis in wondering whether the reasons that move Bill to drop out of school are the reasons that ought to move him. As Taylor notes in an essay on human agency, “[a] strong evaluator, by which we mean a subject who strongly evaluates desires, goes deeper, because he characterizes his motivation at greater depth. To characterize one desire or inclination as worthier, or nobler, or more integrated, etc., than another, is to speak of it in terms of the kind of quality of life which it expresses and sustains.”

A strong or deep evaluation is absent if one acts stubbornly, that is, when one takes up “formulations that come most readily to hand, generally those which are going the rounds in our current milieu or society, and [lives] within them without too much probing.” Taylor adds that one can “employ more or less adequate, more or less truthful, more self-clairvoyant or self-deluding interpretations [to one’s actions].”

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38 Ibid., 42.
39 Ibid., 38.
and deep evaluators need the feedback of others to inform them of the quality of their own processes of evaluation. In the case of Bill, then, an appropriate educational strategy for promoting autonomy, according to Hedman, would be to offer him "a wide range of programs that are designed to speak to the concerns that gave rise to the decision to drop out in the first place." Presenting Bill with a wide range of responsible options makes way for a stronger and deeper evaluation by Bill, and, in turn, growth in Bill's autonomy. The connection between Bill's autonomy and Taylor's notion of 'exclusive humanism' here is straightforward: Bill's decision to drop out of school is 'exclusively humanistic' in the sense that it is a decision which does not appeal to anything higher than his own self-sufficient willfulness.

7.7 A Diverse Spectrum of Humanisms

Taylor’s remarks in A Catholic Modernity? on the rise of exclusive humanism in contemporary education neglects to make clear, I think, that exclusive humanism is only one among the full range of humanist options. There is a diverse spectrum of humanisms to be sure: Classical humanism, Enlightenment humanism, Renaissance humanism, secular humanism, religious humanism, Marxism, utilitarianism, pragmatism, existentialism, etc. All of these humanisms share, in varying degrees, a belief in the dignity of humanity, the principle of freedom, the capacity of reason, the importance of science, and the value of the natural world. Some of these humanisms are arguably more open to transcendence than others. Renaissance humanism and religious humanism are obvious examples of this. Taylor, however, is unclear on whether these humanisms are more or less exclusive and/or inclusive of transcendence. He offers no such classification or variation in regard to the aforementioned humanisms. What we are left with, in effect, is an oversimplification of humanism’s complexity - there is a humanism that excludes transcendence and there is a humanism that includes transcendence, and that is that. Taylor shows little appreciation for the historicity of humanism in A Catholic Modernity? Taylor is silent about the origins of humanism, about Cicero or Petrarch, about the studia humanitatis of Greek and Roman antiquity and its eventual revival during

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42 Taylor simply argues that what distinguishes 'modern exclusive humanism' from preceding forms of humanism is "the idea that (human) flourishing involves no relation to anything higher." He adds that post-Enlightenment sympathy for 'pagan self-assertion' "has something in common with modern exclusive humanism." Charles Taylor, Modern Social Imaginaries, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 57.
the Italian Renaissance, for example. In defense of Taylor, one might argue that he is much more interested in working out some of the philosophical, theological, and educational implications of exclusive humanism in A Catholic Modernity than he is in offering any meaningful historical treatment of the concept. The point he may be trying to make is that the dichotomy between the higher realm of transcendence and the lower realm of humanity is operative throughout the history of humanism, and that these two realms—the higher and the lower—can be understood, historically, in reference to one another. Another way of putting this might be to say that God’s will and human will are in tension throughout history, and, further, that the fullest affirmation of life is found in a reconciliation between the two. If this is indeed the point Taylor is intending to make in A Catholic Modernity, it is not entirely explicit in his text. Irrespective of his intent, in simultaneously emphasizing the spiritual frailties of ‘exclusive humanism’, neglecting the diversity of humanisms, and favouring a Christian humanistic approach, Taylor might be faulted for unwittingly hindering an open dialogue between a variety of humanistic positions, the very dialogue he seeks to advance.

7.8 Kantian Religion as a Source for Modern Exclusive Humanism

Though Kant’s philosophy is the primary source for Taylor’s depiction of modern exclusive humanism in A Catholic Modernity, Taylor’s engagement with Kant’s spiritual views warrants far more theological attention than it receives. What are Kant’s spiritual views precisely, and how have prominent Catholic thinkers (other than Taylor) reacted to them?

The most insightful remarks Kant has made on spirituality can be found in his Critique of Practical Reason, his Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, and his Critique of Pure Reason. Perhaps the most widely quoted passage on the matter can be found in the first of these texts, the Critique of Practical Reason:

“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me. I do not need to search for them and merely conjecture them as though they were veiled in obscurity or in the transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence.”

Kant’s spirituality is entirely immanent, entirely existential. The starry heavens above and the moral law within are naturally accessible. One’s consciousness need not pierce a veil of transcendence to

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admire and revere them. Note Kant’s language when speaking of transcendence. He speaks of transcendence in terms of mere ‘conjecture,’ as an ‘obscurity … beyond [his] horizon’. That which is transcendent for Kant is that which cannot be known. Kant works out the implications of this in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* where he writes that “only the pure faith of religion, based entirely on reason, can be recognized as necessary and hence as the one which exclusively marks out the true church … the pure moral faith must take precedence over the ecclesiastical.”\(^{45}\) Kant’s religion takes the form of a de-institutionalized spirituality. His sole church is the Church of Reason. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant asserts that he “had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.”\(^{46}\) What appears to be a perplexing turn of phrase here is really a clarification of Kant’s perspective. The ‘knowledge’ being denied here is the knowledge of the transcendent; the faith being confirmed here is faith in reason. Missing from these Kantian assertions is any sense that reason, and what Christian theologians of the Middle Ages referred to as ‘revelation’, are connected. (‘Revelation’ is defined here, in terms of Scripture and Tradition, as truth which transcends the human intellect). The centuries-old harmony between ‘reason’ and ‘revelation’ evaporates in Kantian agnosticism.

Or does it? In the latter stages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant retreats to a defense of metaphysics. He writes that:

> “From the whole course of our critique we will have been sufficiently convinced that even though metaphysics cannot be the foundation of religion, yet it must always remain its bulwark, and that human reason, which is already dialectical on account of the tendency of its nature, could never dispense with such a science, which reins it in and, by means of a scientific and fully illuminating self-knowledge, prevents the devastations that a lawless speculative reason would otherwise inevitably perpetrate in both morality and religion.”\(^{47}\)

Is Kant in contradiction here with his previous assertions? One of the pillars of the Kantian epistemological project is the idea that finite reason, ‘locked’, as it were, in time and space, is simply incapable of knowing the infinite. The discipline of ‘metaphysics’ as understood by a host of Christian medieval thinkers, was not merely a ‘science’ as Kant conceptualizes it, but a window to revelation itself – a window to the knowledge of God. Kant argues in the above passage that though metaphysics “cannot be the foundation of religion,” reason “could never dispense with” metaphysics. We need to unpack the meaning of these lines. First, for Kant to claim that metaphysics cannot be the foundation of religion is akin to claiming that reason itself must be that

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\(^{47}\) Ibid., 700.
foundation. Second, for Kant to claim that reason could never dispense with metaphysics is akin to claiming that reason could never dispense with the science of metaphysics (and not with metaphysics conceived as a window to the revelation of God). The science of metaphysics is described by Kant as being the ‘bulwark’ or safeguard of religion. Kant is presumably referring to the ‘religion’ of reason here. The science of metaphysics, which offers “a fully illuminating self-knowledge,” thus acts as a rational check upon the potential lawlessness of reason itself. According to Kant then, metaphysics is not an open window to divine revelation, but a closed door to human reason. Interpreted in this light, Kant’s agnosticism remains consistent and there are no apparent contradictions - the truth of God can neither be proven nor disproven.

In his 1971 series of radio lectures entitled Faith and the Future, Fr. Joseph Ratzinger, already an internationally renowned theologian, offered some on-air opinions on Kant’s religious views. These views have since been published and are well worth considering. Ratzinger is clear in his articulation of the damage Kant has done to the unity of western philosophical thought:

"Since Immanuel Kant, the unity of philosophical thought has more and more become disrupted. The thing to suffer most has been the reliable certainty that man can press, by solid intellectual argument, behind the realm of physics to the being of things and to their ultimate cause ... Even where metaphysics is still practiced, the former situation cannot be reinstated. Philosophy no longer exists - only philosophies ... There is thus no point at which faith can any longer link up securely with human thought ... [Kant] reduced philosophy to the analysis of the conditions of the possibility of human knowledge, to the elucidation of the laws of human consciousness ... [yet] consciousness never spills over in the direction of being, or vice versa; consciousness takes the place of being. The frontier of subjectivity never opens up ... [and] the walls of [one's] own consciousness [become] more and more impenetrable. [With Kant], [t]here was no longer any way out of the reality that [lies] beyond consciousness ... The sobering result [is that] a century and a half after Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, philosophy had not become an exact science, but found itself more fragmented and more helpless than ever."48

Ratzinger’s critique of Kant is unique in that it underscores the connection between philosophical thought and theological thought. For Ratzinger, reason and revelation are connected; both are properly oriented to truth. When reason and revelation are disconnected, the unity of truth is shattered. An immanent humanism that excludes a transcendent God, (i.e. an ‘exclusive humanism’), cannot know the fullness of truth. Ratzinger interprets Kant as replacing divine being with human consciousness. This move effectively encloses subjectivity in its own proverbial bubble, further distancing it from the God of truth. The great irony for Ratzinger here, is that in its quest for certainty, the Kantian epistemological project has made philosophy more uncertain than ever.

Notwithstanding one’s agreement or disagreement with Joseph Ratzinger’s aforementioned views on Immanuel Kant, the point here is that he makes a serious effort to bring the disciplines of

philosophy and theology into conversation, something Taylor fails to do in his reflections on Kant in *A Catholic Modernity*. While it is no doubt the case that Taylor is far more comfortable and, indeed, far more astute, in the realm of philosophy than he is in the realm of theology, that he has often preferred not to wear his Catholic faith on his philosophical sleeve, and that he has strived to make his arguments accessible to the widest possible audience, it is nonetheless true, in the case of Kant, that Taylor's effort to 'retrieve transcendence' for modern exclusive humanism is, in spite of its persuasiveness, somewhat compromised by its failure to engage philosophical discourse *in concert* with theological discourse.49

49 Although he has described Joseph Ratzinger as a man of “luminous intelligence,” and as having a “deep spiritual life,” Taylor's published opinions on Ratzinger's theology have not been altogether uncritical. In *Sources of the Self*, for example, he writes that “[t]he very anti-humanism of much evangelical religion today, or of figures like Cardinal Ratzinger, has been defined by the views targeted as rivals.” See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 318. In ‘Benedict XVI’ an article which appeared in the journal *Public Culture* shortly after Cardinal Ratzinger's election to the papacy, Taylor writes: “[t]he election of Pope Benedict XVI seems, to many people, to indicate a deepening estrangement of the Catholic Church from modern secular culture in the West. It is a common perception that thinkers like Cardinal Ratzinger oppose this culture root and branch and are inclined to denounce it as a ‘culture of death’ or a ‘dictatorship of relativism’. And many self-appointed spokesmen for modern secular culture return the compliment and brand the church as anti-modern, reactionary, and so on.” See Charles Taylor, ‘Benedict XVI’, in *Public Culture* 18:1, 2006, Duke University Press, 7-10. The line running through both of Taylor's critiques is that the Cardinal/Pope's doctrinal theology lacks i) pastoral sensitivity and ii) an appreciation for modern diversity. Taylor neglects to mention, however, that the Cardinal/Pope has not seen doctrinal clarity and pastoral care as mutually exclusive, and has, in the context of modern diversity, sought to distinguish views that merely 'interpret' from views that fundamentally 'oppose' the Catholic faith. [For my own views on the (pre-papal) theology of Joseph Ratzinger, see Anthony Palma, 'Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and the Christian Concept of Sacrifice: A Liturgical Study', (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada, 2006)].
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THE ETHICS OF AUTHENTICITY

8.1 CBC Massey Lectures

In 1991, Taylor delivered the prestigious Massey Lectures on CBC radio. The lectures, established in 1961 in honour of Vincent Massey, former Governor General of Canada, are co-sponsored by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the House of Anansi Press, and Massey College at the University of Toronto. They “enable distinguished authorities to communicate the results of original study or research on important subjects of contemporary interest” and are widely regarded across Canada and around the world. The title of Taylor’s lectures was The Malaise of Modernity, which, in 1992, was republished, with a new index, by Harvard University Press, as The Ethics of Authenticity. Taylor’s Massey Lectures grew out of his earlier 1989 publication of Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity. According to Taylor, The Malaise of Modernity was written “largely in a Tocquevillian spirit.” It “attempted to describe the ethic of authenticity, which emerges from the Romantic-expressive tradition I had articulated in Sources of the Self, and to discuss the ways in which this can be led astray and trivialized in contemporary society.”

8.2 Sources of the Self

Since Sources of the Self is the larger work from which The Malaise of Modernity is partly derived, and since it is still regarded by many to be Taylor’s magnum opus, we need to consider what it has to tell us. Taylor describes the raison d’être of the book in the following way:

“This was my first large-scale attempt to make a philosophically-informed reflection on history. The theme was the development of the modern understanding of the human agent, with its peculiar and often conflicting features: an individual, potentially disengaged from history, society, and the body, and yet with inner depths, calling for further definition through expressive activity, with an identity which he or she can contribute to define. My thesis is that we are all caught in the tension between what we have drawn from the Cartesian-Lockean tradition and the Enlightenment on one hand, and what we have learned from the Romantic-expressive movement on the other.”

Sources of the Self is an exercise in historical retrieval. According to Taylor, “[t]he book attempts to define the modern identity in describing its genesis.” His genealogical portrait of the modern self is

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3 Ibid.
“meant to serve as the starting point for a renewed understanding of modernity.” He avoids both radically optimistic and radically pessimistic readings of modernity, both of which, he argues, are “shallow and partial” and ignore “the full complexity and richness” of our situation. Sources of the Self is divided into five parts. Part I, ‘Identity and the Good’, offers a preliminary discussion of the connection between “senses of the self and moral visions,” a connection Taylor reiterates at various points in the book. Parts II-V constitute the main argument of the book, with each chronological part representing a particular feature of modern selfhood – ‘Inwardness’, ‘The Affirmation of Ordinary Life’, ‘The Voice of Nature’, and ‘Subtler Languages’. A final chapter, entitled ‘The Conflicts of Modernity’, concludes the ambitious and challenging work, which runs more than 600 pages.

Though one cannot possibly do justice to the sophistication of Sources of the Self in a few meager paragraphs, a brief account of each of its parts will help us relate the text to the educational issues discussed in The Malaise of Modernity.

As mentioned, ‘Identity and the Good’ offers a preliminary discussion of the connection between selfhood and morality. Taylor argues here that contemporary moral philosophy, cut off from the Platonic notion of a larger ‘cosmic order’, is ontologically impoverished in as much as it prioritizes what it is right to do rather than what it is good to be. He laments the Kantian move toward an imminent ethic that has reduced morality to mere rational calculation, stifling the spirit in the process. In opposition to this move, he claims that each of us exists in an inescapable moral framework, which embeds us in a cultural reality, with background assumptions, and the autonomy to make strong evaluations in relation to webs of interlocution, such that each of our lives is lived within a meaningful narrative. Each of our identities is many-sided, however, and not easy to articulate. Not only is each of our identities difficult to articulate, adds Taylor, but modernity and the moral philosophy that accompanies it, have rendered the possibility of a shared moral framework increasingly challenging, further complicating attempts at both subjective and collective understanding.

The first modern theme which Taylor treats in Sources of the Self is that of ‘Inwardness’. Taylor traces the emergence of modern inwardness through four thinkers in the Western Tradition: Plato, Augustine, Descartes, and Locke. Each of these archetypal thinkers has had an important part to play on the path to modern introversion. For Plato, self-mastery is essential for self-understanding. To be master of oneself is to be rational. Rationality is the unity of the ‘inner’ with the ‘outer’ world.

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6 Ibid., x.
7 Ibid.
of forms. In his ‘allegory of the cave’, Plato likens this move to a turn by the eye of the soul away from the illusion of shadows toward a brightly lit reality. An ordered soul is one properly attuned from within to the external world of forms. A disordered soul is one improperly attuned to that same world.

After Plato, the next stop in Taylor’s historical account is Augustine. Augustine Christianizes Platonism. With Augustine, the things of the world are signs of the thoughts of God. These signs draw us inward, and then upward, to God. It is God who animates the soul, by way of the grace of a holy spirit, in the direction of truth. A soul at peace is a soul in union with God; a restless soul is a soul alienated from God. Alienation from God is caused by sin, defined as the corruption of the will. A sinful soul is a soul that proudly puts itself in the place of its Creator. The consequence of this is a tendency to dominate rather than to receive. Taylor reads Augustine’s turn from external moral sources toward internal moral sources as an anticipation of Descartes’ philosophical project. Augustine’s turn to the inward subject paves the way for the Cartesian cogito — ‘I think therefore I am’.

With the arrival of Descartes, the ‘Father of Modernity’, divine reason is transformed into human reason. Rationality is no longer seen as an attunement to a ‘cosmic order’; it is now seen as an internal capacity of the human subject. Descartes’ skepticism radically separates mind from body, to the point, Taylor argues, of aberration. In the Cartesian paradigm, strength of will becomes the key virtue. Mind is radically disengaged from the world of experience, and assumes an instrumental stance toward it, which objectifies, neutralizes, and disenchants, such that the world is no longer seen as an embodiment of a spiritual, meaningful, and expressive order defining the good. Descartes assures us that the truth is not something we find, but something we build.

According to Taylor, Locke intensifies this Cartesian move. Locke sees the mind as a blank slate or *tabula rasa*. As such, the mind has no recourse to innate ideas. As an empiricist, Locke holds that all knowledge is grounded in sense experience, by way of the objects of one’s perceptions. The implication of Locke’s theory of mind is that each person is the author of their own identity; each person can, within reasonable limits, freely define, shape, and/or transform the content of their character. What the self is in Lockean terms, Taylor argues, is a capacity to perpetually remake its own identity. For Locke, identity is self-generated. Taylor refers to Locke’s conception of the self, somewhat obscurely, as the ‘punctual’ self, presumably because a ‘punctual’ self is a self fixed to a finite point within time, rather than to an infinite point outside time. A ‘punctual’ self, then, is an existential self subject to constant change, without an eternal anchor to ground its essence. The
appeal of Locke's conception of the self lies in the promise of control, that is, of being radically
disengaged from one's own self for the purpose of willfully fashioning one's own identity.

In the end, the intellectual journey Taylor takes us on from Plato, to Augustine, to Descartes, to
Locke, reveals the extent to which the modern conception of the 'inward' self is, as it was in ancient
times, no longer understood to be meaningfully embedded in a larger cosmic order. The
implications of this dramatic move in the history of ideas are remarked upon throughout Sources of
the Self.

The second modern theme which Taylor treats in Sources of the Self is that of 'The Affirmation of
Ordinary Life'. He uses this expression to denote aspects of human life concerned with the worldly,
that is, with labour and the family, with production and reproduction, and with the accompanying
virtues of industry, sobriety, and restraint. Taylor attributes the emphasis on these aspects of human
life to the spirituality of the Protestant Reformation, as outlined in the writings of Luther and
Calvin. The motto at the heart of this spirituality was 'solo fidei, solo gratia, solo scriptura' (i.e. by faith, by
grace, and by scripture alone are we saved). The Catholic Church is no longer seen as a mediator between
the human and the divine. It is the Reformational rejection of divine hierarchies, of ritualistic
pieties, and of monastic vocations, which inevitably leads, Taylor argues, to an enhanced status for
what was previously considered by the medievals to be 'mundane' and 'profane'. If ordinary life was
sacred, as the Reformers claimed, everyone could participate in it. The medieval understanding of a
holy calling reserved only for sacrificing priests and religious was largely rejected. The 'affirmation
of ordinary life' is further intensified by the rise of Enlightenment science, with its Deistic leanings,
its rejection of the traditional doctrine of Original Sin, its disenchantment of the world, and its
insistence that the moral law is immanently knowable by way of nature (e.g. Bentham's
utilitarianism) or reason (e.g. Kant's categorical imperative). The idea of a transcendent and
Trinitarian God intervening in the affairs of the world to affect human salvation gradually fades
from the epistemological picture. As Spinoza's pantheism held, God and the world are one and the
same. To worship the world is to worship God.

The third and final modern theme which Taylor treats in Sources of the Self is that of 'Expressivism'.
Taylor is most concerned here with the Counter-Enlightenment Romantics and post-Romantics
and with the cultural shift they helped to bring about. The basic point he makes in outlining the
romantic roots of expressivism is that the decline of the old cosmic order perspective necessitated
the emergence of a new poetic discourse - a 'subtler language' in Shelley's words. The poets and
philosophers of Romanticism rejected the rational, scientific objectivity of the Enlightenment in
favour of a more emotive, aesthetic subjectivity. Transcendence was sought within immanence.
Nature, including human nature, was conceived as a source of beauty and goodness, rather than as fallen and corrupt. Wholeness was achieved by listening to the voice of nature from without and from within. The true Romantic was a creative artist, with an intimate connection to nature, one whose ultimate end was expressive self-fulfillment. This ideal was realized, as we have seen, in the work of Herder. For Herder, all persons and all cultures have their own unique face, their own unique identity, which is expressed in their own unique language. Taylor cites Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche as examples of post-Romantic thinkers. Whereas the Romantic outlook is one of a harmonious integration of reason and emotion, the post-Romantic outlook is one of creative imagination. In the case of Nietzsche (whose ethical writings were influenced by Darwin’s theories of evolution and natural selection) creative imagination is at the service of self-affirmation, or ‘will to power’. By contrast, the modernist reaction to the post-Romantic outlook, as exemplified in the writings of Joyce and Proust, seeks an escape from the self. Taylor reads this modernist reaction as a refusal of the ‘depth’ of temporal responsibility. With the arrival of the Post-Modernists – Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida (all of whom Taylor classifies as ‘neo-Nietzscheans’) – no single narrative can capture or unify the complexity, diversity, and/or variety of human experience. Relations of power now define the self, and the meaning of language is challenged by deconstruction. Taylor sees Post-Modernism as further intensifying the lack of expressive ‘depth’ found in Modernism. As with his earlier reading of Romantic expressivism, he argues that the loss of ‘depth’ in Modernity and Post-Modernity is brought upon by a waning, in hearts and minds, of a transcendent, ‘cosmic order’ perspective, such that what it means to be a ‘self’ at all becomes increasingly difficult to articulate.

In ‘The Conflicts of Modernity’, the conclusion to Sources of the Self, Taylor describes his motives for writing the book as: i) an exercise in self-understanding; ii) an effort to examine the modern identity more closely so as to live it more fully; and iii) a work of retrieval, which he describes as “an attempt to uncover buried goods through rearticulation – and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring the air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit.” 8 Much of Taylor’s conclusion focuses on the modern tension between ‘self’ and ‘community’. He writes of a threat of a breakdown in modern ‘therapeutic’ culture, of a loss of substance and an increase in shallowness, of a selfish atomism indifferent to public duty, and, most importantly, of a loss of meaning. “We are now in an age,” Taylor asserts, “in which a publicly accessible cosmic order of meanings is an impossibility. The only way we can explore the order in which we are set with an aim of defining

moral sources is through ... personal resonance.”9 He argues, however, that the adoption of a wholly secular outlook, however prudent it might appear to be, is not likely to resolve the dilemma of modernity. An outright rejection of the religious dimension of human life would amount to a mutilation of some of our deepest spiritual aspirations. “High standards need strong sources,” he adds.10 Taylor ends Sources of the Self on a hopeful note: “It is a hope that I see implicit in Judaeo-Christian theism, (however terrible the record of its adherents in history), and in its central promise of a divine affirmation of the human, more total than humans can ever attain unaided,” he writes.11 For Taylor, then, redeeming the modern identity, in both its individual and communal forms, means retrieving the ‘buried goods’ of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

8.3 The Malaise of Modernity

This brings us to Taylor’s Massey Lectures, The Malaise of Modernity, which, as previously mentioned, were later republished, in the United States, as The Ethics of Authenticity. As noted at the beginning of this section, The Malaise of Modernity is Taylor’s attempt “to describe the ethic of authenticity, which emerges from the Romantic-expressive tradition ... articulated in Sources of the Self, and to discuss the ways in which this can be led astray and trivialized in contemporary society.”12 Based on this remark, then, we can safely assume that it is the third of Taylor’s three themes in Sources of the Self – ‘expressivism’ – which is at play in The Malaise of Modernity. His Massey Lectures further develop this theme.

Taylor writes of three modern malaises in The Malaise of Modernity. By ‘malaises’ he means “features of our contemporary culture and society that people experience as a loss or a decline, even as our civilization ‘develops’.”13 The modern malaises identified by him are i) the danger of individualism, ii) the primacy of instrumental reason, and iii) the decline of political participation. Taylor associates each of these modern malaises with an accompanying ‘loss’. Individualism leads to a loss of meaning, instrumental reason leads to a loss of purpose, and a decline in political participation leads to a loss of freedom.14 The bulk of The Malaise of Modernity is concerned with the first of these three malaises, namely, the danger of individualism and its accompanying loss of meaning. Taylor argues throughout his book that modernity has its ‘boosters’ and its ‘knockers’, those who affirm modernity and those who reject modernity; neither of these two sides, however,

10 Ibid., 516.
11 Ibid., 521.
14 Ibid., 10.
fully appreciates the complexity of the modern condition. He asserts that there is much to be admired and much to be frightened by in modernity, but that the right path to take involves steering modern developments “towards their greatest promise” and avoiding “the slide into debased forms.”

The second chapter of Taylor’s Massey Lectures, ‘The Inarticulate Debate’, includes a discussion of political philosopher Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students*. Bloom’s book, on the New York Times best-seller list for months after publication, sparked a heated debate on the value of a liberal education. According to Taylor’s reading, Bloom argues that today’s educated youth are basically relativistic in their outlook on life. They hold their relativism, he adds, not only as an epistemological stance, but as a moral stance, as well. Grounded in the principle of mutual respect for individual self-fulfillment, the doctrine of relativism affirms that a person’s life choices are his/her own and ought not to be challenged. Bloom, leaning heavily on Nietzsche, thinks the culture of self-fulfillment has shut out more stringent ideals formerly dominant in our culture, ideals that transcend the self, be they religious, political, historical, environmental, or otherwise. The nobility of the soul becomes ‘narrowed’ and ‘flattened’ as a result. Heroism is replaced by survivalism. Yet Taylor disagrees with Bloom in his one-sided assessment of modernity. Unlike Bloom and other authors, Taylor resists all-too-easy denunciations of egoism, hedonism, laxity, narcissism, and permissiveness in his interpretation of modern culture. He thinks these Spenglerian denunciations altogether miss the point. The point for Taylor is that those who are inspired by Romanticist ideals, feel called to an expressive self-fulfillment, that is, that there is a moral force driving them to an ‘ideal of authenticity’ that cannot simply be dismissed as mere self-indulgence:

“But there is something I nevertheless want to resist in the thrust of the arguments that these authors present. It emerges clearest in Bloom, perhaps most strongly in the tone of contempt for the culture he is describing. He doesn’t seem to recognize that there is a powerful moral ideal at work here, however debased and travestied its expression might be. The moral ideal behind self-fulfillment is that of being true to oneself, in a specifically modern understanding of that term. A couple of decades ago, this was brilliantly defined by Lionel Trilling in an influential book, in which he encapsulated that modern form and distinguished it from earlier ones. The distinction is expressed in the title of the book, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, and following him I am going to use the term ‘authenticity’ for the contemporary ideal.”

Taylor associates the ideal of authenticity with a certain strand of liberalism, a liberalism of neutrality, which is impartial on the question of ‘the good life’. The consequence of a liberalism of

16 Ibid., 15.
neutrality, he argues, is an extraordinary inarticulacy about one of the central ideals of modern culture, namely, authenticity. While Taylor knows that everything is not what it ought to be in modernity, he finds the root-and-branch condemnation on the part of some traditionalists partial, shallow, and unhelpful, and, unlike Bloom, nonetheless thinks that authenticity should be taken seriously as a worthwhile moral ideal. What is being attacked by critics, Taylor asserts, is in fact, inauthenticity, that is, debased rather than empowering forms that betray the very ideal of authenticity. Taylor does not claim that ‘authenticity’ is synonymous with ‘relativism’, as Bloom does. “So far from being a reason to reject the moral ideal of authenticity,” Taylor writes, “(relativism) should itself be rejected in its name.” He admits that what he calls “the culture of tolerance for individual self-fulfillment,” can lead to a relativism where all choices are affirmed as equally worthy. Yet, he argues, the ideal of authenticity cannot be defended without reference to ‘horizons of significance’, (e.g. nature, society, and history), that is, the given boundaries that shape the meaning of a particular human life. “[S]elf-centred ‘narcissistic’ forms [of life] are indeed shallow and trivialized ... as Bloom says,” writes Taylor. “But this is not because they belong to the culture of authenticity. Rather it is because they fly in the face of its requirements.” ‘Authenticity’ in Bloom’s sense is thus ‘inauthenticity’ in Taylor’s sense. At its best, Taylor argues, modern authenticity allows for greater self-responsibility, for the freedom to choose one’s own style of life, and for the opportunity to espouse one’s own beliefs, all of which point to a “richer mode of existence” in contrast to the more static, hierarchical, know-thy-place mindset of our ancestors. What is needed to better understand the modern ideal of authenticity, in Taylor’s view, is neither a fully optimistic support, nor a fully pessimistic rejection, nor a carefully balanced trade-off of the ideal, but rather the work of retrieval, via intellectual history. This will assist in entering sympathetically into the authenticity of the modern age, with a view to resisting its corruption and restoring the better angels of its nature.

8.4 Allan Bloom’s ‘The Closing of the American Mind’

Bloom’s 1987 book, The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students, which sold over a million copies, remained on the New York Times Best-Seller list for months, and prompted an outcry in America, and beyond, on the future of

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18 Ibid., 17.
19 Ibid., 40.
20 Ibid., 74.
The Closing of the American Mind is first and foremost a response by a University of Chicago political philosopher to the problem of relativism in the contemporary academy. "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of; almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative," writes Bloom. He laments the indiscriminate 'openness' of the modern democratic university where the only 'absolute' is freedom itself. Bloom claims that students know much less than former generations and are more cut off from the Western intellectual tradition than ever before. His provocative list of causes includes: feeble books; unrefined music; a preoccupation with self; a distorted notion of equality which mistakes equality of opportunity for factual equality; racially motivated admission quotas; a lowering of standards, radical feminism; a separation from family, community, and nature; a lack of commitment to love; and a lame eroticism. Bloom argues that 'nihilism' stands between the student and the modern university.

As was his teacher Leo Strauss, Bloom is a staunch critic of modernity. Modernity, for Bloom, is a product of the Enlightenment and of the political revolutions in France, England, and America, which followed. According to him, modernity is synonymous with reason and science, with natural rights, with democratic liberty and equality, with a leveling of traditional authority, with a rejection of divine revelation, and with the secularization of Christianity. With the birth of the modern, "the city is cut loose from nature and is a product only of man's art." We are no longer defined as 'souls' in modernity; we are now defined as 'selves'. The particular dignity of humanity has replaced the universal dignity of God. Such distinctions as 'authentic and inauthentic', 'sincere and insincere', which Bloom attributes, in part, to the writings of Rousseau, supplant 'true and false' and 'virtue and vice'. These linguistic alterations have had serious effects on our thinking. Nietzsche, too, is responsible for a consequential change in our language, turning concepts of 'good' and 'evil' into

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22 Ibid., 172.
23 Ibid., 201. Bloom's use of Rousseau here is questionable. In Bloom's own translation of the Emile, for example, Rousseau equates truth with nature. "Let us set down as an incontestable maxim that the first movements of nature are always right," writes Rousseau. This single sentence captures the main thrust of his philosophy of education as outlined in the Emile. What is 'nature' for Rousseau? He comes closest to defining it in Book I. After admitting that "perhaps this word nature has too vague a sense," he goes on to add that "an attempt must be made here to settle on its meaning." Rousseau then (vaguely) defines nature in human beings as the "original dispositions (to which) everything must be related." These 'dispositions' are akin to 'sensations', that, from our birth, we are affected by, consciously aware of, and make judgments in relation to. The theme of 'nature' is threaded throughout the Emile. It is found in Rousseau's concept of 'negative education', an education that seeks to preserve freedom from unnecessary coercion, one that protects man's original unity against the forces that divide him. It is found in Rousseau's psychological understandings of 'amour-de-soi' and 'amour-propre', two kinds of 'self-love', (a natural form of self-love that does not depend upon others, versus an unnatural form of self-love which is the product of socialization). It is found in his mention of Daniel Defoe's novel Robinson Crusoe, the one novel Emile is permitted to read before the age of twelve, a novel that highlights the need for self-sufficiency. It is found in Rousseau's Enlightenment-inspired rejection of the Christian doctrine of Original Sin in Book IV's Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar. For Rousseau, nature is good and right; society is evil and corrupt. An education that places the cultivation of all that is 'natural' in the student is the heart and soul of the Emilian project. Rousseau's concept of 'nature' reveals itself to be less a compromise between the freedom of the child and the authority of the teacher, less an opportunity for 'discovery learning', than a mask for sly coercion, however. The teacher is the potter and his student is his clay. Rousseau's argument for negative education in the Emile is flawed because in attempting to retain amour-de-soi, he appeals to amour-propre. A social construction cannot bring about what is natural in the child. In appealing to the regulative function of amour-propre in his defense of the primary value of amour-de-soi, Rousseau undermines his own educational project. He fails to practice what he preaches. In the end, nothing could be more unnatural than Rousseau's manipulation of 'nature'. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Émile or On Education, trans. by Allan Bloom, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1979), 92 & 39.
mere values. These thinkers lead Bloom to claim that “the novel aspect of the crisis of the West is that it is identical with a crisis of philosophy.” The cause of the crisis is relativism, which Bloom finds “appalling,” “astounding,” and “degrading.” Apart from a retreat from the wisdom of the ancients, what bothers him the most about relativism is “our easygoing lack of concern about what (it) means for our lives.” “Western rationalism,” he adds, “has culminated in the rejection of reason.”

Much of Bloom’s The Closing of the American Mind reads as an updated version of Alexis de Tocqueville’s classic work Democracy in America. Toqueville’s criticisms of democracy’s preference for conformity and mediocrity over greatness and excellence, for example, are echoed in Bloom, as are its preference for the historical over the eternal. Bloom places part of the blame for the state of the contemporary academy on ‘The Sixties’, which he describes as “an unmitigated disaster.” Bloom witnessed a radical politicization of the university during this time, a time in which university administrators gave way to pressure from mass student movements that, in turn, had significant academic consequences, including a near-abandonment, on the part of many liberal arts colleges, of a ‘Great Books’ approach to higher education. New voices on campus were demanding an end to the ‘elitist’, ‘racist’, and ‘sexist’ curriculum of ‘dead white males’. Bloom saw the surrender of a classical vision of a well-educated human being, as embodied in the Great Books program, as unforgivable. In his view, “[w]ithout recognition of important questions of common concern, there cannot be serious liberal education, and attempts to establish it will be but failed gestures.” A good liberal education is one that “feeds the student’s love of truth and passion to live a good life.” The languishing of the Humanities, concludes Bloom, “proves only that they do not suit the modern world (and) may well be an indication of what is wrong with modernity.”

Bloom’s controversial book ignited a flurry of critical reviews. Some of these reviews bore colourful titles such as ‘Allan in Wonderland’, ‘Bloom and Doom’, ‘Chicago’s Grumpy Guru’, and ‘The Closing of Allan Bloom’s Mind’. In an article entitled ‘Allan Bloom and the Critics’, Werner J. Dannhauser, a past professor of Government at Cornell University (and confidant and colleague of Bloom), identified the sixteen most frequent charges against The Closing of the American Mind.

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25 Ibid., 197.
26 Ibid., 239.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 240.
29 Ibid., 320.
30 Ibid., 343.
31 Ibid., 345.
32 Ibid., 358.
These accusations included: “sexism, racism, elitism, Straussianism, esoteric writing, slopping writing, absolutism, making scapegoats of students, ignorance of professional philosophy, un-Americanism, failure to understand rock music, pessimism, uncritical advocacy of the Great Books, bad scholarship, and neglect of religion.”34 Notable among the flurry of reviews was ‘Undemocratic Vistas’, a perceptive New York Review of Books piece by Martha Nussbaum in which she criticized Bloom for excessive abstraction, for a lack of practicality, for ignorance of non-Western traditions, and for not being responsive enough, in his one-size-fits-all proposal for the Great Books, to the intellectual needs of individual students.35 The Closing of the American Mind was lauded by the Republican Right and loathed by the Democratic Left. From the Right, William Kristol wrote that:

“No other recent book so brilliantly knits together such astute perceptions of the contemporary scene with such depth of scholarship and philosophical learning. No other book combines such shrewd insights into our current state with so radical and fundamental a critique of it. No other book is at once so lively and so deep, so witty and so thoughtful, so outrageous and so sensible, so amusing and so chilling.”36

While from the Left, David Rieff wrote that:

“The odd thing is that Bloom doesn’t seem actually to like America. Indeed, when it comes time for him to describe anything about the place, he speaks only in what might be called that new grammatical mood invented by neo-conservatives: the denunciative. Bloom hates American mores, decries American families, despises American teenagers, and takes no notice of the beauty of the American landscape. This is, to say the least, a peculiar stance for a man who claims to love America, but in fact it is the hallmark of the neo-conservative Right.”37

Famed educational theorist Neil Postman weighed in on the debate with a balanced review, which cut across political allegiances, highlighting both the strengths and the weaknesses of Bloom’s book:

“Although he does not seem to know it, Bloom is arguing that students need stories, narratives, tales, theories (call them what you will), that can serve as moral and intellectual frameworks. Without such frameworks, we have no way of knowing what things mean … It is odd that Bloom did not see that the student uprisings of the late 1960s (which he detested) were an attempt to construct a new story for a changing world … It is odd because that is what Bloom’s complaint is really about: the fact that our young people have no stories to guide them in managing the information of their culture and directing their education. He wants them to go back to the great books because they may find there the stories that have in the past given coherence and purpose to learning. Perhaps that will work. But it will not, I think, unless the young are helped to reread those tales, to

reconstruct them in light of the problems of our own times ... But we should thank him for reminding us that education must have a purpose, and a purpose connected to some larger, coherent tale. If we cannot find a way to help our students discover such a purpose, by constructing a meaningful tale, they are very likely to remain culturally illiterate.”

I have gone into some detail about Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* in order to demonstrate that Taylor’s all-too-simplistic remarks about Bloom in *The Malaise of Modernity* fail to do justice to the complexity of Bloom’s argument. There are some remarkable similarities between Taylor and Bloom. Bloom’s anxiety over the Enlightenment’s disenchantment of the world, his concern to ground democratic regimes in a strong moral foundation, his critique of a ‘rights over duties’ approach to political philosophy, and his respect for the place of religion in modern secular society, are all Taylorian themes. But Taylor neglects to mention his agreements with Bloom. There are two points of difference worth taking up here, as well. First, Taylor’s reading of Bloom is reduced to a quick remark about Bloom’s “tone of contempt for the culture he is describing.” Yet there is no effort on Taylor’s part to explain the actual reasons for Bloom’s contempt. The perhaps unintended impression Taylor leaves with his reader is that Bloom’s contempt for the culture he is describing borders on the irrational, which as we have seen, (whether one agrees with Bloom or not), is hardly the case. Second, Bloom’s statement in *The Closing of the American Mind* that the modern use of “authentic-inauthentic” has replaced traditional use of “true and false” shows that, contrary to what Taylor sees, Bloom does in fact recognize what Taylor describes as “the moral ideal behind self-fulfillment,” namely ‘authenticity’. Unlike Taylor, however, Bloom argues that the modern notion of ‘authenticity’ supplants a rational understanding of what is true and what is false. The short format of the Massey Lectures would have allowed for at least some clarification of Bloom’s position, along with Taylor’s response, on these two points, I think. In my view, an oversimplification of Bloom’s position and a failure to take his arguments seriously, ultimately weaken Taylor’s defense of the modern principle of ‘authenticity’ as outlined in his Massey Lectures.

### 8.5 Lionel Trilling’s ‘Sincerity and Authenticity’

40 Ibid., 201.
Lectures at Harvard University, on Sincerity and Authenticity. In this series of six lectures, on ‘The Origin and Rise of Sincerity’, on ‘The Honest Soul and the Disintegrated Consciousness’, on ‘The Sentiment of Being and the Sentiments of Art’, on ‘The Heroic, the Beautiful, and the Authentic’, on ‘Society and Authenticity’, and on ‘The Authentic Consciousness’, Trilling offers a literary perspective on the transition from ‘sincerity’ to ‘authenticity’ in Western cultural discourse. He reminds his reader early on in his text that the word ‘sincerity’ is derived from the Latin term sincerus meaning “clean, or sound, or pure.”

He identifies three considerations in light of sincerity: i) “the sincerity of the person making the judgment;” ii) “the degree of correspondence between the principles avowed by a society and its actual conduct;” and iii) “the extent to which a society fosters, or corrupts, the sincerity of its citizens.”

Trilling argues that the concept of ‘sincerity’ differs from culture to culture; for the French, sincerity consists in “telling the truth about oneself to oneself and to others,” whereas for the English, sincerity consists in communication “without deceiving or misleading.” The artist, too, seeks authenticity – “his goal is to be as self-defining as the art-object he creates.”

Trilling’s treatment of the social implications of the modern notion of authenticity takes him on a whirlwind literary tour, from Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness to Diderot’s Neveu de Rameau, in a quest to distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic. In a published essay ‘On the Teaching of Modern Literature’, Trilling writes that “[n]othing is more characteristic of the literature of our time than the replacement of the hero by what has come to be called the anti-hero, in whose indifference to or hatred of ethical nobility there is presumed to lie a special authenticity.”

Known for his attentiveness to what he himself describes as the variety, possibility, complexity, and difficulty of his fictional characters, Trilling is fascinated with the idea of ‘the mask’ in modern literature, and supports his fascination with a host of corresponding references: Wilde: “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth;” Emerson: “Many men can write better in a mask than for themselves;” and Nietzsche: “Every profound spirit needs a mask.”

As with individuals, so too with societies. As Trilling shows, societies need masks just as much as individuals. Quoting from J.H. Plumb’s book The Death of the Past, Trilling adds that “[i]ndustrial society, unlike the commercial, craft, and agrarian societies which it replaces, does not need the past. Its intellectual orientation is toward change.

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42 Ibid., 27.
43 Ibid., 58.
44 Ibid., 100.
rather than conservation, towards exploitation and consumption ... The past becomes, therefore, a matter of curiosity, of nostalgia, of sentimentality ... it is not the sanction of authority (or) the assurance of destiny." One of the key insights in Trilling’s Sincerity and Authenticity, and indeed, in much of his writing elsewhere, is that alienation from our past leads to alienation from ourselves. A forgetfulness of the past, particularly in the realm of education, can lead an entire society astray, on a dusty road to inauthenticity.

In my view, however, Trilling’s greatest contribution in Sincerity and Authenticity is his revelation of the meanings the ancients attributed to the word ‘authenticity’, meanings that have themselves been ‘masked’ by modernity:

“The procedures of the great movement of art of the early century may serve to put us in mind of the violent meanings which are explicit in the Greek ancestry of the word ‘authentic’. A authenteo: to have full power over; also, to commit a murder. A authentes: not only a master and a doer, but also a perpetrator, a murderer, even a self-murderer, a suicide. These ancient and forgotten denotations bear upon the nature and intention of the artistic culture of the period we call Modern.”

This revelation from Trilling is profoundly unsettling to a modern audience. We moderns have forgotten, or perhaps, been led to forget, the true etymology of authenticity, as it was classically defined. Nowhere in Taylor do we read that authenticity is akin to self-murdering; nowhere do we read that the thought of having full power over oneself, when taken to its logical extreme, can result in an act of violence upon oneself. As was the case with his failure to seriously address Allan Bloom’s critique of modernity, Charles Taylor neglects to confront Lionel Trilling’s exposure of the darker side of authenticity. As pointed out earlier, Taylor writes in The Malaise of Modernity, that “I am going to use the term ‘authenticity’ (as defined by Trilling) for the contemporary ideal.” I have italicized the word ideal deliberately, of course, since Taylor is surely not referring to the more unsettling meanings of the ancient etymology of the word as noted above by Trilling. One could go so far as to say that Taylor is rather inauthentic about the meaning of authenticity itself. With his use of both Bloom and Trilling, the pattern that emerges in Taylor’s writing is one of affirming significant points that support his argument, and neglecting significant points that do not. While it is clear that Taylor is more optimistic than pessimistic about the modern condition, careful study of his interlocutors, Bloom and Trilling included, can lead one to better appreciate his sins of omission on the question of modern authenticity.

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48 Ibid., 131.
8.6 Taylor, Authenticity, and the Philosophy of Education

A number of philosophers of education have drawn on Taylor’s understanding of ‘authenticity’ in their own academic work. This work can be sub-divided into two categories: first, research relating Taylor’s notion of authenticity to ‘the dynamics of the self’ in education, and second, research relating Taylor’s notion of authenticity to ‘linguistic theories and practices’ in education. The research in both of these categories attempts to work out the various educational implications of a commitment to an ethic of authenticity.

The first of these two categories, research relating Taylor’s notion of authenticity to ‘the dynamics of the self’ in education, includes studies on the nature of authentic selves and education (Smeyers, 1994); public and private perspectives on authenticity in religious education, both past and present (Miedema, 2006); conceptions of authenticity in teaching (Kreber et al., 2007); and authenticity and constructivism in education (Splitter, 2009).

Smeyers argues that Taylor’s analysis of authenticity in education is more conceptual than empirical, that it absolutizes the positive aspects of dialogicality, and that it does not rule out selfish individualism, subjectivism, or narcissism. Smeyers is right on his first point, but wrong on his second and third points. Taylor is well attuned to the distortions of authenticity in the name of selfish individualism, subjectivism, or narcissism, distortions that can have an adverse effect on dialogicality. He wants to overcome such distortions. For Taylor, how one thinks about the concept of authenticity has a major effect on how one puts authenticity into practice, especially in an educational setting.

Miedema maintains that authentic religious education involves support for and sensitivity toward a student’s personal relationship with God, that the aim of religious education is not to indoctrinate a student into a particular religious institution, and that religious educators should be open to allowing a student to explore, by way of course content, his/her own unique form of religiosity. Though Taylor has not articulated his views on religious education in any comprehensive way, a logical consequence of his interest in the philosophy of William James, for example, would be the admission that plurality is as evident in religion as it is in other areas of human endeavour, that there are varieties of religious and non-religious experience, and that such realities ought to be taken

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into account, at the macro and micro levels of educational administration, in both public and private schools.

Kreber et al., in reviewing the literature on conceptions of ‘authenticity’ in teaching, contend that there is no single, universally agreed-upon definition of the term:

“Recent North American literature in adult and higher education has attached value to authenticity and highlighted the significance of authenticity in teaching. ‘Authenticity’ is seen, for example, to make individuals more whole, more integrated, more fully human, more aware, more content with their personal and professional lives, their actions more clearly linked to purpose, ‘empowered’, better able to engage in community with others, and so forth.”

“The literature reviewed would also suggest that ‘authenticity in teaching’ could involve these features: consistency between values and actions; presentation of a genuine self as teacher; care for students; care for the subject and interest in engaging students with the subject around ideas that matter; care for what one’s life as a teacher is to be; self-knowledge and confronting the truth about oneself; being defined by oneself rather than by others’ expectations; critically reflecting on how certain norms and practices have come about; self-definition in dialogue around horizons of significance; making educational decisions and acting in ways that are in the important interest of students, and ultimately society; promoting the ‘authenticity’ of others (at least their learning and possibly their development in a larger sense); reflecting on purposes (and on one’s own unique possibilities, that is those that matter most) in education and teaching; and (constructive developmental) pedagogy emphasizing the dialogical character of the teaching-learning interaction.”

In the multiplicity of meanings associated with ‘authenticity in teaching’, Kreber et al. are much impressed by Taylor’s idea of ‘horizons of significance’, which, they argue, is a moral ideal that has not garnered sufficient attention in the discourse of contemporary education, on matters including pedagogical strategy, curriculum design, and professional development for teachers. Horizons of significance involve ways in which teachers define themselves as educators, which in turn, have profound effects, both conscious and unconscious, on the students they teach. The larger question of purpose is not unfamiliar to an authentic educator. Kreber et al. write that “importantly, authenticity in teaching ... would need to include negotiating the tension between creative originality and self-definition in dialogue around horizons of significance.”

Taylor’s remark in The Malaise of Modernity that “[t]he struggle ought not to be over authenticity, for or against, but about it, defining its proper meaning” is surely a clue as to how he would respond to the work of Kreber et al. In short, Taylor would give full marks to those who labour over the meaning of authenticity, which he sees as modern culture’s motivating ideal. The struggle over the meaning of authenticity,

52 Ibid., 39.
53 Ibid., 36.
Taylor writes, can persuade people “that self-fulfilment, so far from excluding unconditional relationships and moral demands beyond the self, actually requires these in some form.” In response to the caricaturizing critics of ‘authenticity’, who see it in pejorative terms as a regrettable expression of selfish individualism, Taylor’s view is that a richer understanding of the variety of the meanings associated with ‘authenticity’ in the modern age will open us up to a better appreciation that it is, indeed, an uplifting moral ideal.

Splitter, our final commentator, claims that the self is constructed by way of inter-subjective dialogue. A dialogical perspective on the self grounds authenticity in the relationship between the private and the public. Splitter reads Taylor as advocating a position whereby mere membership in a collectivity renders a person de facto ‘authentic’, a position which is indifferent to the need for developing, encouraging, and cultivating reflective dialogue. A key priority for Splitter is the ‘reconstruction’ of classrooms as communities of inquiry such that students make sense of themselves affectively, cognitively, socially, and morally ‘among others’. Splitter thinks that a proper learning environment is one in which students are simultaneously learning and growing as authentic human beings. Splitter’s argument appears to confine Taylor’s understanding of reason to mere ‘belonging’, (in the Herderian sense), however, and in doing so, underestimates the critical capacities intrinsic to the very ‘reason’ Taylor employs, capacities that would not rule out the reflective dialogue and communal inquiry Splitter so strongly advocates. Included in Taylor’s conception of human ‘reason’, a conception Splitter ignores, is its capacity to discern its place in the ‘Reason’ of the cosmos. Splitter’s notion of reason is a purely naturalistic one, which, contrary to what Taylor advocates, gives no credence to the role of ‘transcendence’ in the classroom.

In the end, what is common in the analyses of Smeyers, Miedma, Kreber et al, and Splitter, is the sense that authentic personhood rests in some larger connection beyond the self, despite the fact that there is, among them, a difference of opinion as to what that larger connection should be. But the key similarity in their respective educational analyses is the fundamental insight that one cannot be ‘authentic’ on one’s own.

A second category of philosophers of education that have drawn on Taylor’s understanding of ‘authenticity’, includes those whose academic work relates Taylor’s notion of authenticity to linguistic theories and practices in education. This second category includes studies on language and educational development (Hammond and Eisenberg, 1992); language and educational research

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Hammond advances a conception of a well-educated person as a ‘sophisticated conversationalist’, a conception that moves beyond the tension between expressivist and utilitarian understandings of the modern person, as identified by Taylor, to a more Wittgensteinian appreciation for dialogue, a conception that sees sound educational practice as rooted in rich communicative activity. In a reply to Hammond, Eisenberg doubts whether the tension between expressivism and utilitarianism, as identified by Taylor, is central to our understanding of the modern person. Why not the tension, he asks, between humanism and positivism? Eisenberg finds Taylor’s narrative of the modern self problematic in that it does a certain injustice to historical complexity. Eisenberg also doubts whether language is essentially expressive. What both Taylor and Hammond, neglect, notes Eisenberg, is the significance of silence; communicative holism includes silence as well as dialogue. Eisenberg takes issue, as well, with Hammond’s failure to explain what ‘sophisticated’ dialogue really is. How is one to know whether a classroom dialogue is ‘sophisticated’ or not? What criteria of excellence would apply? Who is to judge? Eisenberg raises three criticisms here. First, Taylor would certainly not deny that there are intellectual movements in tension in modernity that are not reducible to the expressivist-utilitarian divide. Every historian of ideas has choices to make in the unraveling of a narrative. Taylor’s project is one of stressing the profound influences of the Romantic and Enlightenment traditions on our understanding of the modern self, the former of which is connected, through thinkers like Rousseau, to expressivism, and the latter of which is connected, through thinkers like Locke, to utilitarianism. The tensions between these intellectual strands are between inner/outer, subjective/objective, emotional/rational understandings of human personhood. Eisenberg is vague on what he takes ‘humanism’ and ‘positivism’ to be, unclear on how these intellectual movements are consequential for a modern understanding of the self, and, in contrast to Taylor, indifferent to both the humanistic aspects of Romanticism and to the positivistic aspects of Enlightenment.

Taking up Taylor in a slightly different way, Frowe asserts that language and reality are closely interwoven in Taylor’s work, that language actively shapes the reality of educational experience, and, more particularly, that language can and does have an important influence on the structure of social practices within education, whether it be on the quality of teacher-student relationships, or on the business-like ‘management’ of schools. Frowe’s application of Taylor’s philosophy of language to

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the realm of education is insightful, though he has little to say about how an educator can effectively determine whether or not a given vocabulary of words is appropriate or inappropriate in an educational context, such as when remarks are made in a classroom which some deem to be derogatory, or when a minister of education refers to students as ‘clients’ and to teachers as ‘service-providers’ in public debate. Language affects the way we think and feel about reality, and this is no less true for education.

Semetsky, our final commentator, is an admirer of the French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze. She rejects what she perceives to be Taylor’s characterization of post-modern language as ‘decline’ in favour of a characterization of post-modern language as ‘becoming’; rejects Taylor’s essentialist, metaphysical language of self in favour of a constructivist, naturalistic language of self; and rejects Taylor’s equation of any deviation in the fixed meaning of an abstract ideal with disorder and immorality, in favour of a greater attentiveness toward practical difference in questions of identity. Deleuze would surely have difficulty with the notion of ‘authenticity’ in so far as he rejects the idea of a true, integrated, apriori self. For Deleuzians, identity is an unstable construction. On the horizontal plane of history, what one ‘is’, is in perpetual flux. The self changes in accordance with its ‘positionality’. One is what one is, at any given time, because one is different from another, both in nature and in society, and not because there is any transcendental form which one’s ‘essence’ is a reflection of. Taylor views the post-moderns as being heavily influenced by Nietzsche’s idea of ‘will to power’. For Taylor, post-modern thought, of which Deleuze is a representative, is synonymous with a radical freedom which places the moral limits of the self at risk. Semetsky’s Deleuzian critique of Taylor awakens us to a more existential conception of the self, however one with significant implications for education. Taking Semetsky’s train of thought a step further, one might be inclined to say that ‘existentialist-thinking’ schools and teachers are more likely to produce ‘existentialist-thinking’ students, just as ‘essentialist-thinking’ schools and teachers are more likely to produce ‘essentialist-thinking’ students, and, furthermore, that the way in which an institution responds to the question of human identity affects every aspect of its educational mission.

In the end, what is common in the analyses of Hammond, Eisenberg, Frowe, and Semetsky is an astute observance of the ways in which language can both define and distort authentic human communication in educational institutions. Each contributes to a better understanding of how language has the power to create one’s educational reality.

In examining two categories of research - the first relating Taylor’s notion of authenticity to the dynamics of the self in education; the second relating Taylor’s notion of authenticity to linguistic theories and practices in education - we have learned that authentic personhood rests in some
larger connection beyond the self, and that authentic language can enhance the quality of one’s educational experience. What these two insights share, of course, is a real concern for dialogue. In considering the educational implications of a commitment to an ethic of authenticity for both persons and institutions, then, it turns out that dialogue is the heart of the matter.57

8.7 Authenticity in the Modern World

Two recent studies, both of which reference and are very much influenced by Taylor’s own reflections on authenticity, confirm the extent to which the ideal pervades modern culture. The studies in question are Andrew Potter’s The Authenticity Hoax: How We Get Lost Finding Ourselves and R. Jay Magill Jr.’s Sincerity: How a moral ideal born five hundred years ago inspired religious wars, modern art, hipster chic, and the curious notion that we all have something to say (no matter how dull).

Potter argues that in a disenchanted, secular, liberal, hyper-commercialized, mass media society, the quest for a self-fulfilling authenticity serves as a bogus replacement for traditional sources of deeper meaning. “Absent from our lives is any sense of the world as a place of intrinsic value, within which each of us can lead a purposeful existence,” writes Potter. “And so we seek the authentic in a multitude of ways, looking for a connection to something deeper in the jeans we buy, the food we eat, the vacations we take, the music we listen to, and the politicians we elect.”58 Potter packs his analysis with a variety of cultural touchstones linked to both the search for ‘authenticity’ and/or the discovery of ‘inauthenticity’: organic foods, Starbucks coffee, exotic yoga, ecotourism, pop art, Oprah Winfrey, Sarah Palin, Lady Gaga, The Daily Show, Stephen Colbert, assorted spin doctors, corporate scandals, the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, etc. Quoting the philosopher Harry Frankfurt, Potter notes that “[o]ne of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit.”59 Frankfurt’s remark points to the fact that the gap between appearance and reality is often much wider than acknowledged in modern life. Potter’s thesis is that the more we seek ‘authenticity’ in our contemporary culture, the more we artificially exacerbate our own alienation from the truth about ourselves.


59 Ibid., 11.
In contrast to Potter, Magill argues that “the only ‘hoax’ about authenticity and sincerity in our own time is how they have been misappropriated and abused, not whether they are real or not.” Magill’s analysis is enriched with examples of authenticity and/or inauthenticity from the world of literature. He is equally fascinated by characters in literature who mask their true intentions through deceit and trickery (Machiavelli), as he is by those characters who go out of their way to prove just how transparent they really are (Montaigne). Magill cites Moliere’s Tartuffe, where, in one scene, Madame Pernelle reveals to Orgon: “My dear, appearances are oft deceiving / And seeing shouldn’t always be believing ... False suspicions may delude / And good to evil oft is misconstrued.” And from Moliere, he moves to Shakespeare’s Hamlet, where Polonius reminds Laertes: “This above all – to thine own self be true / And it must follow, as the night the day / Thou canst not then be false to any man.” Rounding out Magill’s list of literary examples are Erasmus (“True and sincere faith and charity must not be feigned”), Rochefoucauld (“Sincerity comes from an open heart. It is extremely rare; and what usually passes for sincerity is only an artful pretence designed to win the confidence of others”), and Emerson (“Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of another person, hypocrisy begins.”) Like Potter, Magill has his own litany of hip ‘authenticity’ markers: trucker hats, undershirts, facial hair, aviator glasses, tube socks, tattoos, photoshopped advertising, facebook, twitter, youtube, etc. Unlike Potter, however, Magill’s thesis is that ‘authenticity’ is not an ersatz quality, but an undeniably real one that has unfortunately become subject to increasing distortion in modern consumer culture.

As we have seen, through Sources of the Self and The Malaise of Modernity, through interpretations of Allan Bloom and Lionel Trilling, through an assortment of book reviews, and through the writings of philosophers of education, Charles Taylor and his interlocutors, (including Potter and Magill), have been deeply immersed in the debate over the meaning of ‘authenticity’ in the modern world. It is a debate that has had and will continue to have relevance for contemporary educators. One of the key tensions that emerges upon reflection of the contents of the authenticity debate, is the tension between authenticity and truth. Several questions arise here: Is authenticity a relative truth or an objective truth? Can it be both? If yes, then how? If no, then why not? What is the relationship between these different kinds of truth and to their moral and epistemological claims? What standard of truth ought to be applied in forming judgments about both authenticity and inauthenticity? Struggling with such questions, and the tensions to which they lead, help us further unpack the concept of authenticity, and provide us with a clearer understanding of its relevance for contemporary education.

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60 R. Jay Magill Jr., Sincerity: How a moral ideal born five hundred years ago inspired religious wars, modern art, hipster chic, and the curious notion that we all have something to say (no matter how dull), (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 231.
61 Ibid., 37.
62 Ibid., 41, 60, 116.
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THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

9.1 ‘The Politics of Recognition’ in Higher Education

Having assessed the extent to which Taylor’s concept of ‘recognition’ emerges from Hegel’s philosophical writings, through a shift in the history of ideas from a more subjective to a more intersubjective understanding of human freedom, we can now turn to a discussion of what the concept of recognition entails when applied to contemporary education. As we will see, Taylor’s own consideration of the theme of recognition touches on two controversies, namely, the Western canon debate and the place of religious education in a liberal democracy.

Before moving any further, however, we need to return to Taylor’s landmark essay on ‘The Politics of Recognition’, which served as the inaugural lecture at Princeton University’s Centre for Human Values, founded in 1990. (An initial summary of this essay was provided in Chapter One). A brief refresher might be helpful here. The thesis of Taylor’s highly acclaimed essay ‘The Politics of Recognition’ – a concept first used by Hegel, whom Taylor identifies as the philosopher of ‘recognition’ par excellence – is “that one’s identity is largely shaped by the recognition, or, indeed, the misrecognition of others, that persons or groups can suffer real harm, including self-hatred, when a false, distorted, and/or contemptible picture of their identity is mirrored back to them ... Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe,” Taylor writes, “[i]t is a vital human need.” Since authentic human identities are formed in community, and not in isolation, they must be given a fair chance to develop, both within the private sphere of the family, and the public sphere of the larger society. Taylor argues that the move from a hierarchically-based ‘honour’ society to a democratically-based ‘dignity’ society has profoundly shaped the link between recognition and identity. In contemporary Western liberal societies, the call for equal dignity often takes the form of a demand for constitutional rights. Both individuals and groups demand their respective rights in the public sphere, and these rights often clash. Taylor distinguishes between two types of moral commitment for resolving such clashes: a substantive commitment, which involves a degree of consensus on the common good, and a procedural commitment, which relies upon supposedly

1 Robert R. Williams writes that “intersubjective recognition is for Hegel the universal shape and pattern of freedom, including all the virtues, and of social institutions from the family through civil society and state.” See Robert R. Williams, Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 3.
'neutral' rules in the resolution of disputes. As a Québecker, Taylor is far less enamored with proceduralism, insofar as it is ill equipped to manage cultural difference.

The clash of individual and group rights in modern liberal societies extends, as Taylor points out, to the realm of education, as well. (As noted in Chapter One, issues of 'identity', 'multiculturalism', 'globalization', and 'pedagogy', are all educationally tied to the 'School of Recognition'). The locus of the recognition debate in higher education is found within the Humanities where demands are made by various academic stakeholders to re-evaluate, adjust and/or expand 'the canon' of curricular literature. “What has come about with the modern age, Taylor writes, “is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which this can fail. That is why the need is now acknowledged for the first time. In premodern times, people didn’t speak of ‘identity’ and ‘recognition’, not because people didn’t have (what we call) identities or because these didn’t depend on recognition, but rather because these were then too unproblematic to be thematized as such.”3 In the ‘canon debate’, the traditional Eurocentric canon of ‘dead white males’ comes under heavy scrutiny by groups long marginalized by Western education, including women, persons of colour, homosexuals, aboriginals, atheists, Muslims, etc. The claim is that the transmission of the Western literary heritage is not simply an exercise in preservation, but is itself a kind of production. As such, a more global, multicultural curriculum will be better placed to properly address constituencies that have been historically marginalized, leading to greater sympathy, mutual understanding, and the recognition of equal dignity and respect. While discounting the notion that the canon debate is a mere choice between ‘civilization’ on one hand and ‘barbarism’ on the other, as some defenders of the older curricula have argued, Taylor supports a balanced, moderate, and thoughtful expansion of the traditional canon, one which avoids an essentialist imposition of one set of cultural standards on the whole:

“There must be something midway between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other. There are other cultures, and we have to live together more and more, both on a world scale, and commingled in each individual society ... There is perhaps after all a moral issue here. We only need a sense of our own limited part in the whole human story to accept the presumption. It is only arrogance, or some analogous moral failing, that can deprive us of this. But what the presumption requires of us is not peremptory and inauthentic judgments of equal value, but a willingness to be open to comparative cultural study of the kind that must displace our horizons in the resulting fusions.”4

4 Ibid., p. 72.
But how far should the university - (i.e. presidents, principals, department chairs, program directors, course administrators, professors, teaching assistants, researchers, etc.) - go to accommodate the diversity of intellectual perspectives? This is the central question in the ‘politics of recognition’ debate in higher education.

9.2 Reactions to ‘The Politics of Recognition’

A number of responses emerged in the wake of Taylor’s essay on ‘The Politics of Recognition’. The best of these responses came in the form of commentaries, five of which were included in the extended collection Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition. The commentators were Susan Wolf, Steven Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, and Anthony Appiah. (Jürgen Habermas’ reply to Taylor will be taken up in Chapter Thirteen). In her commentary on Taylor’s essay, Susan Wolf argues that multicultural education is socially progressive, affirming that “there is a need for a conscientious recognition of cultural diversity,” and that “we might even say that justice requires it.” By inculcating an appreciation for diversity in the young, adds Wolf, children will grow to understand and respect persons and cultures different from their own. Steven Rockefeller considers the politics of recognition in light of liberal democracy, environmentalism, and religious experience. Rockefeller sees liberal democracy as a way of life, one which ought to pervade every institution of society, and which is closely tied to experiential and experimental methods of truth, rather than to a hierarchical set of moral absolutes. In the context of his reflections on liberal democracy, however, Rockefeller sees “an uneasy tension between Taylor’s defense of the political principle of cultural survival and his espousal of open-minded cross-cultural exchange.” He adopts both an environmentalist perspective and a religious perspective to offset this liberal democratic tension.

On the environmental side, Rockefeller embraces a “biocentric egalitarianism … [in which] all cultures possess intrinsic value.” On the religious side, Rockefeller cites the need for a spirit of humility in acknowledging the sacredness of human life, a spirit that moves far beyond a mere

5 One such response was from Arthur Ripstein: “The simplistic character of Taylor’s account comes out in his silence about a number of related questions any theory of cultural rights must address. What counts as a culture surviving? How much change is still compatible with survival? Arthur Ripstein, ‘Recognition and Cultural Membership’, Dialogue, 34 (1995), 334. Another response was from Cornel West: “[M]y disagreement with Taylor is not a fundamental one, yet it does encourage him to downplay his metaphysical conception of persons and deepen his structural analytical connections between the limited public space in liberal societies and the defects of the structures of racism, patriarchy, and class ... I start precisely where Taylor never arrives, namely, with the way in which structures of racism, patriarchy, and class delimit the very public sphere Taylor wants.” Cornel West, ‘Hegel, Hermeneutics, Politics: A Reply to Charles Taylor’, Cardozo Law Review, (1988-1989), Vol. 10: 871-875.


8 Ibid., 93-93.
'presumption of equal value', which “does not fully address this deeper human need.”  

Michael Walzer wonders whether Taylor’s preference for ‘substantive liberalism’ over ‘procedural liberalism’ is justified in the American context. Noting that the Americans have never faced a ‘Québec challenge’, he asserts that “[s]o far as [American proceduralism] is concerned, there is no privileged majority and there are no exceptional minorities.”  

He adds that procedural liberalism is adequately equipped to “support schools in which the study of otherness ... [is] pursued in the deeply serious way called for in Taylor’s essay.”  

In his review of ‘The Politics of Recognition’ included in the extended collection, Anthony Appiah addresses the challenges of multicultural societies in light of ‘social reproduction’. “[O]ther things being equal,” he writes, “people have the right to be acknowledged publicly as what they already really are ... we deny them something in requiring them to hide this fact, to pass for something that they are not.”  

Appiah focuses on three important concepts alluded to in Taylor’s essay: ‘identity’, ‘authenticity’, and ‘survival’. He claims that the major categories of identity in present-day North America are “religion, gender, ethnicity, race, and sexuality,” and that there are both personal and collective dimensions to these categories.  

In arguing for a form of authenticity which is neither ‘essentialist’ nor ‘monological’, Appiah writes that “[t]he rhetoric of authenticity proposes not only that I have a way of being that is all my own, but that in developing it, I must fight against the family, organized religion, society, the school, the state – all the forces of convention.”  

Singular identities of ‘religion’ or ‘gender’ or ‘ethnicity’ or ‘race’ or ‘sexuality’, then, must be worked out in relation to all intersecting identities. In highlighting the intersection of such identities, Appiah acknowledges that he is “less happier with the collective identities that actually inhabit our globe” than (he suspects) Taylor is.  

Appiah is less content because of a wish to balance the future autonomy of citizens with cultural survival, to find a via media between the ‘politics of recognition’ and the ‘politics of compulsion’. To this end, he introduces a notion of ‘scripts’, which he defines as “narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories.”  

Appiah is in favour of ‘loosely-scripted’ as opposed to ‘tightly scripted’ life-narratives. He also argues for the creation of positive life-scripts in societies.
where infringements to dignity are most evident. It is with these claims in mind, then, that Appiah questions Taylor’s support of mandatory French-language instruction in the public schools of Québec. Such a policy, Appiah adds, “steps over a boundary” insofar as it restricts the choices of future citizens to a too-tightly-scripted narrative.17 If, in the end, there is any agreement between the Taylor-inspired commentaries of Susan Wolf, Steven Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, and Anthony Appiah, it is their collective sense that a healthy response to the politics of recognition calls for respectful democratic deliberation.

9.3 Other Perspectives on ‘Recognition’

Charles Taylor is by no means the only reputable scholar who has written on the question of recognition. There is a veritable ocean of literature on the topic.18 Apart from Taylor’s work, other leading authorities on the concept of recognition include Paul Ricoeur, Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser, and James Tully.19

Of these four scholars, the one who has done the most to define the modern concept of recognition, (and who incidentally happens to be one of Charles Taylor’s mentors), is the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. In The Course of Recognition, Ricoeur goes to great lengths to explore the multiple meanings of the word ‘recognition’, (recognoscere in Latin – ‘to know again’), that have been assigned by lexicographers throughout history. He quotes the Oxford English Dictionary as defining ‘recognition’ as “the action or fact of apprehending a thing under a certain category, or as having a certain character.”20 Other definitions for the word ‘recognition’ cited by Ricoeur include:

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18 For an excellent overview of the most recent scholarship on ‘recognition’ see Michael Seymour, (ed.), The Plural States of Recognition, (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillian, 2010): See especially ‘Hegel, Taylor, and the Phenomenology of Broken Spirits’, by Rajeev Bhargava (pgs. 37-61). [Bhargava details the degrading work of India’s ‘untouchable’ Bhangi caste who clean dry latrines and scavenge for food on a daily basis, leaving them without recognition and self-respect. “We need another politics of recognition,” writes Bhargava, “one that focuses on self-reparation … ”] In his book, Bound by Recognition, Patchen Markell quotes Hannah Arendt to the effect that “if it is good to be recognized, it is better to be welcomed, precisely because this is something we can neither earn nor deserve.” See Patchen Markell, Bound by Recognition, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 180. [If toleration is one step below recognition, then welcoming is, on Arendt’s terms, one step above. In her book, Against Recognition, Lois McNay claims that she is against recognition “in so far as [it] is not sufficiently embedded in a sociological understanding of power relations.” See Lois McNay, Against Recognition, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 2. [By way of Pierre Bourdieu’s work, McNay criticizes Taylor for disassociating language from power].
1. “To grasp (an object) with the mind through thought, in joining together images, perceptions having to do with it; to distinguish or identify the judgment or action; to know it by memory.”

2. “To accept, take to be true (or take as such).”

3. “To bear witness through gratitude that one is indebted to someone for something.”

For Ricoeur, then, to recognize is to ‘make sense’, by way of memory, of a person, thing, or act.

In The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts, Axel Honneth offers a social/psychological theory that identifies three forms of recognition – a recognition based on love, a recognition based on rights, and a recognition based on solidarity. These three forms “constitute the social conditions under which human subjects can develop a positive attitude toward themselves.” In his theory of recognition, Honneth relates love to self-confidence, rights to self-respect, and solidarity to self-esteem. In the experience of these virtues, “a person can come to see himself or herself, unconditionally, as both an autonomous and an individuated being, and to identify with his or her goals and desires.” Honneth’s empirical approach, which is highly influenced by Foucault’s understanding of power relations and by Habermas’ understanding of communicative action, sees modern recognition as a moral struggle. It is a struggle in so far as recognition cannot be given to oneself; it can only be given by others. The denial of self-confidence, self-respect, and/or self-esteem, can be emotionally crippling, and it is in the struggle to overcome such denial that the struggle for recognition is initiated.

Nancy Fraser’s ‘Rethinking Recognition’ is another influential piece in the landscape of literature on recognition. She is less interested in the cultural aspects of identity politics, than she is with their economic and democratic implications. Her critique of the politics of recognition is two-fold: first, that it tends to displace struggles for economic redistribution to alleviate inequality; and second, that it tends to reify the entrenched characteristics of group identities at the expense of democratic plurality. To replace what she calls the ‘identity model’ of recognition, Fraser proposes an alternative ‘status model’, one that aims at “overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest ... To view recognition as a matter of status means examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors.” Fraser is interested in institutional

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23 Ibid.
patterns of misrecognition, based on cultural values that subordinate certain persons to the point where they are deemed unworthy. She cites social policies that are an affront to gays, single mothers, and visible minorities, as institutional harms that perpetuate certain stereotypes, thereby alienating the groups in question. “In each case,” she writes, “an institutionalized pattern of cultural value constitutes some social actors as less than full members of society and prevents them from participating as peers.”

By addressing economic and democratic considerations, a status model of recognition would thus strive to change existing patterns of cultural value that inhibit social participation with new patterns of cultural value that foster such participation.

Another leading authority in the debate over recognition is James Tully. (Before moving to the University of Victoria, Tully was a professor of Political Science at McGill University for sixteen years, co-teaching a number of courses alongside Charles Taylor). In his latest two-volume work, Public Philosophy in a New Key, Tully devotes three essays to the subject of ‘Democracy and Recognition’ – ‘The Agonistic Freedom of Citizens’, ‘Reimagining Belonging in Diverse Societies’, and ‘Multinational Democracies: An Introductory Sketch’. The connecting thread that runs through each of these essays is his association of ‘recognition’ with ‘the rules of the political game’. Citing such thinkers as Hannah Arendt, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Michel Foucault, Tully’s focus is less on the theory of recognition than on its practice, that is, on how the game of recognition is in fact played. As with any game, rules matter: “Identity politics and struggles for recognition are games in which the contestants seek to modify and often transform the rules of recognition and action coordination of the game, not once and for all, but as their identities and diverse ways of being themselves change over time and generations, often as the result of participation in dialogues with diverse others.”

Two of the more important questions in this regard are: who decides what the rules and procedures for assigning recognition are and who decides whether particular claims are in fact worthy of recognition? Quoting John Rawls, Tully notes that these questions are “political, not metaphysical.” In a liberal democracy, recognition is won or lost by way of constitutional negotiation. Tully defines a constitution as: “1) the prevailing system of rules of mutual recognition of the identities of political actors, 2) the relations of cooperation among them, 3) the procedures for discussing, negotiating, and altering the rules, and 4) the normative considerations that bear on the rules.” The game of democratic recognition is thus a game of constitutional politics. Changing

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26 James Tully, Public Philosophy in a New Key (Volume 1), (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 152.
27 Ibid., 175.
28 Ibid., 197.
the rules of the game amounts to changing the rules of the constitution. Rules can either be fair or unfair. Rules that are seen to be fair by a sufficient majority of citizens promote recognition of difference whereas unfair rules do not. For Tully, the freedom to change the rules of the constitutional game is ‘agonistic’ in the sense that citizens must continually fight to have their respective claims recognized by the larger society.29

Where might Charles Taylor’s ‘politics of recognition’ fit in with the aforementioned four scholars? As we have seen, four separate themes are illustrated by Ricoeur, Honneth, Fraser, and Tully. Ricoeur underscores the meaning of recognition as ‘making sense’, by way of memory, of a person, thing, or act. Honneth underscores the link between recognition and cultural identity. Fraser underscores the link between recognition and economic considerations. Tully underscores the link between recognition and constitutional negotiation. Each offers a different lens through which the concept of recognition can be understood. As far as Taylor is concerned, his take on the politics of recognition runs closest to Honneth’s. Like Honneth, he is keen to highlight matters of cultural identity when examining the issue of recognition. He is less keen than Ricoeur to highlight the multiple meanings of recognition, less keen than Tully to highlight the constitutional implications of a politics of recognition, and nowhere near as keen as Fraser is in highlighting economic considerations. This comparison places Taylor solidly in the ‘cultural identity’ camp of the politics of recognition.30

9.4 Taylor’s Take on ‘Neutrality’

Taylor’s critique of ‘neutrality’ is an important feature of his philosophical work, and, more particularly, of his work on the politics of recognition. There is no shortage of evidence for this.

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29 Elsewhere, Tully cites the late Czech President Vaclav Havel on the need for respecting each other’s differences: “If the world today is not to become hopelessly enmeshed in ever more terrifying conflicts, it has only one possibility: it must deliberately breathe the spirit of multicultural co-existence into the civilization that envelops it.” James Tully, Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 211.

30 Taylor’s writings have some affinity with the writings of Iris Marion Young, as well. In her book Inclusion and Democracy, Young writes that “[t]he normative legitimacy of a democratic decision depends on the degree to which those affected by it have been included in the decision-making processes and have had the opportunity to influence the outcomes.” Iris Marion Young, Inclusion and Democracy, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5. Compare Young’s comments here to those of Taylor’s in his essay on ‘Democratic Exclusion (and its Remedies)’: “Democracy obliges us to show much more solidarity and much more commitment to one another in our joint political project than was demanded by the hierarchical and authoritarian societies of yesteryears ... Democracies work well when people know each other, trust each other, and feel a sense of commitment toward each other.” Charles Taylor, ‘Democratic Exclusion (and its Remedies)’, in Dilemmas and Connections, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 130-133. [Both Young and Taylor share an interest in promoting democratic inclusion. At the same time, however, both realize that democracy, by its very nature, tends, however unintentionally, toward exclusion. Young differs from Taylor in seeing ‘recognition’ as a starting point rather than an end to political engagement.]
As early as 1957, in an article entitled ‘Can Political Philosophy Be Neutral’, published in *Universities and Left Review*, Taylor was already showing signs of discomfort with the concept of neutrality, in this case, with the scientific tendency of linguistic analysis to render the claims of moral and political theory ‘neutral’, (or in some cases, ‘nonsensical’), by way of a fact-value distinction. “Now this analysis of the language of morals and political theory, into ‘valueless’ statements of fact on one hand, and expressions of preference which have no factual content on the other, is itself supposed to be neutral,” explains Taylor.31 “[The statement] ‘This is God’s will’, is meant as a factual statement, but it can hardly be said to be devoid of moral implications. It is ‘neutral’ only to non-believers. To believers it is even decisive.”32 Taylor’s point is that ‘fact’ and ‘value’ are inseparably intertwined in human language. “How can we discover that there is a gap between fact and value by a simple examination of language? The answer is that we can’t. Language is not simply a brute fact in the world which we have to take account of, it is also something that we speak. Before we can talk about the logic of language, we must make clear whose language we are talking about.”33

In 1962, in an article on ‘La Bombe et le Neutralisme’, published in the journal *Cité Libre*, Taylor continued his intellectual attack on the dogma of ‘absolute neutrality’, this time in the context of the Cold War. In defense of the sovereignty of Canadian foreign policy, Taylor argues that Canada, as a member of both NATO and the UN, should opt for a two-pronged strategy with respect to the two nuclear superpowers at hand – the United States and Russia. Outside the American and Soviet spheres of influence, Canada ought to join hands with smaller, soft-powered, post-imperial nation states to exert political pressure on the two superpowers to reconcile their differences. Inside the American and Soviet spheres of influence, Canada ought to encourage a politics of disarmament, negotiation, and détente. Both prongs of this strategy, if properly pursued, will aid “à assurer la paix mondiale.”34 The upshot of Taylor’s two-pronged foreign policy recommendation is that Canada cannot afford to be absolutely neutral on the threat of nuclear war, and that Canada must be wisely engaged in the struggle for global peace.

Taylor then turned his attention, in 1967, to a critique of ‘neutrality’ in political science. (His earlier 1957 piece had dealt strictly with political philosophy). In his essay on ‘Neutrality and Political Science’, Taylor reasserts his claim that facts and values are intertwined. He argues that a political

31 Charles Taylor, ‘Can Political Philosophy be Neutral?’, *Universities and Left Review* 1 (Spring 1957), 68-70.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Charles Taylor, ‘La Bombe et le Neutralisme’, *Cité Libre* 13 (Mai 1962), 11-16.
scientist's values guide his/her path of research, and that facts guide that path of research in the right direction. Taylor extends his rejection of the fact/value distinction to an analysis of explanatory frameworks. "According to the view defended here," writes Taylor, "a given framework of explanation in political science tends to support an associated value position [and] secretes its own norms for the assessment of politics and policies." 35 A political framework, he adds "cannot fail to contain some, even implicit conception of human needs, wants, and purposes." 36 The idea here is that just as facts and values are important to political scientists, so too are the theoretical frameworks within which facts and values are considered. "A given explanatory framework secretes a notion of good, and a set of valuations, which cannot be done away with – though they can be over-ridden – unless we do away with the framework ... The framework can be said to distribute the onus of argument in a certain way. It is thus not neutral." 37 In other words, as far as political science is concerned, a theoretical framework that affirms the fact/value distinction will fundamentally differ from a theoretical framework that rejects that distinction. The theoretical framework one chooses to adopt reveals certain assumptions, biases, and judgments, from the outset.

In a discussion on Taylor's critique of 'neutrality', one with a view to his educational philosophy, Taylor's 1975 essay 'Neutrality in the University' should not be overlooked. Here, he rejects absolute neutrality in reference to the public commitments of the university, arguing that "[a]bsolute neutrality is impossible in virtually any predicament where neutrality is meaningful, because we need a background of value-commitment to give neutrality a clear application." 38 In the case of the university, the 'background of value commitment' includes a dialectical understanding of truth as well as a personalist understanding of freedom. As students and teachers are likely to be concerned with and involved in the life of their university, the university ought not to "determine or restrict the form or direction of this concern or involvement." 39 There are challenges to the 'non-alignment' of the university, to be sure. Taylor does not look highly upon lucrative military and/or corporate involvement in 'progressive' university research, for example, in part because such involvement tends to legitimate the existing power structure of society. For him, a proper balance is struck between the values of truth and freedom in a publicly funded university when "members of

36 Ibid., 89.
37 Ibid., 90.
39 Ibid., 133.
the university choose their field of research with the minimum of external interference or limitation."40 To pretend, however, that the university is without obligation to the wider society it serves, is, according to Taylor, “a chimera.”41 He concludes his essay by linking the various challenges to the ‘non-alignment’ of the university with deeper strains in western culture. Though he does not probe the depths of these strains, it is clear from Taylor’s writing that the crisis to which he refers is a moral crisis. And since, as Taylor puts it, “[t]he university has been the locus where a more widespread malaise can most easily find expression,” the suggestion of ‘absolute neutrality’ in university governance, in a time of moral crisis, fails the test of public responsibility.42

In an essay published in Philosophical Arguments in 1995 entitled ‘Lichtung or Lebensform: Parallels Between Heidegger and Wittgenstein’ – (Lichtung means ‘clearing’ and Lebensform means ‘form of life’ in German) – Taylor compares the epistemological views of both Heidegger and Wittgenstein with a view to a critique of epistemological ‘neutrality’. Aside from the fact that they were charismatic geniuses who lived fascinating but controversial lives, (as their biographers, Rüdiger Safranski and Raymond Monk, have well-documented), Taylor links Heidegger and Wittgenstein by arguing that both thinkers have, through their respective appreciations for the role of ‘the background’, helped to challenge modern rationalism through a notion of engaged agency. As Taylor writes, “even my account of the knowing agent in terms of the disengaged picture must draw on such a background to be intelligible to me.”43 A retrieval of the background trumps the pure individuality (i.e. monologicality) of the knower, replacing it with a shared commonality. The background allows for the possibility of intelligibility when a statement about the knowing agent is made and/or when various sense impressions are taken in. A denial of the background would lead to incoherence. Indeed, Taylor calls the supposed ‘neutrality’ of the disengaged picture of knowing “a fundamental mistake.”44 Both Heidegger and Wittgenstein share a reliance on Kant’s ‘transcendental deduction’, as elaborated in The Critique of Pure Reason, a book Taylor describes as a ‘turning point’ in modern philosophy. Kant aims to show that the common ground of human experience is the self-consciousness of the experiencing subject. Against Hume, Kant argues that particular sense impressions are inter-related. These impressions are neither isolated from each other nor are they without connection. The reception of said impressions are not only ‘about’ the

41 Ibid., 140.
42 Ibid., 148.
44 Ibid., p. 73.
subject, but have the potential to be ‘unified’ (i.e. made meaningfully intelligible) for that subject. The philosophies of Heidegger and Wittgenstein are, for Taylor, “parallel attacks on the disengaged picture of the mind. Both put forward against this an account of engaged agency ... Both are therefore concerned with the context of intelligibility of knowledge, thought, and meaning. Both propose some notion of background (i.e. Heidegger’s ‘clearing’ and Wittgenstein’s ‘form of life’); and more, both articulate some part of the background whose neglect has allowed the disengaged view to seem plausible. Articulation plays a crucial part in their argumentative strategy; it is central to the innovating force of their philosophy.”

Heidegger and Wittgenstein, Taylor adds, are strong critics of modern technological civilization. Both provide the inspiration for a new kind of humanism that rejects modern bureaucratic-technical reason. There are, in short, many parallels for Taylor between the philosophies of Heidegger and Wittgenstein, parallels that resonate with his own intellectual commitment to epistemological realism and with his critique of a disengaged epistemological neutrality.

And finally, in his essay ‘The Politics of Recognition’, originally published in 1992, (and later expanded into book-form with a full commentary, in 1994), Taylor links his critique of neutrality with a critique of liberalism. Liberalism, he argues, cannot be neutral. It cannot profess to be blind to difference. “[T]he supposedly fair and difference-blind society is not only inhuman (because suppressing identities),” he writes, “but also, in a subtle and unconscious way, itself highly discriminatory.” It is highly discriminatory, in Taylor’s view, because it is a “pragmatic contradiction, a particularism masquerading as the universal.” When applied to Canada, modern procedural liberalism is, for Taylor, more an expression of an individualistic, liberal, anglophone culture and less an expression of a socialistic, communitarian, francophone culture. As such, Canadian liberalism cannot claim to offer “a neutral ground on which people of all cultures can meet and coexist.” His conclusion is that liberalism is a fighting creed that “can’t and shouldn’t claim complete cultural neutrality.”

46 In an interview with his intellectual biographer, Ruth Abbey, shortly after the publication of his essay ‘The Politics of Recognition’, Taylor remarks that “There’s no way to be neutral. Neutral liberalism is an angelic view, unconnected to the real world in which democracies function.” See Ruth Abbey, ‘Communitarianism, Taylor-made - An Interview with Charles Taylor’, Australian Quarterly, 68/1 (1996), 5.
48 Ibid., 44.
49 Ibid., 62.
50 Ibid.
Piecing together the various insights from the aforementioned historiography of Taylor’s critique of ‘absolute neutrality’, then, we see that whether Taylor is focused on the fact/value distinction, Canadian foreign policy, explanatory frameworks, the public policy of the university, epistemological backgrounds, or modern liberalism, his critique of ‘absolute neutrality’ remains clear. For Taylor, ‘absolute neutrality’ is a pious myth. Differences matter; in as much as they are worthy of recognition, one’s attitude toward them cannot be ‘absolutely neutral’.

9.5 The Great Books Idea

In the realm of higher education, debates about ‘the great books’ are never neutral. In what follows, I take up the issue of ‘recognition’ in relation to the recent history of such debates. Charles Taylor has not had a great deal to offer in print about the controversy surrounding ‘The Western Canon’. One would have thought that an advocate of multiculturalism such as Taylor would have had more to say on the matter. One can speculate on the reasons as to why this might be. Taylor’s decision to stand at a distance from ‘the canon debate’ may very well be the result of prudence on his part. This is not to suggest, however, that he has completely avoided the question. As we shall see, in the latter stages of our analysis, Taylor’s remarks on ‘recognition’ in relation to the curriculum of higher education are meaningful in that they transcend the usual tensions that accompany discussions about ‘gender’, ‘race’, and ‘class’. Yet, in order to fully understand his remarks, we need to examine the historical context from which they emerge. What is the origin of the ‘Great Books’ idea? When did the idea take hold? Where did the idea come from? Who have some of the key players been in promoting the Great Books? Which books have prevailed? Why have some books been included and others not? How has the controversy surrounding the Great Books evolved over time? These are some of the questions we need to wrestle with so as to understand Taylor’s contribution to the Great Books debate more fully.

In his insightful study, Making a Democratic Culture: The Great Books Idea, Mortimer J. Adler, and Twentieth-Century America, intellectual historian Tim Lacy traces the origin of the great books idea to “the transnational Victorian culture of Britain and the United States in the late nineteenth century.” One of the inspirations for the idea, according to Lacy, was the Inspector of British Schools, man of letters, poet, essayist, literary critic, and professor, Matthew Arnold. The advice offered in Arnold’s book Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism (1869) to

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51 Tim Lacy, Making a Democratic Culture: The Great Books Idea, Mortimer J. Adler, and Twentieth-Century America, (Ph.D. Dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, 2006), 25. [Thanks to Dr. Lacy for allowing me to quote from his dissertation].
familiarize oneself with “the best that has been thought and known in the world,” sparked a trend in developing lists of must-reads.\textsuperscript{52} Arnold had described an elevated culture as “having its origin in the love of perfection,” as “making reason and the will of God prevail,” and as “the pursuit of sweetness and light.”\textsuperscript{53} He defined perfection as “a harmonious expansion of all the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature.”\textsuperscript{54} In his introduction to the Cambridge edition of \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, Stefan Collini cites Arnold as remarking, in an essay on democracy, that “[t]he difficulty for democracy [is] to find and keep high ideals.”\textsuperscript{55} Collini adds that “although the aristocracy and the working class by no means escaped censure (the former perhaps being let off a little more lightly than the latter), the central target of \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, as of Arnold’s work in general, was “the bad [i.e. ‘philistine’] civilization of the English middle class.”\textsuperscript{56} Though sensitive to the economic and social challenges of his fellow citizens, Arnold was nevertheless struck by the civilizational ‘anarchy’ he witnessed in travels through his native Britain. ‘Culture’, then, was the Arnoldian answer to such ‘anarchy’. One way of restoring the cultural integrity of Britain, argued Arnold, was through enhanced standards of education.

As a student at Balliol College, (and eldest son of Thomas Arnold, a Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford), Matthew Arnold was familiar with Oxford’s undergraduate arts program in ‘Greats’. In his essay on college life at Oxford in the interwar period (1918-1939), Brian Harrison describes what traditional ‘Greats’, also known as Literae Humaniores, actually amounted to:

“Oxford discouraged any narrowly vocational approach to study, and hankered after the earlier ideal of a common culture for all junior members ... The same non-specialist values molded Oxford’s multi-subject degree-courses – most notably the ‘[moderns]/Greats’ combination of classical [Roman and Greek] literature and history] [and] philosophy [both ancient and modern], and the ‘modern Greats’ combination of philosophy, politics, and economics. Unlike Oxford’s combined-subject degrees founded in the 1960s, these combinations aimed to provide a broad education rather than to focus attention on the frontier between two single-subject courses. Indeed, the Greats and PPE courses sometimes had the effect of discouraging specialized study within their domain.”\textsuperscript{57}

In 1921, John Erskine, a Professor of Literature at Columbia University, (who also served a term as the President of the Juilliard School of Music), taught a course at Columbia based on the Oxford

\textsuperscript{52} Matthew Arnold, \textit{Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings}, Stephan Collini (ed.), (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 36.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 59, 61, & 78.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, pg. 62.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., xiii.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., xvii.
model of Ancient and Modern Greats. The course was one of the first of its kind in America.

One of Erskine's students was Mortimer J. Adler. Alex Beam's delightful study, A Great Idea at the Time: The Rise, Fall, and Curious Afterlife of the Great Books, recounts the story of how, in 1943, Encyclopedia Britannica and the University of Chicago jointly announced a multi-million dollar plan to collaborate on a 54-volume publication of The Great Books of the Western World. One of the driving editorial forces behind the project was now-Professor Mortimer J. Adler himself, a hard-working, Arnold-like, devotee of the 'Greats'. According to Beam, Adler's criteria for a 'Great Book' was that it:

1. "Be important in itself and without reference to any other; that is, it must be seminal and radical in its treatment of basic ideas or problems."

2. "Obviously belong to the tradition in that it is intelligible by other great books, as well as increasing their intelligibility."

3. "Have an immediate intelligibility for the ordinary reader even though this may be superficial."

4. "Have many levels of intelligibility for diverse grades of readers or for a single reader re-reading it many times."

5. "Be indefinitely re-readable ... It should not be the sort of book that can ever be finally mastered or finished by any reader."

These were the criteria Adler opted for; a 'Great Book' ought to be unique, traditional, intelligible, re-readable, and inexhaustible. There was no mention of selection on the basis of language, nationality, gender, race, sexual orientation, or class. A nine-member advisory committee presided over the selection process, which included ten meetings over the course of two years. Beam takes

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59 Not all were enthusiastic about the Great Books curriculum, however. Some educators, like Leo Strauss and Christopher Dawson, saw it as a replacement for traditional religious education. Leo Strauss: 'Is our present concern with liberal education and our present expectation from such liberal education not due to the void created by the decay of religious education? Is such liberal education meant to perform the function formerly performed by religious education? Can liberal education perform that function? Leo Strauss, 'Liberal Education and Mass Democracy', in Higher Education and Modern Democracy: The Crisis of the Few and the Many, ed., Robert A. Goldwin, (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally & Company, 1965), 88. Christopher Dawson: "Universal education [has] ceased to be considered as a means of communicating learning and [has become] instead an instrument for creating a common mind. In this way universal education becomes the most important agent in the creation of the new secular religion of the state or the national community, which in democratic as well as totalitarian societies is replacing the old religion of the Church as the working religion of the modern world." Christopher Dawson, 'The Crisis of Western Education' in The Great Tradition: Classic Readings on What it Means to be an Educated Human Being, ed., Richard M. Gamble, (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2008), 629.
61 The original 1952 committee, appointed by Hutchins, included: "Stringfellow Barr, Professor of History at the University of Virginia; Scott Buchanan, Philosopher; formerly Dean of Saint John's College; John Erskine, novelist and formerly Professor of English at Columbia University; Clarence Faust, President of the Fund for the Advancement of Education and formerly Dean of Humanities and Sciences at Leland Stanford University; Alexander Meiklejohn, Philosopher and formerly Chairman of San Francisco's School of Social Studies; Joseph Schwab, Scientist, Professor in the College of the University of Chicago; and Mark Van Doren, Poet, Professor of English at Columbia University." This list of committee names is provided by Robert M. Hutchins in The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education, (Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), xxvi.
full advantage of a paper trail left by the appointed committee in documenting the fascinating inner workings of the selection process, which included fierce debates about and regular vote-taking on the Great Books. The original, leather-bound, 54-volume, 32,000 page set of The Great Books of the Western World was launched in 1952 at a gala dinner at the posh Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. The original set, comprised of 443 works by 74 authors, provided a life-long cartography of reading including poems, satires, and novels; writings in law, politics, economics, and ethics; physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and astronomy; as well as philosophy and theology. These works included:


Robert Maynard Hutchins, the stylish former President of the University of Chicago, was instrumental as Editor-in-Chief in helping to launch The Great Books of the Western World and was evangelical in his praise of the project: “Here is our heritage. This is the West. This is its meaning for mankind. Here is the faith of the West, for here ... is that dialogue by way of which Western man has believed that he can approach the truth. The deepest values of the West are implicated in

62 Alex Beam, A Great Idea at the Time: The Rise, Fall, and Curious Aftlife of the Great Books, (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2008), 95. Tim Lacy notes that the New York Times dubbed the Waldorf Astoria dinner in New York City “a literary Leviathan.” According to Lacy, the attendees included businessman Nelson A. Rockefeller as well as Great Britain’s Consul General, H.A. Hobson, appearing on behalf of Queen Elizabeth. Among the guest speakers was the eminent Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, a good friend of Mortimer Adler. Lacy’s transcription of Maritain’s dinner remarks are as follows: “Allow me, as a European, to stress the significance of [the] ... faithful attention of this country to the European tradition it has inherited. It seems remarkable to me that the notion of tradition, in its living and genuine sense, is now being rehabilitated, and the task of saving and promoting the best of this very tradition [has been] taken over by the pioneering spirit ... of America. This is a sign [that] ... the historic process ... [of] intellectual and spiritual struggle on which the destinies of the world depend [have] shift[ed] to this country. Yet this ... struggle remains universal in nature, and the European mind is involved in it as deeply as the American mind ... The Atlantic is now becoming that which the Mediterranean was for thirty centuries, the domestic sea of Western Civilization ... At the core of the work undertaken in publishing The Great Books of the Western World, there is abiding faith in the dignity of the mind and the virtue of knowledge. Such a work is inspired by what might be called humanist generosity.” See Tim Lacy, Making a Democratic Culture: The Great Books Idea, Mortimer J. Adler, and Twentieth-Century America, (Ph.D. Dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, 2006), 154-156.
64 Op. cit., Alex Beam, A Great Idea at the Time: The Rise, Fall, and Curious Aftlife of the Great Books, 207. Except for the later writings of Freud, no works from the twentieth century were included in the original 1952 set of The Great Books of the Western World. There were no female or black authors included in the 1952 set either. Female authors Jane Austen, Willa Cather, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf were added to an expanded version of the collection in 1990; no black authors were included in the 1990 edition (except in the inventory of terms). The Bible was not included in either the 1952 set or the 1990 set on account of its widespread availability; a variety of Biblical citations were included in both sets, however.
this dialogue. It can be conducted only by free men. It is the essential reason for their freedom.”65 One of the volumes of the Great Books collection, entitled The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education, was authored by Hutchins. It constitutes a passionate defense of a liberal education. Every educated person, Hutchins writes, must have some acquaintance with the Great Books of the Western Tradition. “How can we say that we are defending the tradition of the West if we do not know what it is?” asks Hutchins.66 What are the Great Books? The Great Books are those that teach us who we are, strengthen our inner selves, cultivate the intellect, refine our perceptions, inspire and uplift, stimulate the imagination, promote human excellence, reflect our common humanity, and lead us to wisdom. Though Hutchins was insistent in his book that democracy relied upon a liberal education for every citizen, he had a sharp antipathy toward the suggestion, which was prevalent in his day, that every student should have his/her education ‘tailored’ to their individual needs. Hutchins strongly rejected this. “Educators ought to know better than their pupils what an education is,” he replied.67 He was equally forceful in his critique of modern science and technology, which, he thought, had grown to become ends in themselves. According to Hutchins, the expansion of the industrial economy had resulted in the educational promotion of narrow specializations, which in turn, had led to a waning of a true liberal education. “Great Books and the liberal arts were identified in the public mind with dead languages, arid routines, and an archaic, pre-scientific past. The march of progress could be speeded by getting rid of them, the public thought, and using scientific method and specialization for the double purpose of promoting technological advance and curing the social maladjustments that industrialization brought with it.”68 Yet this was mistaken, argued Hutchins. At best, greater specialization would assist people in earning a living, but it would not “contribute to the much more important elements of national strength: trained intelligence, the understanding of the country’s ideals, and devotion to them.”69 As for the criticism that The Great Books of the Western World neglected the literary achievements of the East, Hutchins reasoned that the West should be proud of its achievements, that students should come to know their own tradition before coming to know another, and that “an education based on the full range of the Western search is far more likely to produce a genuine openness about the East, a genuine capacity to understand it, than any other form of education now

67 Ibid., 49.
68 Ibid., 28.
69 Ibid., 61.
proposed or practicable." Thanks to an effective advertising and sales campaign, The Great Books of the Western World became a popular commodity in American households. In 1961 alone, a mere ten years after its initial release, 50,000 sets worth $22 million were sold.

One of the more innovative contributions of The Great Books of the Western World was the inclusion, in volumes two and three, of a 'Syntopicon', (meaning, in Greek, 'a collection of topics'). The product of eight years of labour by a supervised staff of thirty-five readers, the Syntopicon was described by Adler as "both a reference book and a book to be read ... The Syntopicon is also intended to serve as an instrument of liberal education, through the aid it can give to a certain kind of study and teaching of the Great Books. It is not inconsistent with its primary function as a reference book that it should, in addition, prove to be an instrument of research and discovery." As a tool of scholarship, the Syntopicon consisted of 102 alphabetically-listed chapters of 'The Great Ideas' along with an introductory essay for each (all 102 essays were written by Adler), an outline of relevant topics (nearly 3000), references, cross-references, additional readings, a comprehensive bibliography, and an inventory of terms, all of which were meant to reveal the network of connections within and among the Great Books. The Syntopicon facilitated historical inquiry into particular ideas, writers, and/or time periods. In his prefatory essay on the Syntopicon, Adler noted that "[t]he Syntopicon serves the end of liberal education to the extent that it facilitates the reading of the Great Books and, beyond that, the study and teaching of them." He distinguished between two types of reading, integral reading and syntopical reading. Integral reading consists of the reading of an entire book. Syntopical reading involves "the reading of one book in relation to others, all of them relevant to the consideration of the same topic." Adler argued that both integral and syntopical reading are important in shining new light on and deeper understanding of the Great Books. For him, the Syntopicon was a 'Summa Dialectica', a rich

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73 Not all were impressed by the Syntopicon either. Responding to a Life magazine feature of Adler's Syntopicon, Marshall McLuhan wrote in The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man that "[t]he 'Great Ideas' ... have been extracted from the Great Books in order to provide an index tool for manipulating the books themselves. By means of this index the books are made ready for immediate use. May we not ask how this approach to the content and conditions of human thought differs from any other merely verbal and mechanized education in our time?" See Marshall McLuhan, The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man, (London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1951, 43. Others criticized the selection of authors within the various disciplines represented by the collection. See The Great Books of the Western World: A Symposium', The Saturday Review, (Sept. 20, 1952).
75 Ibid.
articulation of ‘the great conversation’. “To the extent that (the Syntopicon) succeeds,” wrote Adler, “it reveals the unity and continuity of the Western Tradition.”

The 102 ‘great ideas’ as listed in both the 1952 and 1990 editions of *The Great Books of the Western World* are as follows:


“What distinguishes the Great Books is the originality, the profundity, and the scope of their treatment of these ideas,” wrote Adler in his appendix on ‘The Principles and Methods of Syntopical Construction’. Revealingly, one of the ideas left out of the above list was that of ‘equality’. In his 1992 book *The Great Ideas: A Lexicon of Western Thought*, Adler observed that “[t]hough fifty years have elapsed since the 102 Great Ideas were chosen, nothing that has happened in the last half-century, with one exception, necessitates a single change in that list by addition or subtraction. The one exception is the idea of equality.” In a footnote, he added that, “[t]he one exception, equality, appears (in the updated 1990 edition) in the (subordinated) ‘Inventory of Terms’; it there refers to many topics under other ideas.” Adler was acknowledging in these remarks that though ‘equality’ was a notable idea in the twentieth century, it was not sufficiently ‘great’ to be included in his list of the top 102 ideas; a striking admission - or, indeed, omission - depending on one’s point of view. In addition to Adler’s self-critique, there was no shortage of criticism directed at *The Great Books of the Western World*. Lacy’s compilation of reviews of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* collection includes harsh criticism of the project’s use of science and its use of translations. Perhaps the best review cited by Lacy, however, is that of Gilbert Highet, a

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80 Ibid.
Professor of Latin at Columbia University, who was “astonished” by the “arbitrary” list of selections approved by the advisory committee.

According to Lacy, The Great Books of the Western World emerged out of a clash of educational currents at the University of Chicago:

“At its core, this fight concerned the undergraduate curriculum. On one side, roughly, were the proponents of the elective system, progressive educators in the spirit of John Dewey, and a highly specialized, research-oriented faculty. The University’s faculty championed an empiricist outlook in the pursuit of truth. On the other side lay proponents of generalist-style education, which included a ‘core’ curriculum – centred on the Great Books – and the seminar method. They represented a backlash against vocationalism and science-oriented higher education curricula. Both movements came together in a conflict of ideas known as ‘The Chicago Fight.’

Adler and Hutchins were clearly on the generalist side of the debate, the side that cultivated humanistic learning in preparation for a ‘good life’. Adler and Hutchins were less interested in the pragmatic ends of a highly specialized, technical, vocational education, as were their opponents, than they were in a higher ideal, that of helping to empower a democratically enlightened citizenry. Adler and Hutchins were convinced that access to the ‘The Great Conversation’, via the Great Books, was far and away the best educational strategy, offering the student a window into the variety of perspectives on the ‘Great Ideas’ of the Western Tradition.

9.6 The Great Books and the ‘Multiversity’

The post-war American displacement of Europe as the world’s major political, economic, and cultural superpower led to a major reassessment of the traditional canon. In his historiography, Lacy recounts how public interest in the great books waned with the onset of the sixties and

81 Writing in The New York Times, Highet began his review by complimenting the project as “a noble monument to the power of the human mind.” He then went on to argue that: “The omissions from the set are astonishing... For 1,500 years the world read Cicero (omitted) rather than Aristotle and Plato; for 2,000 years it read Horace and Sallust (omitted) rather than Ptolemy and Archimedes. The education of the West has long cultivated Racine and Molière and Ariosto and Tasso; they are omitted. It has seldom included Fourier and Faraday; they are printed at length. It would be a valuable project to make a list of the books which have been considered essential, in large areas of the West, over long periods of the past 3,000 years; to reconstruct the bookshelves of men like Cicero, Petrarch, Erasmus, Goethe, Croce. Such a list would fairly accurately represent the Great Books of the Western World, but it would be very far from coinciding with this interesting but arbitrary collection. It would include Protestant thinkers like Luther, Calvin, Hooker, to balance St. Thomas; it would contain law and oratory; it would have much more poetry, and much more drama; it would be more broadly human.” As for the Syntopicon’s introductory essays, Highet found them to be “a little naïve in their acceptance of ‘authority’ [and] a little mechanical in their careful counterbalancing arguments.” Highet was also critical of the project’s implied notion “that Great Books are concerned only with ideas which can be logically analyzed... (on the contrary) many masterpieces of literature live in realms partially or wholly outside the realm of logic.” Tim Lacy, Making a Democratic Culture: The Great Books Idea, Mortimer J. Adler, and Twentieth-Century America, (Ph.D. Dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, 2006), 212-214.

82 Ibid., 124.

83 Lacy adds that Adler and Hutchins “never emphasized the Great Book idea’s connections to Christianity. Hutchins, moreover, was a lapsed Presbyterian, and Adler a lapsed Jew.” (Ibid., 225.)

84 Competitors to The Great Books of the Western World include Oxford Classics, Harvard Classics, The Loeb Classical Library, The Modern Library Series, Penguin Classics, and Everyman’s Library. A number of colleges and universities throughout North America have versions of the traditional Great Books program. Among these are: Chicago, St. John’s, Columbia, Notre Dame, and Carleton University in Ottawa.
seventies, but was renewed in the eighties and nineties. In short, the liberation movements of the 1960s combined with the multicultural movements of the 1970s, led to a profound cultural shift, one that negatively affected the appeal of the Great Books. This shift, in turn, had a definitive influence, in the 1980s, on American higher education. Both liberals and conservatives lined up to reject or defend the legitimacy of the 'Western Tradition'. A confluence of educational events unfolded in the decade of the eighties to revive the debate. Education Secretary William Bennett released his study To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education in 1984. Allan Bloom’s The Closing of the American Mind was published in 1987. Fierce debates at Stanford University erupted over its Western Civilization course in 1988. These events helped catapult the Great Books debate to the forefront of American culture.

We have already covered the controversy surrounding Allan Bloom’s The Closing of the American Mind in the course of this thesis; since they are relevant to our discussion of the politics of recognition in the Great Books, a closer look at both William Bennett’s report on the Humanities as well as the uprising at Stanford University should give us a fuller appreciation for the educational zeitgeist of the day.

Some believe William Bennett’s To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education was the real spark that ignited the so-called ‘culture wars’ in the United States in the late 1980s. The result of a national consultation with a variety of stakeholders in higher education, the point of Bennett’s report was clear: “Too many students are graduating from American colleges and universities lacking even the most rudimentary knowledge about the history, literature, art, and philosophical foundations of their nation and their civilization.” What was needed, according to Bennett, was a reconsideration of the traditional idea of ‘an educated person’. “There are standards of judgment,” wrote Bennett, “[and] some things are more important to know than others.” With the help of his colleagues, Bennett provided his own list of great works from the Western Tradition for the American undergraduate. “The highest purpose of reading,” he added, “is to be in the

86 Ibid., 7.
87 Ibid., 11. Bennett’s list is as follows: “[F]rom classical antiquity – Homer, Sophocles, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, and Vergil; from Medieval, Renaissance, and Seventeenth Century Europe – Dante, Chaucer, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Hobbes, Milton, and Locke; from Eighteenth through Twentieth Century Europe – Swift, Rousseau, Austen, Wordsworth, Tocqueville, Dickens, Marx, George Eliot, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Mann, and T.S. Eliot; from American literature and historical documents – the Declaration of Independence, the Federalist Papers, the Constitution, the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Address, Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘Letter from the Birmingham Jail’ and ‘I have a dream’ speech, and such authors as Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, and Faulkner … [As well as the Bible] … which is the basis for so much subsequent history, literature, and philosophy.”
company of great souls.” He blamed part of the responsibility for the decline of the Humanities on weak professors and shoddy administrators who, in the 1960s and 1970s, had relinquished their intellectual authority in favour of a relative smorgasbord of student choice. “With intellectual authority relinquished,” wrote Bennett, “we found that we did not need to worry about what was worth knowing, worth defending, worth believing. The curriculum was no longer a statement about what knowledge mattered; instead it became the product of a political compromise among competing schools and departments overlaid by marketing considerations.” Too many educational institutions in the United States lacked the confidence to put forward a clear mission statement. While Bennett applauded the post-war achievement of greater access to education on the part of women, visible minorities, immigrants, and the less well-to-do, he was cautious on the virtue of pluralism. “[O]ur eagerness to assert the virtues of pluralism should not allow us to sacrifice the principle that formerly lent substance and continuity to the curriculum, namely, that each college and university should recognize and accept its vital role as conveyor of the accumulated wisdom of our civilization.” Undergraduate students should familiarize themselves with the cultural traditions of the non-Western world, asserted Bennett, but not at the expense of the core curriculum. A student should understand his/her culture and society first, lest they become “strangers in their own land.” Recognition from within was more important than recognition from without. Bennett concluded his report with two quotations, one from Canadian novelist Robertson Davies to the effect that “a university education is meant to enlarge and illuminate your life,” the other from American journalist Walter Lippmann to the effect that “a society can be progressive only if it conserves its tradition.” On the whole, Bennett’s *To Reclaim a Legacy* was a call to educational arms, a call to professors and administrators in colleges and universities across America to look themselves in the mirror and ask whether or not they were offering the highest quality of education to their students.

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89 Ibid., 19-20.
90 Ibid., 29.
91 Ibid., 30.
92 Ibid., 29-30.
93 Conservatives who shared Bennett’s patriotic perspective included Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and George Will. Schlesinger: “Instead of a transformative nation with an identity all its own, America in this new light is seen as preservative of diverse alien identities. Instead of a nation composed of individuals making their own unhampered choices, America increasingly sees itself as composed of groups more or less ineradicable in their ethnic character. The multietnic dogma abandons historic purposes, replacing assimilation by fragmentation, integration by separatism. It belittles unum and glorifies pluribus.” Will: “Our country is a branch of European civilization. ... ‘Eurocentricity’ is right, in American curricula and consciousness, because it accords with the facts of our history, and we – and Europe – are fortunate for that. The political and moral legacy of Europe has made the most happy and admirable of nations. Saying that may be indisputable, but it has the merit of being true and the truth should be the core of the curriculum.” See ‘After the Canon: Knowledge and Ideological Representation in the Multicultural Discourse on Curriculum Reform’ by Cameron McCarthy in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow (eds.), *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 289 & 294.
Bennett’s report was vehemently attacked. Roger Kimball’s *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* recounts how the report was labeled reactionary, undemocratic, authoritarian, and an exercise in “intellectual fundamentalism,” by its detractors, and how Bennett himself was compared, by one dissenting professor, to the German dictator Adolf Hitler.⁹⁴ A more intelligent, but no less critical assessment of *To Reclaim a Legacy* was offered by the University of Chicago historian of religions, Jonathan Z. Smith. In a review published in the *American Journal of Education*, Smith condemned Bennett’s report for its “blame on people (students, teachers, parents, the public) for failing to appreciate and realize the traditional, institutionalized goals of education, rather than seize this juncture as a promising new opportunity to subject the goals, themselves, to renewed scrutiny.”⁹⁵ He dismissed its lack of “complexity,” its “colonialist” rhetoric, and its “arrogant” assumptions about the cultural superiority and homogeneity of America.⁹⁶ In contrast to Bennett’s nationalistic recommendations, Smith proposed an education for an emerging world civilization, a world, Smith wrote, “that is increasingly not of America’s choosing or of America’s imagination.”⁹⁷ He denounced the “pathetic limitations” of Bennett’s “little list” of classic works, adding that “there are no texts that are classic, there is only a classical attitude toward texts.”⁹⁸ Smith reserved his harshest criticisms for the report’s passive and indoctrinatory view of higher education, a view that neglected critical thinking and “the recognition of the conflict of interpretations.”⁹⁹ These remarks are indicative of the kind of reaction the report received in certain quarters. The reception of *To Reclaim a Legacy* confirmed that a spirited defense of canonicity by an established academic would be subjected to fierce opposition.

Events at Stanford University in the late 1980s, widely covered in the American media and in Dinesh D’Souza’s best-selling book *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*, revealed what the debate about Western culture looked like from within an institution of higher learning. In January, 1987, calls to abolish Stanford’s Western Culture program were made by a group of activists associated with the university’s Black Student Union. The program had long revolved around a core curriculum, including “such thinkers and writers as Plato, Dante, Machiavelli, Voltaire, Marx, and Freud and on such events as the ascent of Greece, the fall of Rome, medieval Christian civilization, the Renaissance and Reformation, the French and Scottish Enlightenments,

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⁹⁶ Ibid., 542-544.
⁹⁷ Ibid., 543.
⁹⁸ Ibid., 544-545.
⁹⁹ Ibid., 544-546.
and the founding of modern states.” Jesse Jackson led a march and rally on Martin Luther King Day in protest of what was seen to be a ‘racist’ and ‘sexist’ academic program catering to dead white males. Hundreds of students chanted “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western culture’s got to go” on the campus grounds. A few months later, the President’s office was occupied by a sit-in. Students at Stanford demanded change. In response to the uprising, President Donald Kennedy commissioned a task force to re-evaluate the Western culture program and offer new recommendations. In March of 1988, recommendations were presented to the Faculty Senate to drop the Western Culture program and replace it with a new program to be called ‘Cultures, Ideas, and Values’, or ‘CIV’ for short. With some professors publically denouncing the Western Culture program as a “pedagogic handicap,” the proposal was unanimously accepted by the Faculty Senate in a 39-4 vote. CIV required that all courses include works by non-European authors, women, and minorities. As D’Souza points out in Illiberal Education, “[t]he term Western was eliminated, to remove any taint or preference for European and American thought. The term cultures signaled a new pluralism – not one culture but many. Values suggested a certain relativism, in which various systems of thought would be considered on a roughly equal plane.” A new orthodoxy had been established, one which would be more responsive to multicultural diversity. As one Stanford professor of history quoted by D’Souza noted, “There is something inherently anti-intellectual about the notion of an educational institution establishing a canon … To establish a canon is to ‘convey a message about the importance of a work even before students have seen for themselves the content of [that] work.” In offering an account of the uprising at Stanford, (as well as of controversial admission policies, hiring quotas, and interventions on behalf of ‘political correctness’), D’Souza’s Illiberal Education is unsympathetic to the demands for curricular change. The title of his first chapter, ‘The Victim’s Revolution on Campus’, offers more than a clue on where the author stands. “High standards do not discriminate against anyone except those who fail to meet them,” he writes. In her New York Times review of Illiberal Education, Nancy Dye argues that “[l]ike so much of the current debate on higher education, Mr. D’Souza’s discourse is framed entirely in polarities. There are only extremes here … In Dinesh D’Souza’s academy, there is no middle ground.”

101 Ibid., 59 & 64.
102 Ibid., 67.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid., 62.
105 Ibid., 250.
Since the height of the canon debate of the late 1980s, a number of books and articles have been written that address the issue of the post-modern proliferation of ‘race’, ‘gender’, and ‘class’ in university departments of Cultural Studies, African American Studies, Women’s Studies, Gay and Lesbian Studies, Post-Colonial Studies, Pluralism Studies, and the like. Some authors have viewed the canon as a fixed entity for cultural transmission; some have viewed it as a living organism in perpetual revision. Others, seeing the idea of canonicity as ‘elitist’, ‘hierarchical’, and ‘undemocratic’, would like to abolish the canon altogether. A few have rejected the notion that a ‘canon’ has ever existed. Still others have linked the ‘selection of books’ to the creation of a ‘social reality’. There have been studies on the canon’s positive and/or negative connection to the preservation of the nation state (Readings), to global citizenship (Nussbaum), to civilizational memory (Steiner), to the production of cultural capital (Guillory), to the voiceless (Gates), to the colonially oppressed (Said), to methods of analysis (Fish), to social transformation (Searle), to the teaching of conflicts (Graff), and to the distinction between ‘high’ culture and ‘popular’ culture (West). 107 It is important to mention here that ‘the canon debate’ is just as controversial within individual disciplines as it is across disciplines. Academics in departments of Women’s Studies, African American Studies, and Gay and Lesbian Studies, for instance, are just as combative in designing curriculum for their particular programs, as are academics that gravitate toward a more interdisciplinary curriculum. 108 The controversies surrounding canon formation are no less inevitable from within these disciplines as they are from without. Who decides what books to teach? Who authorizes such decisions? Should professional academics be left to themselves to decide the answers to such questions?

The question of the purpose of a canon, is by no means clear. What is striking about the various commentators on the canon debate is the fact that they are overwhelmingly American. The only Canadian included in the aforementioned list is the late Bill Readings, formerly a professor at

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Université de Montréal. In his highly acclaimed book, The University in Ruins, Readings writes that: “The canon debate is a specifically American crisis, and, let me add, a salutary one. What we are experiencing today in departments of literature in the United States is not so much a revision of the canon as a crisis in the function of the canon. This is perhaps the clearest sign of the breakdown of the idea of the nation-state, since the canon can no longer serve to authoritatively integrate popular will and an ethnic fiction under the rubric of culture.” Why has the canon debate not been as intensely felt in the Canadian educational context as it has in America? One possible answer might be that, unlike Canada, the United States has no official policy on multiculturalism. Despite being no less multicultural than Canada, the United States is far more constitutionally inclined toward the establishment of an assimilationist, ‘melting pot’ society. Demographic change combined with the liberation movements of the 1960s have resulted in strong challenges to traditional American education. Yet without an official government recognition of multiculturalism that would naturally encourage a responsible re-evaluation of educational canonicity, the ‘canon debate’ in the U.S. has inflamed the passions it has.

9.7 Newman’s *The Idea of a University*

Another of the noticeable curiosities of the American ‘canon debate’ is the way in which many scholars have pointed to Cardinal Henry Newman’s 1852 classic on *The Idea of a University*. Both liberals and conservatives have quoted passages from Newman’s book in defense of their respective points of view. Conservatives arguing on behalf of a ‘closed’ canon have often cited Newman’s definition of a liberal education as consisting of “a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life – these are ... the objects of a University.” On the other hand, liberals arguing on behalf of an ‘open’ canon have often cited Newman’s views on knowledge in relation to learning: “[t]hat only is true enlargement of mind which is the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system.” The fact that these two passages from Newman are quoted for opposing reasons is more than revealing, I think. Both passages originate from the same book – Newman’s *The Idea of a University*. One can safely say that Newman’s intention

109 The other Canadian worthy of note here is Peter Emberley, Founding Director of the College of the Humanities at Carleton University in Ottawa. Emberley cites “the human longing for wholeness and its relation to the principles of a just and satisfying political order” as reasons for returning to the classics. See his *Bankrupt Education: The Decline of Liberal Education in Canada*, (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1994).
112 Ibid., 103.
in penning these two passages was, alas, not to contradict himself. In Newman’s eyes, the cultivation of the intellect is perfectly consistent with an enlargement of the mind.

9.8 Harold Bloom and ‘The Western Canon’

Since the dawn of The Great Books of the Western World, the person who has done most to revive the idea of a ‘canon’ of Great Books is the Yale literary scholar and self-professed Gnostic, Harold Bloom. His own contribution to the debate, The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages, was published in 1994, to wide acclaim, and much controversy. A gifted teacher and writer; intellectually intense, outspoken, cantankerous, quick-witted, with frightening erudition, and a brilliant memory, Bloom is best known for his commentaries on the Romantic poets and the works of Shakespeare, his studies of American religion, and his theory of literary influence. Written for the ‘common reader’, The Western Canon includes thoughtful reflections on twenty-six great authors in the tradition. Shakespeare is, for Bloom, the central figure of the Western Canon: “No one has matched him as psychologist, thinker, or rhetorician. [R]epresentations of human beings, the role of memory in cognition, the range of metaphor in suggesting new possibilities for language, these are Shakespeare’s particular excellences.” Shakespeare can teach us many things, including “how to accept change, in ourselves as in others, and perhaps even the final form of change.” Shakespeare, Bloom adds, “largely invented us.” It is Shakespeare’s universality which moves Bloom. “If we could conceive of a universal canon ... its one essential book would not be a scripture ... but rather Shakespeare, who is acted and read everywhere, in every language and circumstance.” Along with Shakespeare, then, Bloom’s main canonical list, which is mostly literary in nature, includes: Dante, Chaucer, Cervantes, Montaigne, Molière, Milton, Johnson, Goethe, Wordsworth, Austen, Whitman, Dickinson, Dickens, Eliot, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Freud, Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Kafka, Borges, Neruda, Pessoa, and Beckett. These are the main actors on Bloom’s canonical stage, but they are by no means the only. Inspired by Vico’s classifications in The New Science, the appendix to The Western Canon includes Bloom’s list of a variety of authoritative texts in the Western Tradition arranged in four historical sequences: ‘The Theocratic Age’, ‘The Aristocratic Age’, ‘The Democratic Age’, and ‘The Chaotic Age’. “I have tried to confront greatness directly,” writes Bloom in his preface, “to ask what makes the author and the works canonical. The answer, more often than not, has turned out to be strangeness, a mode of originality that either cannot be

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114 Ibid., 31.
115 Ibid., 40.
116 Ibid., 38.
assimilated, or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange.” 117 In addition to ‘strangeness’, Bloom counts ‘aesthetic value’, ‘sublimity’, ‘cognitive power’, ‘mastery of language’, ‘vitality’, and ‘re-readability’, among the criteria for canonicity. In judging the ordered hierarchy of Great Books, Bloom’s rule for canonical measurement is “the triple question of the agon – more than, less than, [or] equal to?”118 Bloom reminds us that life is short, and there is only so much time to read; in light of our mortality, why would anyone choose to neglect the Great Books?

Bloom’s principal targets in The Western Canon are the anti-canonizers of ‘The School of Resentment’. The school consists of six branches: “Feminists, Marxists, Lacanians, New Historicists, Deconstructionists, [and], Semioticians.” 119 According to Bloom, they “wish to overthrow the canon in order to advance their supposed programs for social change.”120 The “cardinal principle” of the School of Resentment, according to Bloom, (who cites Marxist writer Antonio Gramsci as a key representative), is that “what is called aesthetic value emanates from class struggle.”121 While Bloom is prepared to admit that “all canons are elitist,” he is not prepared to admit that the Western Canon is “another instance of what they call ‘cultural capital’.”122 He disagrees with the Marxist claim that canonicity is the ultimate expression of a dominant social class. “[T]he writer battling for canonicity may fight on behalf of a social class,” explains Bloom, “but primarily each ambitious writer is out for himself alone and will frequently betray or neglect his class in order to advance his own interests, which centre entirely upon individuation.”123 What is ‘resented’ by members of The School of Resentment, in Bloom’s eyes, is the need to compete with the ‘dead, white, male’ canonical authors. “Contemporary writers do not like to be told that they must compete with Shakespeare,” writes Bloom.124 The aspiration to canonical status necessitates an encounter with the greatness of authors like Shakespeare; it is only in strongly confronting the Canon from within, as it were, and not from without, that canonical expansion is justified. Bloom laments the decline in intellectual standards and the rise of political ideologies at many of the colleges in his native America. Such standards are “being abandoned in the name of social harmony and the remedying of historical injustice,” asserts Bloom.125 ‘Text’, for him, is far more important than ‘context’. “Whatever the Western Canon is, it is not a program for social salvation ... To read

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118 Ibid., 24.
119 Ibid., 527.
120 Ibid., 4.
121 Ibid., 23.
122 Ibid., 37.
123 Ibid., 27.
124 Ibid., 7.
125 Ibid.
in the service of any ideology is not, in my judgment, to read at all.”

Failure to engage with the Canon will lead to its demise. “[W]hat is being taught includes by no means the best writers who happen to be women, African, Hispanic, or Asian,” argues Bloom, “but rather the writers who offer little but the resentment they have developed as part of their sense of identity. There is no strangeness and no originality in such resentment.” Bloom does admit to exceptions however. “If multiculturalism meant Cervantes,” he asks, rhetorically, “who could quarrel with it?” Bloom’s notion of ‘canonicity’ is closely linked with his notion of the ‘anxiety of influence’. The ‘anxiety of influence’ is the literary theory for which he is best known. In The Western Canon, Bloom defines the ‘anxiety of influence’ as “an anxiety achieved by and in the poem, novel, or play. Any strong literary work creatively misreads and therefore misinterprets a precursor text or texts ... the strongly achieved work is the anxiety.” The ‘anxiety of influence’, then, is an inter-textual dynamic in which literary successors ‘struggle’ with the greatness of their literary predecessors. A Shakespearian reading of Freud would be one such example, notes Bloom. “Strong literature,” he adds “cannot be detached from its anxieties about the works that possess priority and authority in regard to it.”

Why bother with the Western Canon? Bloom is saddened by the contemporary “Balkanization of literary studies” into a variety of separate disciplines – ‘Cultural Studies’, ‘Post-Colonial Studies’, ‘Women’s Studies’, ‘Black Studies’, ‘Gay and Lesbian Studies’, etc. – yet he, nonetheless, wants the canon to survive. If the canon is to survive, however, students must come to see its ‘true use’. According to Bloom, “[t]he true use of (the Western Canon) ... is to augment one’s own growing inner self. Reading deeply in the Canon will not make one a better or a worse person, a more useful or more harmful citizen. The mind’s dialogue with itself is not primarily a social reality. All that the Western Canon can bring one is the proper use of one’s own solitude, that solitude whose final form is one’s confrontation with one’s own mortality.” Here we see Bloom’s Gnosticism at play. Unlike Mortimer Adler, who was primarily concerned with the Great Books for the spread of popular democracy, Bloom’s rationale in championing canonical texts is the enhancement of self-knowledge.

127 Ibid., 7.
128 Ibid., 40. Edward Said shares a similar view: “What has been most unacceptable during the many harangues on both sides of the so-called Western canon debate is that so many of the combatants have ears of tin and are unable to distinguish between good writing and politically correct attitudes, as if a fifth-rate pamphlet and a great novel have more or less the same significance.” Said’s point here is that quality has often been sacrificed at the expense of diversity. See Edward Said, ‘The Politics of Knowledge’, in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow (eds.), Race, Identity, and Representation in Education (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 313.
129 Ibid., 8.
131 Ibid., 517.
132 Ibid., 29.
9.9 Taylor and the Great Books

So where does Taylor stand in the ‘Great Books’/ ‘Western Canon’ debate? Is he an inclusivist or an exclusivist with regard to multicultural education? More inclined toward education for democracy or toward education for self-knowledge? There are two excerpts worth quoting here in reply to such questions. The first relevant excerpt is from Alan Montefiore’s aforementioned book on Neutrality and Impartiality. Late in his response to Taylor’s remarks on the topic of neutrality in the modern university, Montefiore informs us that “[i]t is not for nothing that people like Taylor are sometimes accused of being anti-revolutionary in their efforts to get the would-be revolutionaries to submit their ideas and their aims to institutionalized university discussion.” ¹³³ Montefiore’s reference to Taylor’s ‘anti-revolutionary’ approach to ‘revolutionary’ ideas is meant to convey that Taylor is a man of reason and not a man of violence. According to Taylor’s view, (or at least Montefiore’s interpretation of it), radical ideas can find their place in the academy if they earn their way in through persuasion, not aggression. Radical ideas expressed with civility can be included; radical ideas expressed with incivility must be excluded. The second relevant excerpt is from Taylor’s appearance on ‘Common Culture, Multiculture’, a 1988 episode of ‘Ideas’ on C.B.C. radio. In conversation with host David Cayley, Taylor spoke, in part, on ‘the politics of recognition’ in education, weighing in on the question of curricular reform in higher education:

“The desire to apply universal principles of fairness really gets in the way here. If you start to think in terms of what’s just and right and decide you’ve got to tell all the stories or none, that’s almost always going to end up pushing you towards a very watered-down curriculum in which a little bit of this and little bit of that and a little bit of the other gets a look in. But nobody can get really fired up with something in one or other of these great traditions to the point that it really means something to you, that you can take it and read further or write further or whatever. It isn’t going to answer this requirement if you have a tiny bit of the I Ching and two pages of aboriginal myth and half of a sonnet by Shakespeare and so on, because then nobody has a chance to get fired up by anything at all. And here I would lean very far on one side. In other words, if your resources only allow you to go very deeply into Shakespeare and not very much else, then don’t sacrifice going deeply into Shakespeare just because at the moment you can’t provide similar coverage of everything. It’s very, very important that people really get sufficient exposure to particular subjects. On the other hand, we now can move in a multicultural direction more effectively. I am familiar with the university level, and we do have people who are really very well versed in some of these other cultural traditions, who are pedagogically very alive, who can get them across in a very powerful way and meet the requirement I’m asking for – that the subject be taught in a lively enough way with enough depth and breadth that there’s some hope that people can actually pick up on something. And we can plan in the universities to increase this element steadily, as long as we aren’t hamstrung by the idea that unless we do it all, you know this year, we’re somehow not meeting some requirement of justice or fairness.”¹³⁴

Taylor establishes some highly pragmatic principles for curricular inclusion in the above excerpt. Though his primary concern is to balance curricular depth with curricular breadth, Taylor leans on the side of the former over the latter. Even in the context of multicultural education, too much breadth and not enough depth inevitably leads to a diluted, hollow, and superficial curriculum. Professors must know their limitations. Students who are insufficiently exposed to the content of a particular text will not be inspired to learn more. Depth is the one educational virtue Taylor is not prepared to sacrifice.135

The question is – how far does a professor go in accommodating the diversity of intellectual interests bound to be present in the classroom? As anyone with even a passing interest in higher education will know, a professor’s political, economic, social, cultural, and historical biases are illuminated in his/her lecture topics, reading lists, and course assignments. The presence of bias on the part of the instructor is essentially unavoidable. Yet such bias ought not to be viewed solely through the prism of ideology, prejudice, and oppression, I think. Allowing students the greatest possible choice in the selection of their assignments, for example, is one way of countering such bias. Another way would be to focus on issues that transcend individual differences, issues like love, beauty, and courage, the discussion of which naturally tempers the darker side of political correctness. One of the paradoxes of the push for greater representation in the Western Canon debate is that those constituencies that have traditionally been marginalized by the canon run the risk of doing the very thing they are trying to prevent. In the demand for inclusion of their respective identities, they run the risk of excluding other identities, in the process. An over-emphasis on gender can skew the importance of race, for example, just as an over-emphasis on race can skew the importance of gender. What is at stake here is the constitution of a ‘well-educated person’. One could argue, for instance, that a well-educated person is one who is receptive to the wisdom of the ages, yet open to questioning such wisdom in a way that takes into account the intersection of multiple disciplines, topics, and identities. What Taylor’s educational analysis in The Politics of Recognition lacks, I think, is a prescription for overcoming our differences without wallowing in subjectivism, even more, the sense that we are not simply imprisoned in our recognition of individual differences, but that these differences can partially be overcome in meaningful academic discussion.

135 In his C.B.C. conversation with David Cayley, Taylor does not raise the possibility of allowing for some element of student choice on course outlines, course readings, and course assignments, but one would think that Taylor would not be wholly averse to such options.
9 (b)  
THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

9.10 Secularism and Religious Education

A second educational controversy taken up by Taylor in concert with the theme of recognition is that of religious education in a liberal democracy. In his most recent work, Taylor links the educational content of a ‘politics of recognition’ to two key concepts – ‘secularism’ and ‘freedom of conscience’. Published in 2011, and co-authored by Laval professor Jocelyn Maclure, Secularism and Freedom of Conscience is, in many respects, Taylor’s finest articulation of the practical implications of a ‘politics of recognition’ for contemporary education. The book emerged from the authors’ involvement in the drafting of Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation, which served as the final report of the 2007 Commission on Reasonable Accommodation of Cultural Differences in the Province of Québec. Taylor served as Co-President and Maclure as Expert Analyst on the commission. As the authors of Secularism and Freedom of Conscience assert in their introduction, “[o]ne of the most important challenges facing contemporary societies is how to manage moral and religious diversity.” Their book, then, is an attempt to establish basic philosophical criteria for the management of such diversity.

Part One of the book focuses on the first of the two terms in the title, namely, ‘secularism’. Taylor and Maclure argue that, due to the limits of rationality, a liberal democratic state must strive to be impartial toward different conceptions of the good. Referencing the work of John Rawls, the authors claim that “the presence of what Rawls calls an ‘overlapping consensus’ about basic public values is the condition for the existence of pluralist societies.” In the case of a liberal democratic state, certain ‘core values’ – ‘human rights’ for example – are essential to the maintenance of peace. Taylor and Maclure define ‘secularism’ as “a political mode of governance based on two major principles (i.e. the ends of secularism) – equality of respect and freedom of conscience – and on two operative modes (i.e. the means of secularism) – separation of church and state and the neutrality of the state toward religions and toward secular philosophical movements.”  Since these major principles and operative modes can often come into conflict with one another, the state must act from a ‘minimal political morality’ on behalf of all citizens. The authors distinguish the more ‘open’

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137 Ibid., 11.
138 Ibid., 22.
secularism of pluralist regimes from the more ‘rigid’ secularism of republican regimes, with open secularism offering greater protection of religion, and rigid secularism offering greater restriction of religion. The authors are clearly in favour of open secularism. They affirm that it is best suited to the ‘integration’ (rather than the ‘fragmentation’) of all citizens, that is, to “the sense of an allegiance to a common civic identity and the collective pursuit of the common good.”139 For Taylor and Maclure, the reasonable recognition of both similarities and differences is a mark of a healthy polity. Unlike republican regimes, pluralist regimes make a sharp distinction between ‘private’ individuals and ‘public’ institutions, particularly in matters of religion. Should a public official wearing a conspicuous religious symbol be prohibited from exercising his/her duties? Generally ‘no’ say the authors. “What matters, above all, is that such officials demonstrate impartiality in the exercise of their duties.”140 As the authors point out, a prohibition against the wearing of a conspicuous religious symbol by a public official would come with a cost, that is, with restrictions on freedom of conscience and on equal access to employment. According to Taylor and Maclure, the mere wearing of a religious symbol is “not in itself an act of proselytism.”141 “Could a Muslim defendant presume the impartiality of a Jewish judge wearing a yarmulke?” ask the authors.142 If there are any doubts, they reply, “at all times the parties retain the right to present a demand for recusal.”143 Clearly, public institutions and the laws that govern them must take into account the diverse nature of the society they serve. From the perspective of Taylor and Maclure, a state by-law on weekend shopping, a state provision for the observance of religious holidays, and/or a state allowance for a religious symbol in an elected assembly, must all weigh their respective effects on a diverse citizenry.144 Open secularism is context-specific. Whereas the United States Constitution includes a ‘non-establishment’ clause, for example, the Canadian constitution does not. “[N]o two regimes of [open] secularism regulate in the same way all the dilemmas that arise from managing religious diversity,” conclude Taylor and Maclure.145

140 Ibid., 44.
141 Ibid., 45.
142 Ibid., 47.
143 Ibid.
144 One of the great paradoxes in the wake of The Taylor-Bouchard Commission was the response to the report’s recommendation for the removal of the crucifix in the Québec National Assembly. That recommendation was unanimously rejected by the members of the Assembly, in spite of their political support for secularism.
Part One of Taylor and Maclure’s study includes a series of reflections on educational matters, reflections that build on the aforementioned means and ends of ‘open secularism’. Much of the first half of Secularism and Freedom of Conscience is centered on the question of whether a Muslim teacher and/or student ought to be permitted to wear a headscarf in a public school as an expression of her religious identity. Taylor and Maclure spend a great deal of time on this issue, an issue that has served, in many ways, as a convenient touchstone for secular critics of religion. On one hand, there is the impartiality of a public institution to consider. On the other hand, there is the right on the part of the teacher and/or student to freedom of religion. Taylor and Maclure note that reconciling the two considerations is by no means decisive, as evidenced by the way in which different countries have settled the question. In the case of France, for example, the authors point out that the 2004 prohibition on the wearing of “religious symbols in the public schools” was justified not in terms of secular constraint, but “in the name of public order.” The Canadian response to this issue has differed from the French. Taylor and Maclure support the wearing of the hijab in public schools, but not the burqa or niqab. While the burqa or niqab hinders communication and/or socialization in the classroom, the hijab does not:

“The wearing of a religious symbol must not interfere with the performance of one’s duties. A teacher, for example, could not wear a burqa or niqab in class and still adequately discharge her duties as a teacher. On one hand, teaching necessarily entails communication, and covering the face and body does not allow for nonverbal communication. On the other, one of the teacher’s missions is to contribute toward the development of the student’s sociability. It seems reasonable to think that wearing a full veil establishes too much distance between the teacher and her charges. In short, pedagogical reasons may be invoked to justify the prohibition of the burqa or niqab among teachers. By contrast, the hijab does not prevent communication or socialization.”

The authors add that far from infringing on their autonomy, the early exposure of students to cultural differences in the public school is beneficial for the integration of these students into the fabric of a multicultural society. As mentioned by Taylor and Maclure, an ‘Ethics and Religious Culture’ (E.R.C.) program was introduced in Québec high schools in September, 2008, to help students acquire the knowledge to understand “religion and its varied manifestations in Québec and

147 Ibid., 117. The authors quote former French President Jacques Chirac’s reaction to the controversy: “[Conspicuous symbols, namely, those that, when worn, attract immediate notice and identify one’s religious affiliation, cannot be allowed. These symbols – the Islamic veil, by whatever name it is called, the yarmulke, or an obviously oversized cross – have no place within the walls of the public schools. The public schools will remain secular.” As well, see: John R. Bowen, Why the French Don’t Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).
148 Ibid., 46.
elsewhere and to develop the skills necessary to peacefully coexist within a diverse society.”¹⁴⁹ It is interesting to note here, however, that in Part One of Secularism and Freedom of Conscience, Taylor and Maclure are silent on the fact that the implementation of the E.R.C. program has, in some quarters, proven to be highly controversial. This is a significant point of omission on the part of the authors. A closer look at the Ethics and Religious Culture program is needed here.

### 9.11 The Historical Origins of Québec’s ‘E.R.C.’ Program

From the establishment of New France in the 17th century, through the British conquest in 1760, to the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, the education system in the French-speaking province of Québec was almost entirely run by the Catholic Church, that is, by priests and nuns from a variety of religious orders, most notably the Jesuits and the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame. The majority of English-speaking Québeckers sent their children to Protestant schools, a right protected under Section 93 of the British North America Act (1867). According to Spencer Boudreau, a Professor of Education at McGill University and author of ‘From Confessional to Cultural: Religious Education in the Schools of Québec’, up until 1960, “Catholic and Protestant churches ran their own schools with little interference from the government of Québec.”¹⁵⁰ There was a dramatic change, however, in 1964, when the Québec government established a Ministry of Education. As Boudreau explains, “[i]n order to standardize education and make it available to all Québeckers, the government shifted authority away from local boards and the Church and centralized it in the Ministry of Education. The consensus was that a modern Québec required a modern educational system that would prepare the young for positions in industry, commerce, and science.”¹⁵¹ The push for a fully secularized Québec school system grew stronger through the 1970s and 1980s. Some wanted confessional school boards to be replaced by linguistic school boards. “During this time,” writes Boudreau, “a non-confessional moral option was introduced into the schools for those parents or children who did not want confessional religious instruction.”¹⁵² These tendencies eventually led, by way of an amendment of Section 93 in the Canadian Constitution, to the abolishment of public Catholic and Protestant schools in the Province of Québec on July 1.

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¹⁵¹ Ibid., 214.
¹⁵² Ibid.
A new system of public education, one designed along linguistic lines, would effectively replace the long-standing confessional framework.

**9.12 The Proulx Report**

A major turning point in the recent history of Québec education was the release, in 1999, of a government-sponsored report, entitled *Religion in Secular Schools: A New Perspective for Québec*. Better known as the ‘Proulx Report’, after its chairman, Jean-Pierre Proulx, a Professor of Educational Studies at the Université de Montréal, the report was the product of an eight-member task force comprised of three university professors (one in education, one in sociology, and one in philosophy), an elementary school teacher, a secondary school teacher, a principal, a college director, and a president of a Québec-based human rights commission. Pauline Marois, the Parti Québécois education minister at the time, gave the task force “a general mandate to examine the place of religion in schools, to define appropriate guidelines, and to propose methods for their implementation.” In their foreword to the report, the authors announce that “the time has come to define the place of religion in our schools from a new perspective. This new perspective provides for open, secular schools that would draw on the common values of citizens and include the study of both religious and secular world views.” The report highlights the demographic, social, and cultural transformations of modern-day Québec, arguing that though the majority (i.e. 86%) of Québeckers designate themselves as Catholic, accompanying communities – Protestant, Jewish, Orthodox, and Islamic, primarily – have increased in numbers in recent years, with the largest increase found among those of no religious affiliation. The report asserts that “[r]eligion has not disappeared, but its influence is now largely confined to the purely religious sphere. The various Christian Churches have been transformed from within as they have absorbed the values of modernity. Religion has become more of a personal than a group experience ... [T]he Church is no longer in a position to dictate the moral attitudes of a majority of individuals [which] often differ

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154 Daniel Weinstock, Associate Professor of the Department of Philosophy at the Université de Montréal, was one of the eight members of the committee and is a former student of Charles Taylor.
155 Jean-Pierre Proulx, *Religion in Secular Schools: A New Perspective for Québec* (Quebec City, QC: Gouvernement du Québec, 1999), 1. [Pauline Marois, a staunch separatist, became the first female Premier of Québec on September 4th, 2012. A year after her election, a new ‘Charter of Values’, in the form of Bill 60, was proposed. The Bill prohibits the wearing of ‘conspicuous’ religious symbols by all government employees. As the former Co-Chair of the Reasonable Accommodation Commission in the Province of Québec, Charles Taylor has vigorously opposed the Bill.]
156 Ibid., v.
markedly from official doctrine." The report sees children not as future members of religious communities but as future citizens. "In this capacity," state the authors, "[children] have a fundamental interest in being prepared for life in a pluralistic liberal democratic context." The task force subscribed to five operative principles in the writing of its report:

1) “Québec is a liberal democracy that must, in all areas, uphold the principle of fundamental equality of all citizens.”
2) “Any Québec state policy on the question of religion in schools must be subject to the requirement of egalitarian neutrality.”
3) “Schools fall under the shared responsibility of parents, civil society, and the state. This partnership aims to provide all children with a well-rounded and high-quality education.”
4) “Children have fundamental interests with respect to education that must be guaranteed by the state. These fundamental interests, in addition to the development of general cognitive skills, are generally translated into the right of children to be properly prepared for their lives as citizens in a liberal democracy. This type of education must include the development of personal autonomy and critical thinking, the capacity to reason, tolerance, an openness to diversity, and a sense of belonging to the community.”
5) “Religion may have a place in schools, as a contribution to the development of the child as a whole person, provided its teaching is organized in a way that is consistent with the principle of fundamental equality of all citizens, and provided it promotes the attainment of the goals identified as necessary for educating citizens and forging the social bond.”

The task force asked for written submissions from a variety of educational stakeholders in Québec. The submissions were gathered from surveys and/or questionnaires, by mail and by telephone, from parents, teachers, and principals. Various ‘models’ for the future of the Québec education system were proposed by the task force in its surveys and questionnaires. Respondents were asked whether schools should: “a) offer only Catholic or Protestant religious instruction; b) offer appropriate religious instruction for each religious group; c) offer all students courses on the study of religions from a cultural perspective; or d) offer no religious instruction.” According to the authors of the report, ‘c’ was the preferred option for the majority of respondents. The task force agreed that offering all students courses on the study of religions from a cultural perspective was a reasonable option, an option that would effectively discontinue the existing privileges enjoyed by Catholic and Protestant schools in the province of Québec. In advocating for an abolition of the status quo, the authors of the report note, on the basis of both the Québec and Canadian Charters of Rights and Freedoms, that “[r]ecognizing a school as Catholic or Protestant is also an infringement of freedom of conscience and religion. The symbolic recognition inherent in such a

157 Jean-Pierre Proulx, Religion in Secular Schools: A New Perspective for Québec (Quebec City, QC: Gouvernement du Québec, 1999), 15.
158 Ibid., 19.
159 Ibid., 20.
160 Ibid., 26.
status does not extend to the beliefs of parents and students of other religions ... These two
parameters alone provide sufficient ground to reject the status quo.”

The authors of the Proulx Report underscore the importance of ‘common values’, defined as those “values that can be shared
by all because they exclude no one at the outset.” According to the report, whereas common
educational values are ‘democratic’, ‘cohesive’, ‘pluralistic’, and ‘integrative’, denominational
educational values are ‘marginalizing’. The task force recommended that the Québec public school
system be secularized, and that a new course of study of religions from a cultural perspective be
made mandatory for all elementary and secondary school students. A new ‘Ethics and Religious
Culture’ course (as of September, 2008) would be introduced into all public schools in accordance
with the following rationale:

1. “The study of religions examines religious phenomena and secular schools of thought from a social
sciences viewpoint.”
2. “It reflects the diversity of religious traditions and secular schools of thought present in Québec
society and in the world.”
3. “It gives a prominent place to Christian traditions.”
4. “It presents the richness and complexity of religious traditions and secular schools of thought.”
5. “It prepares students for life in a society characterized by ideological, cultural, and religious
diversity.”
6. “It takes into account students’ cognitive development, lifestyles, and diverse interests.”

9.13 The Bouchard-Taylor Commission

In 2008, a report entitled Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation was released by the Québec
government-sponsored Commission de Consultation Sur Les Pratiques D’Accommodation Reliées
Aux Différences Culturelles. Then-premier Jean Charest had established the commission in
response to controversy surrounding ‘reasonable accommodation’ of cultural differences in the
province. The commission was co-chaired by Charles Taylor and Gérard Bouchard, (the latter a
prominent sociologist, and brother of Lucien Bouchard, a former premier of Québec). The
mandate of the commission was four-fold: to examine various practices of accommodation in the
province, to analyze the issues involved with reference to how other societies were coping with
them, to conduct a broad consultation, and “to formulate recommendations to the government to
ensure that accommodation practices conform to Québec’s values as a pluralistic, democratic, [and]

161 Jean-Pierre Proulx, Religion in Secular Schools: A New Perspective for Québec, (Québec City, QC: Gouvernement du
Québec, 1999), 42.
162 Ibid., 50.
163 Ibid., 64.
egalitarian society.” 164 With a budget of $5 million, the commission established an advisory committee, paneled a variety of experts, organized an assortment of meetings, met with focus groups, hosted citizen forums, accepted written submissions, and operated a website. 165 In the text of the 300+ page report, Taylor and Bouchard cite “a crisis of perception” (largely brought on by the media) and “anxiety over identity” as sources of the crisis. 166 The authors provide a chronology of incidents leading to the crisis, including whether a hijab should be worn during a soccer match, whether a YMCA should be required to frost its windows to prevent Hasidic boys from peering in, and whether the municipal council of Herouxville should be allowed to pass legislation to ban any form of religious accommodation for future immigrants. 167 Taylor and Bouchard take up a number of education-related issues including provisions for religious holidays, religious attire, multi-faith prayer rooms, subsidies for religious schools, and kosher and halal food menus. Interestingly, the word ‘recognition’ appears a total of 33 times in the commission’s full report. ‘Recognition’ is used in conjunction with the following: Aboriginal peoples, Muslim student associations, diversity, human rights and freedoms, differing cultures, the moral value of each person, freedom of conscience and religion, religious pluralism, tolerance, equality of religions, secularism, the equal dignity of persons, immigrants, skills and diplomas, and democracy. 168 Taylor and Bouchard conclude their report by asserting that “the objective is clear: integration in pluralism, equality, and reciprocity is by far the most laudable, reasonable choice [for Québec].” 169 The co-chairs called for a three-pronged approach to the accommodation crisis: ‘interculturalism’, (i.e. greater dialogue between cultures), ‘open secularism,’ (i.e. a secularism open to religious perspectives), and ‘harmonization’ practices that link the two. As one observer noted, “the Bouchard-Taylor Commission was a watershed in the debate on cultural diversity in Québec, if only because it gave citizens from all walks of life and on a wide regional base the occasion to express themselves on a theme crucial to the future of their society.” 170

165 Ibid., 35.
166 Ibid., 18.
168 Sample search of full report.
9.14 Québec’s ‘Ethics and Religious Culture’ Program

The aims, goals, and competencies of Québec’s Ethics and Religious Culture program, which followed on the heels of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, are spelled out in the education ministry’s curriculum documents. The program’s aims are two-fold. From the perspective of ethics, the ministry aims to encourage “ethical reflection [that] enables the development of a person’s moral sense, [which is] likely to contribute to peaceful coexistence.”¹⁷¹ From the perspective of religious culture, the ministry aims to instruct students in “sacred texts, beliefs, teachings, rituals, ceremonies, rules of conduct, places of worship, works of art, practices, institutions, and types of organization [as well as the] experiential, historical, doctrinal, moral, ritualistic, literary, artistic, social, and political dimensions of religion.”¹⁷² The program has two main goals – ‘recognition of others’ and ‘pursuit of the common good’. These goals are worth quoting at length:

“Recognition of others, which is intrinsically connected to self-knowledge, is also linked to the principle that all people possess equal value and dignity. Hence the importance each of us attributes to being recognized, particularly with regard to our world-view, or how we see ourselves and others, which in turn orient our attitudes and actions. This recognition occurs in dialogue that is characterized by listening and discernment, and that has no room for attacks on personal dignity or actions that might compromise the common good. In doing so, it contributes to building a common culture that takes diversity into account.”¹⁷³

“The pursuit of the common good, which goes beyond the satisfaction of purely personal interests, not only involves the greater welfare of the collectivity, but also that of each individual. It refers to three main actions: the search, along with others, for common values; the promotion of projects that foster community life; and respect for democratic principles and ideals specific to Québec society. Thus the pursuit of the common good presupposes that people from different backgrounds can agree responsibly to take on challenges inherent to life in society.”¹⁷⁴

Finally, the Ethics and Religious Culture program strives to develop three core competencies. After completion of the program, students should be able to “reflect on ethical questions, demonstrate an understanding of the phenomenon of religion, and engage in dialogue.”¹⁷⁵ The aims, goals, and competencies of Québec’s Ethics and Religious Culture program, as spelled out in the education ministry’s curriculum documents, then, are fully compatible with the Bouchard-Taylor Commission’s call for ‘open secularism’ and ‘interculturalism’. In short, the E.R.C. program marks a

¹⁷² Ibid.
¹⁷³ Ibid., 462.
¹⁷⁴ Ibid.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid.
radical shift from church-run education to state-run education, from education in faith to education in citizenship.

9.15 Criticism of the E.R.C. Program

As previously mentioned, Taylor and Maclure neglect to include any criticism of the Québec government’s Ethics and Religious Culture program in their book Secularism and Freedom of Conscience. While absence of criticism does not necessarily imply evidence of support, it would be safe to assume, based on their respective lines of argument, that Taylor and Maclure are more favourably disposed toward the E.R.C. program than not. Multicultural education for multicultural citizenship is a path both Maclure and Taylor would certainly affirm. For the sake of intellectual responsibility, however, critiques of the E.R.C. program ought to be considered. The leaders of Québec’s Catholic community, for example, have expressed serious reservations about the content and form of the program. In a letter to the Minister of Education on September 15, 2009, Bishop Martin Veillette, President of the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops, wrote that “[w]e must say that we are concerned. A growing number of indicators point to the need for significant corrections without which the program can neither meet its objectives nor fulfill its potential.”

Bishop Veillette pointed to three main concerns: a lack of parental consultation, a dilution of the Christian tradition in approved elementary school textbooks, and inadequate teacher training. In an article entitled ‘Where is Québec Going?’ published in the February, 2009 edition of Catholic Insight, Cardinal Marc Ouellet lamented the “weakening of religious identity,” the “spiritual vacuum,” and the “substantial loss of memory,” associated with the decline of institutional Catholicism in Québec. “Without considering the primacy of the right of parents and their clearly expressed desire to retain the freedom of choice between confessional and moral teaching,” writes the Cardinal, “the state is suppressing confessional teaching and imposing an obligatory course of ethics and religious culture in both private and public schools. No European nation has ever adopted such a radical approach,

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176 Bishop Martin Veillette of Trois-Rivières, President of the Assembly of Québec Catholic Bishops, A Letter to the Minister of Education on the Ethics and Religious Culture Program, (September 23, 2009).

177 Teachers of the E.R.C. course, whether religious or secular, are instructed to maintain a ‘critical distance’ from their own respective worldviews: “Since this subject matter touches upon complex and sometimes delicate personal and family dynamics, teachers have an additional obligation to be discreet and respectful, and to not promote their own beliefs and points of view.” See ‘Ethics and Religious Culture Program’ in Quebec Education Program: Secondary Education, (Québec City, QC: Gouvernement du Québec, 2008), 459.

which revolutionizes the convictions and religious freedom of the citizens.” According to the Cardinal, it would be naïve to think that the new E.R.C. program will quench the spiritual thirst of young Québeckers. “It takes a lot of naïveté,” he adds, “to believe that this miracle of the culture teaching of religion will manufacture a new little inhabitant of Québec, a pluralist, an expert in interreligious relations, and a critic of all faiths. The least that can be said is that the thirst for virtual values will be far from quenched, and that a dictatorship of relativism risks making the transmission of our religious heritage even more difficult.” In addition to members of the Catholic hierarchy in Québec, Douglas Farrow, a Professor of Religious Studies at McGill University, has offered his own critique of the Ethics and Religious Culture program. Farrow makes four claims: “that the E.R.C. represents a significant transfer of power from civil society to the state; that its ambitious goals belie any claim to neutrality; that the program is intended to provide formation [and] not merely information; and that the program is a defeat for certain of the program’s own objectives in recognizing diversity.” Farrow is convinced that the E.R.C. program imposes the doctrine of normative pluralism upon its students. “To speak of normative pluralism is presumably to emphasize, in the present context, that valuing diverse moral and religious practices or perspectives

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180 Ibid.
181 Farrow’s critique of the E.R.C. program took the form of an ‘expert witness’ presentation to the Québec Superior Court in the case of Loyola High School and John Zucchi vs. Michelle Courchesne, in her Capacity as Minister of Education. Loyola is a private English Catholic Secondary School in Montreal, founded by the Jesuits in 1848. It receives a considerable amount of its operating budget from the province of Québec. John Zucchi, a professor of history at McGill University, had a son studying at Loyola and argued that the province-mandated E.R.C. course infringed on his right to educate his son in the Catholic faith. Loyola had proposed an equivalent Catholic course to the E.R.C. program but that course was denied accreditation by Québec’s Minister of Education on the grounds that it was not compatible with E.R.C. standards. In his judgment on June 18, 2010, the Honourable Gérard Dugré ruled that “the Court is of the opinion that the Minister’s decision, both intrinsically and through its effects, interferes with the freedom of religion guaranteed Loyola under section 3 of the Quebec charter.” He noted that “[i]n this era of respect for fundamental rights, tolerance, reasonable accommodation, and multiculturalism, the attitude adopted by the Minister in the present case is surprising,” adding, (provocatively), that “[t]he obligation imposed on Loyola to teach the ERC course in a secular manner is totalitarian in nature and essentially tantamount to the command given to Galileo by the Inquisition to abjure the cosmology of Copernicus.” See http://www.mcgill.ca/prpp/sites/mcgill.ca.prpp/files/loyola_judgment_english.pdf], pgs. 54 and 61. The Québec government announced, shortly after the verdict, that it would challenge the decision. The case is currently before the Supreme Court on appeal.
183 The preamble of the E.R.C. curriculum document for secondary schools reads as follows: “[The E.R.C. program] does not espouse any particular set of beliefs or moral references ... The objective is not to propose or impose moral rules ... The goal is neither to accompany students on a spiritual quest, nor to present the history of doctrines and religions, nor to promote some new common religious doctrine aimed at replacing specific beliefs.” See ‘Ethics and Religious Culture Program’ in Québec Education Program: Secondary Education, (Québec City, QC: Gouvernement du Québec, 2008), 459.
is to become the norm,” he writes.184 “Normative pluralism is neutral towards religion only in the sense that it has made itself the norma normans to which all religions, including Catholicism, must submit.”185 The E.R.C. program, argues Farrow, is less an exercise in religion, as it is an exercise about religion; as such, it teaches students how to think about religion in a non-theological way, which is by no means a neutral endeavour. It substitutes monocultural uniformity for true diversity.186 Farrow adds that, from a Catholic perspective, the E.R.C. program does not adequately address the question of God, the relationship between faith and reason, the connection of the past with the present, and/or the issue of radical autonomy in modern society. For Farrow, the pluralism of the Ethics and Religious Culture program is exclusivist in so far as it presents itself as the right way to understand religious and secular diversity.187 In short, the aforementioned critiques of Québec’s Ethics and Religious Culture program - by Veillette, Ouellet, and Farrow - call the E.R.C.’s stated aims, goals, and competencies into serious question.

Challenges to the E.R.C. program have reached the heights of the Supreme Court of Canada. On February 17, 2012, the court rendered its judgment in the “S.L. and D.J.” appeal involving a parental request to a Drummondville, Québec school board, for exemption of their children from the E.R.C. course, on the basis of legal rights enshrined in the Education Act.188 The appeal was dismissed. S.L. and D.J. had argued that exposing their children to the teachings of the E.R.C. course would infringe upon their constitutional right to freedom of religion and run counter to their obligation to pass on their Catholic faith. According to the judgment of the court:

“The evidence demonstrates, firstly, that the Ministry’s formal purpose does not appear to have been to transmit a philosophy based on relativism or to influence young people’s specific beliefs. Exposing children to a comprehensive presentation of various religions without forcing the children to join them does not constitute an indoctrination of students that would infringe the freedom of religion of L and J. Furthermore, the early exposure of children to realities that differ from those in their immediate family environment is a fact of life in society. The suggestion that exposing children to a

185 Ibid., 6.
186 Farrow quotes from The Catholic School, a document published by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, to the effect that “[t]he Church upholds the principle of a plurality of school systems in order to safeguard her objectives in the face of cultural pluralism …. The absence of the Catholic school would be a great loss for civilization and for the natural and supernatural destiny of man.” (Ibid., 14).
187 See Gavin D’Costa, ‘The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions’, in Religious Studies, 32.2, (1996), 223-232. [Cited by Farrow]. D’Costa argues that a pluralist view of religions is untenable, and is really another form of exclusivism insofar as it holds to the view that “all the major religions have true revelations in part, while no single revelation or religion can claim final and definitive truth.” In the pluralist model of religions, adds D’Costa, “all religions are viewed as more or less equally true.”
188 In 2008 alone, there were nearly 1,300 requests for exemption from the E.R.C. course. See Nancy Bouchard, ‘Living Together With Differences: Québec’s New Ethics and Religious Culture Program’, Education Canada, Vol. 49 (1), 60. [wwwcea-ace.ca].
variety of religious facts in itself infringes their religious freedom or that of their parents amounts to a rejection of the multicultural reality of Canadian society and ignores the Québec government’s obligations with regard to public education.”

The court noted that, notwithstanding the sincerity of their belief, L. and J. had failed to prove that the E.R.C. program was ‘non-neutral’, or ‘relativist’, or ‘confusing’, to their children. In remarking on the case, Justice Deschamps explained that “[t]he societal changes that Canada has undergone since the middle of the last century have brought with them a new social philosophy that favours the recognition of minority rights. The developments in the area of education that have taken place in Québec and that are at issue in this appeal must be situated within this larger context. Given the religious diversity of present-day Québec, the state can no longer promote a vision of society in public schools that is based on historically dominant religions.” In his arguments before the court, constitutional layer Iain Benson remarked that a decision that was indifferent to parental rights would have the effect “of driving such objecting parents out of public education altogether, [which in turn would] undercut the rationale for the program in the first place.”

Other observers, like David Seljak, a professor of Religious Studies at Waterloo University and editor of Religion and Ethnicity in Canada, have mixed views on Québec’s Ethics and Religious Culture Program. On the one hand, Seljak laments the de-Christianization of high schools, the secular ‘neutralization’ of religious instruction, and the new religious illiteracy that is emerging in Canada, as a result. “We can no longer dismiss calls for education about religion or independent religiously based schools as negations of liberalism, pluralism, and democracy,” he claims. On the other hand, Seljak is optimistic that a “return to religion in public education is an inescapable consequence of the adoption of multicultural education.” Whatever the imperfections of Québec’s Ethics and Religious Culture model, the program is, for Seljak, “certainly one from which other Canadians could learn … [and] has much to teach other provinces about this issue.”

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190 Ibid., 12.
193 Ibid., 193.
194 Ibid., 196.
9.16 Religious Education in a Liberal Democracy

A number of prominent philosophers of education have weighed in on the question of religious education in a liberal democracy. In his book *In Defense of Religious Schools and Colleges*, Canadian scholar Elmer Thiessen examines the full landscape of objections to religiously-inspired educational institutions. Thiessen examines a host of charges against religious schools and colleges, including charges relating to divisiveness, intolerance, the separation of church and state, elitism, indoctrination, and censorship. Thiessen offers a thorough critique of contemporary liberal values, which, to his mind, are, more often than not, consciously anti-religious. Thiessen’s quest is one of finding a middle way between unity and diversity, between Enlightenment universalism and Postmodern particularism, and between communitarianism and liberalism. For Thiessen, the fact of religious and cultural diversity must be built into our institutional structures. The best way to accomplish this, both in theory and in practice, is via educational pluralism.  

Thiessen sees a wholly state-controlled common school system as inherently monopolistic, and as suffocating the legitimate rights of minority groups in a free and democratic society. “There is evidence to suggest,” writes Thiesen, “that state-maintained common schools throughout the Western world are experiencing considerable strain, and much of it has to do precisely with the failure to achieve the required balance between a transcendent universalism and a separatist particularism.”  

For Thiessen, a plurality of worldviews warrants a plurality of school systems, public, private, religious, secular, etc., each operating alongside the other, with due provision for what Thiessen calls a “minimalist set of common values and skills that are essential to healthy democracies.” Thiessen’s reasoning rejects an *either/or* approach in favour of a *both/and* approach. In defense of a system of educational pluralism, a system in which religious schools and colleges (that have due sensitivity to liberal democratic, multicultural, and multi-faith values) have a place, Thiessen is cognizant of certain limitations. Echoing the philosopher William Galston, he notes that “[t]he greatest threat to children in modern liberal societies, is not that they will believe in something too deeply, but that

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195 Thiessen quotes John Stuart Mill in his defense of educational pluralism. Mill writes: “All that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity of opinion and mode of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. A general State education is a mere contrivance for molding people to be exactly like one another; and as the mold in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation - in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body.” Elmer Thiessen, *In Defense of Religious Schools and Colleges*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 241-242.

196 Ibid., 229.

197 Ibid., 224.
they will believe in nothing very deeply at all." A number of questions remain unanswered in Thiessen’s analysis, however. Can a government effectively manage the sort of educational pluralism Thiessen is advocating? Upon what set of criteria would schools be eligible for government funding? What oversight would a government have over private, independent, and/or separate schools? Thiessen’s study is strong on philosophical content, though weak on practical logistics.

Other philosophers of education, such as Neil Burtonwood (British) and Walter Feinberg (American), are more hesitant than Thiessen is on the issue of religious schooling in a liberal democracy.

In his book *Cultural Diversity, Liberal Pluralism, and Schools: Isaiah Berlin and Education*, Burtonwood writes that, “schools that reflect the strong cultural identity model will have difficulties in accepting the kind of conditions that are attached to state funding” and that “there remain those strong identity schools that even political liberals must reject.” Burtonwood makes a useful contribution to the present debate in distinguishing ‘moderate cultural identity schools’ from ‘strong cultural identity schools’. Whereas moderate cultural identity schools expect their pupils, as they mature, to subject their own traditions to rational critique from within and from without, strong cultural identity schools expect their pupils to resist secularization and assimilation to the wider society in the interests of asserting and perpetuating their cultural integrity. Burtonwood clearly favours moderate cultural identity schools over strong cultural identity schools in the debate concerning public funding for such schools in Britain. Whereas moderate identity schools are ‘open’, ‘balanced’, and ‘more adaptable’ to the interests of a secular liberal democratic British society, strong identity schools are ‘insular’, ‘totalizing’, and ‘less adaptable’ to the interests of a secular liberal democratic British society. Quoting Isaiah Berlin, Burtonwood adds that “unless there is a minimum of shared values that can preserve the peace, no decent societies can survive.” Along with David Bell, the Chief Inspector of Schools in Britain, Burtonwood worries that “many young people are being educated in faith-based schools with little appreciation of their wider responsibilities and obligations to British society.” The challenges for faith-based schooling in Britain are no less serious than the

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200 Ibid., 141.
201 Ibid., 153.
challenges now faced in Canada, where shifting demographics, the assertion of individual and collective rights, and various cases brought to court, are pressing the issue.

There is a strong irony in Burtonwood's choice of Isaiah Berlin as his intellectual interlocutor. A word or two about Isaiah Berlin and religion is in order here. It should be noted that Sir Isaiah had a rather odd relationship with religion. He was, as his literary trustee Henry Hardy has pointed out to me in an e-mail exchange, "tone deaf" to God. He believed there was need for a fourth category in addition to theism, agnosticism, and atheism, a category for those "who do not understand what belief in God amounts to." Berlin was not a teleological thinker; he would often quote his Russian mentor Alexander Herzen to the effect that the purpose of life is life itself. Berlin’s biographer Michael Ignatieff has referred to him as a “convinced Humean skeptic" in matters religious. Berlin was a cultural Jew, pious but non-practicing, committed to institutions and rituals in so far as they expressed belonging to a community. Berlin’s marked indifference toward religion, theology, and metaphysics, is somewhat of a mystery, however. Whether one looks for Berlin’s views on religion in his published correspondence, in his conversations with the Iranian intellectual Ramin Jahanbegloo and/or with the Polish intellectual Beata Polanowska-Sygulska, in Berlin’s essay ‘Notes on Prejudice’, in the work of Michael Jinkins, or indeed elsewhere, one is struck by the realization that Berlin was and is, first and foremost, a profoundly secular thinker, one who never quite sympathized with religion in the way one would have expected. After all, Berlin advocated intellectual sympathy as his raison d’être. When religion does come up in Berlin’s prose it is usually associated, in a decidedly negative sense, with ‘monism’, ‘fanaticism’, ‘dogma’, ‘intolerance’, ‘myth’, ‘superstition’, and, indeed, (justifiably), with anti-Semitism. The bright side of religion is hardly ever mentioned, however. Charles Taylor would no doubt have been unsettled by his Oxford tutor’s profound antipathy toward religion, and one can only speculate on the impact this had on Taylor’s own philosophical writing.

Do religious schools have the capacity to educate for democratic citizenry? In his book For Goodness Sake: Religious Schools and Education for Democratic Citizenry, Walter Feinberg writes that “[t]he general public has a strong interest in the work of religious schools; this interest extends beyond the

202 E-mail correspondence with Dr. Henry Hardy, (October 26, 2006).
academic performance of students in said schools to the shared moral understandings required to sustain and reproduce liberal, pluralist democracies.” Feinberg argues that religious education is everyone’s business, that education is best served when citizens can count on schools that promote commitments to the conditions of pluralism and liberalism, and that moral education in a religious context must preserve the independent critical inquiry of the learner by preventing premature commitments to established doctrines of authority without proper rational deliberation. Some of the assumptions underlying Feinberg’s thesis include the following: i) that education is indeed the collective business of the child, of the parent, of the school, of the church (or respective religious authority), and of the state; ii) that the objective of sustaining and reproducing liberal, pluralist democracies is itself immune from philosophical critique; iii) that shared moral understandings are not only possible but necessary in a free and democratic society and that different moral understandings are not altogether desirable; iv) that some religious schools may not be as fully attuned to the values of liberalism and pluralism as they ought to be; and v) that a doctrinally conservative education in a particular religious tradition is itself insufficient to sustain and reproduce liberal, pluralist democracy. Feinberg seeks to minimize state intervention in religious schools while maximizing the receptivity of these schools to liberal, pluralist (i.e. democratic) values. He proposes a program of instruction for religious educators that would simultaneously enhance both their understanding of their own religious tradition and their commitment to the ideals of liberal pluralism. Feinberg offers no details on the content of such a program, nor does he offer a way out of a dilemma of having to choose between a given value of one’s religion versus a given value of liberal democracy. What happens when one value collides with and/or contradicts and/or is incommensurable with another? Though a deeply engaging read, Feinberg’s book underestimates the potential irreconcilability of certain religious values, on one hand, with certain liberal pluralist values, on the other.


206 In Chapter 7 of his book, Feinberg writes that: “one concern about faith-based schools has been that their religiously homogenous population reduces the value of other groups and places limits on the application of this extended loyalty [to all members of society].” Walter Feinberg, *For Goodness Sake: Religious Schools and Education for Democratic Citizenship*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 156. There are a number of assumptions at work here, as well. The first assumption is that there is a need for religious education to eschew its ‘narrow-mindedness’ and embrace accountability to the larger society. The second assumption is that teachers and students ought to be equally committed to the values of ‘Church’ and ‘State’ in the context of religious education. The third assumption is that there is a religiously homogenous population (rather than a religiously heterogeneous population) in most if not all faith-based schools. The fourth assumption is that an ‘extended loyalty’ to other groups in society will have a neutral effect on loyalty to one’s own ‘chauvinistic’ religious commitment (as Feinberg describes it). The fifth assumption is that faith-based schooling somehow reduces rather than enhances ‘the value of other groups’.
What the arguments of Thiessen, Burtonwood, and Feinberg have in common is a commitment (in varying degrees) to at least some form of educational diversity both in theory and in practice, and a conviction that representatives from both secular governments and religious communities must collaborate in achieving a just balance of educational rights and duties. There is a need, in other words, to find a way for both ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ approaches to education to co-exist without jeopardizing the integrity of either. Diversity is inescapable; it is part and parcel of the human condition. In systemic terms, one can either choose to recognize, dignify, and celebrate difference or to ignore, suppress, and reject difference. To the aforementioned theorists, the former option seems preferable. An authentic educational pluralism, then, one that is constitutive of a healthy liberal democracy, allows for both religious and secular voices. The challenge is one of institutionalizing such diversity, in present systems of education, without perpetuating solipsistic communities. What is needed is greater sympathy, intellectual and otherwise, between the religious and the secular, neither of which is ‘monolithic’. There are different modes of religiosity just as there are different modes of secularity. Religionists must be attentive to the practical needs of secularists just as secularists must be attentive to the practical needs of religionists. If the two are entangled in the world, then (ideally) mutual understanding and co-operation ought to prevail. Wholly secular communities and/or wholly religious communities can indeed lead to intolerance of ‘the other’. To avoid such intolerance, both the religionist and the secularist need to learn from each other. School board policies, teacher training, curriculum guidelines, and student engagement ought to reflect, both in theory and in practice, a just balance of educational rights and duties in an increasingly diverse society.

9.17 Taylor on Religious Education

Where does Taylor stand on the question of religious education in a liberal democracy? Like Thiessen, Burtonwood, and Feinberg, Taylor, too, is in favour of some form of systemic educational diversity. On ‘Common Culture, Multiculture’, an episode of ‘Ideas’ on C.B.C. radio aired in June, 1988, Taylor spoke with host David Cayley on the question of whether a ‘politics of recognition’ implied a single common school system for all and/or separate schools for some. Here is what Taylor had to say:

“There is no doubt that, on one hand, there are real advantages to having schools in which everybody’s mixed in. You know, it’s quite impressive in Montreal now with Bill 101, which has put all these immigrant children into French-speaking schools together with, you know, pur lain Quinçis.
This situation has changed all the players - the old-stock Québeckers as well as the others. It's been very important to their forming friendships and achieving understanding. So that's a real example where there's a real advantage to having everybody in the same school. However, it's also important that different groups can feel that their identities are really being listened to, carried over and so on, as they define them, and this is going to mean that for some groups it's going to be very important to have their own schools. And I can't see that one of these principles is pre-eminent over the other and that you can just, in virtue of the nature of democracy or whatever, decide from the beginning that we're going to take one of these (let's say the common school) and that, therefore any request for a Jewish school or a Catholic school is just not receivable. So we have to find a way of allowing that possibility, even though I think, ideally, we should try to find a way of encouraging as many as possible to be in a common school. But people have to be persuaded of that ... [W]hen you have goals that take the form of statements beginning “we'd have in some ways a better society if ...,” or “it would be good if ...,” and so on, then you actually defeat your purpose by compulsion, because very often the goodness of those conditions depends on [voluntarily agreement]. I think you undercut the very point of the operation if you begin to make those things mandatory. So the fact that, in some ways, it would be good if we all were in a common school system is not a good ground to say to people, “No, you cannot have your own school.”207

We need to untangle the threads in Taylor's position here. We know that Taylor is in favour of a 'politics of recognition' that respects both similarity and difference. We also know that Taylor is in favour of a proper balance between these considerations. Applying these positions to the case of common and separate schools, then, Taylor holds that though common schools should be encouraged separate schools should not be discouraged. Taylor's admission in the above excerpt that “I can't see that one of these principles is pre-eminent over the other,” is crucial here.208 If there is no universal a priori principle that arbitrates whether respect for similarity trumps respect for difference, or, alternatively, whether respect for difference trumps respect for similarity, then, philosophically speaking, consistency demands that both respect for similarity and respect for difference are, within reason, equally valid. There is no contradiction here. Respect for similarity and respect for difference are compatible. Judging from the above remarks, then, Taylor is not in favour of a compulsory approach to the management of education. “I think you undercut the very point of the operation if you begin to make [educational conditions] mandatory,” he says.209 The practical implication here is that common schools and separate schools must both be allowed to flourish in a liberal democracy. How might Taylor's educational views, as expressed, correspond to the Québec government's 'Ethics and Religious Culture' program? In keeping with Taylor's thinking on the issue, (which excludes legal and financial considerations), Québec's mandatory E.R.C. program (if consented to) may very well be legitimate for provincially-funded common

208 Ibid.
209 Ibid.
schools, but may not be altogether legitimate for those separate schools that, in their efforts to pursue different educational paths, wish to opt out.

### 9.18 Freedom of Conscience and Religious Education

In Part Two of their study on Secularism and Freedom of Conscience, Taylor and Maclure explore the nature of ‘freedom of conscience’. The authors begin their treatment by referencing Article 18 of the United Nations’ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 18 reads as follows: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching.”

Taylor and Maclure cite this passage to underscore the legal obligation for ‘reasonable accommodation’. In the realm of political philosophy, the authors assert that reasonable accommodation is justifiable, from the standpoint of multiculturalism and the politics of recognition, in that “certain public norms applying to all citizens are not neutral or impartial from a cultural or religious point of view.”

Reasonable accommodation is also seen, by some, as a matter of social justice, though Taylor and Maclure view such a justification as “counterintuitive” to the values of ‘equality of opportunity’ and ‘personal responsibility’. For critics of reasonable accommodation, religious beliefs and practices ought not to enjoy preferential treatment. As Taylor and Maclure explain, a request for reasonable accommodation on religious grounds to the Supreme Court of Canada need only meet the subjective test of ‘sincerity of belief’ and not any objective test of adherence to a particular orthodoxy.

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211 Ibid., 67.
212 Ibid., 70.
213 It should be noted here that Taylor’s work has been cited by The Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin, Chief Justice of Canada. In a 2002 lecture at McGill University on ‘Freedom of Religion and the Rule of Law: A Canadian Perspective’, which discussed the impact the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms has had on religious freedom in Canada, McLachlin observed that: “Charles Taylor has contributed greatly to our understanding of the way in which individuals and communities situate themselves in society and ascribe meaning to their actions and experiences … [In light of] Charles Taylor’s theoretical framework, the Charter has articulated and laid bare, for discussion and application, both the good of religious freedom and the hypergoods, the core values, it reflects.” Douglas Farrow (ed.), Recognizing Religion in a Secular Society: Essays in Pluralism, Religion, and Public Policy, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 28-33.
commitments are as morally profound as religious commitments, and entirely deserving of equal protection. In Rawlsian parlance, secular doctrines can be just as ‘comprehensive’ as religious doctrines. “A [moral] conception is fully comprehensive,” writes Rawls, “if it covers all recognized values and virtues within one rather precisely articulated system.” 215 Taylor and Maclure acknowledge that, contrary to the early Rawls, the later Rawls is much more open to religion in the public sphere, that is, to both the actual and potential contributions of religious perspectives in a liberal democracy.

9.19 Rawls on Religion

Is the later Rawls as open to religion as Taylor and Maclure suggest? In the summer of 1997, shortly before his death, Rawls published an essay in the Chicago Law Review entitled ‘The Idea of Public Reason Revisited’. In a letter to his editor at Columbia University Press, Rawls acknowledged that the essay is “by far the best statement I have written on ideas of public reason and political liberalism,” adding that it stressed “the relation of public reason and political liberalism to the major religions” and that “except for fundamentalism, [the major religions] can support a constitutional democratic regime.”216 Since Rawls does not treat religious considerations directly in either of his two major works – A Theory of Justice (1971) and Political Liberalism (1993) – we can safely assume that ‘The Idea of Public Reason Revisited’ is Rawls’ definitive statement on religion in a liberal democracy. What then does Rawls actually say about religion?

Central to both A Theory of Justice and Political Liberalism is the idea of ‘public reason’. In ‘The Idea of Public Reason Revisited’, Rawls sharpens his definition of public reason in light of the often incommensurable religious, philosophical, and moral diversity of ‘comprehensive doctrines’ in a pluralist liberal democracy. We should recall here that Rawls defines ‘comprehensive doctrines’ as covering “all recognized values and virtues within one rather precisely articulated system.”217 As a way to sort out the conflicts between comprehensive doctrines, Rawls proposes his notion of ‘public reason’: “I propose, that in public reason, comprehensive doctrines of truth or right be replaced by an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens … Central to the idea of public reason is that it neither criticizes nor attacks any comprehensive doctrine, religious or

nonreligious, except insofar as that doctrine is incompatible with the essentials of [a] democratic polity. The basic requirement is that a reasonable [comprehensive] doctrine accepts a constitutional democratic regime and its companion idea of legitimate law.” Rawls refers to the political constraints placed upon comprehensive doctrines in the realization of public justice as “the proviso.” The proviso allows for comprehensive doctrines to be introduced in public discussion provided that “proper political reasons - and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines - are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines introduced are said to support.” Rawls is aware that different democratic societies will have different comprehensive doctrines at work within them at any given time, yet he is equally aware that each of these democratic societies is in need of an appropriate form of public reason. For Rawls, public reason assumes free, equal, fair, socially co-operative, politically just, and reciprocal relations between citizens: “[C]itizens are reasonable,” explains Rawls, “when, viewing one another as free and equal in a system of social cooperation over generations, they are prepared to offer one another fair terms of cooperation according to what they consider the most reasonable conception for political justice; and when they agree to act on those terms, even at the cost of their own interests in particular situations, provided that other citizens also accept those terms.”

The key phrase in Rawls’ definition of the ‘reasonable citizen’ is “at the cost of their own interests.” Why, one might ask, should any citizen who ascribes to a comprehensive doctrine - be it religious, nonreligious, or moral - endorse a liberal constitutional democracy, at the sacrifice of his/her own interests? Does Rawls underestimate the intensity of commitment that the holding of a comprehensive doctrine entails? It would be safe to assume, one would think, that a person who holds to a comprehensive doctrine in public does so out of true conviction. If one believed that one’s comprehensive doctrine was false, why would one bother to hold it? Rawls’ idea of public reason appears to exclude - even deny - the very notion of ‘truth’. (Indeed, there is no entry for ‘truth’ in the indexes of A Theory of Justice or Political Liberalism, notwithstanding the fact Rawls is clearly convinced of the truth of his own brand of liberalism). Rawls’ clearest statement on the matter runs as follows: “Political liberalism views this insistence on the whole truth in politics as

219 Ibid., 462.
220 Ibid.
221 Ibid., 446.
222 Ibid.
incompatible with democratic citizenship and the idea of legitimate law." He further claims that "[t]he definitive idea for deliberative democracy is the idea of deliberation itself." Much can be said about these two Rawlsian propositions. First, Rawls' language is revealing. The word 'insistence' is used pejoratively by Rawls in reference to truth claims in the public sphere. Are truth claims always 'insisted'? Are they not often 'proposed'? Second, Rawls appears, as a liberal democrat, to be much more at ease with a notion of partial truth, except in the case of his own political liberalism, which presumably rests on the assumption that the 'whole truth' of political liberalism is that only 'partial truths' are compatible with it. Third, Rawls' claim that 'the whole truth' in politics is incompatible with both democratic citizenship and legitimate law, suggests, perhaps unwittingly, that the very ground upon which democratic citizenship and legitimate law stand is something other than 'the whole truth' itself. Democratic citizenship and legitimate law are presumably legitimate because they are true, not because they are false. Fourth, in his remarks on 'deliberative democracy', Rawls seems to imply that deliberation takes place in a democracy for the sake of deliberation itself, that is, that there is no greater end (e.g. 'truth') to which deliberation is necessarily oriented. Rawls replaces the more contentious notion of 'truth' with the less contentious notion of an 'overlapping consensus'. In his essay on 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited', Rawls writes that "[w]hen political liberalism speaks of a reasonable overlapping consensus of comprehensive doctrines, it means that all of these doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, support a political conception of justice underwriting a constitutional democratic society, whose principles, ideals, and standards satisfy the criterion of reciprocity." The focus of concern for Rawls, then, is agreement between human beings, rather than agreement between a human being and any metaphysical notion of truth.

One of the important features of Rawlsian political liberalism is that of 'tolerance'. Rawls is suspicious of the 'hegemonic', 'persecutory', and 'zealous' tendencies in religious history, and is keen, in response, to guard the freedom and equality of all citizens. "[T]he principles of toleration and liberty of conscience must have an essential place in any constitutional democratic conception," writes Rawls. "They lay down the fundamental basis to be accepted by all citizens as fair and regulative of the rivalry between doctrines." He distinguishes between toleration in the realm of politics and toleration in the realm of religion. Political liberalism is concerned with the first of

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224 Ibid., 448.
225 Ibid., 482.
226 Ibid., 461.
these. In reflecting on toleration of the intolerant in the realm of politics, Rawls asserts that “[u]nreasonable doctrines are a threat to democratic institutions.” Unreasonable doctrines - those doctrines that are incompatible with the principles of liberal democracy - are beyond the boundaries of Rawlsian toleration. Yet how tolerant is Rawls himself toward religion? There are, to be sure, a number of remarks made about religion in his essay 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited', remarks that, to some, would raise questions about the depth of Rawls' understanding of religion as such. He writes, for example, that “[a] persecuting zeal has been the great curse of the Christian religion. It was shared by Luther and Calvin and the Protestant Reformers, and it was not radically changed in the Catholic Church until Vatican II (and) the Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom - Dignitatis Humanae.” Rawls makes use of words like “fundamentalist,” “autocratic,” and “dictatorial,” when reflecting on religious doctrines and rulers. To the claim from religious leaders, (as articulated by Rawls), that “democracy leads to a culture contrary to their religion,” Rawls offers the dismissive reply that “[w]e simply say that such a doctrine is politically unreasonable. Within political liberalism nothing more need be said.” For Rawls, the religiously true does not override the politically reasonable. In Rawls' only substantial remarks on Islam, relegated to a mere footnote, he quotes the Shari’a scholar Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im, author of Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law, to the effect that “[t]he Qur’an does not mention constitutionalism, but human rational thinking and experience have shown that constitutionalism is necessary for realizing the just and good society prescribed by the Qur’an. An Islamic justification and support for constitutionalism is important and relevant for Muslims.” This may very well be An-Na’im’s view, yet there are certainly views to the contrary among more conservative scholars in the Muslim world, views Rawls fails to mention. And finally, toward the end of his essay on ‘The Idea of Public Reason Revisited’, Rawls reveals that “[i]n political liberalism … [a]ccounts of human nature [are] put aside and [we] rely on a political conception of persons as citizens instead.” This ‘putting of human nature’ aside, however, would, for many religious believers, be an exercise in unreality. In a recent book on The Idea of Justice (dedicated to the memory of John Rawls), the Nobel Prize laureate, Amartya Sen, criticizes Rawls

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228 Ibid., 476.
229 Ibid., 488.
230 Ibid.
231 Ibid., 461.
232 Ibid., 482.
for denying in his ideal of public reason “the inescapable relevance of actual behaviour.” Rawls assures his readers that religion and democracy are not at war, that political liberalism is much more at home with religion than Enlightenment liberalism ever was, and that the ideal of public reason has its practical limits, yet the total effect of his remarks on religion leave one with the distinct impression that Rawls’ understanding and treatment of religion in general lack balance, insight, and nuance.

Is Rawls as open to religion as Taylor and Maclure suggest? A charitable judgment from the aforementioned analysis would reasonably lead one to claim that Rawls’ ‘openness’ toward religion is accompanied by serious qualifications, qualifications that are unfortunately overlooked by Taylor and Maclure.

9.20 Freedom of Conscience and Parental Authority

Part Two of Secularism and Freedom of Conscience further expands Taylor and Maclure’s educational reflections. Other cases of reasonable accommodation involving some link to freedom of conscience are taken up, including requests for prayer spaces in public schools and universities, menu options for religious students in school cafeterias, and other special protections. The key theme in Part Two, however, is the tension between freedom of conscience and parental authority. Though Taylor and Maclure acknowledge the right of religious parents to exempt their sons and daughters from attending courses that “contradict or relativize the religious convictions transmitted at home,” they nonetheless hold to the claim that such exemptions “may compromise the realization of … tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and other civic skills within societies with diverse beliefs and values.” In addition, “[s]tudents are future citizens who will have to interact and learn to cooperate with fellow citizens with different sexual identities and value systems, and from different cultures, religions, social classes, and so on. Students will be hindered, in that learning process, if they are separated out as a function of their parents’ religious beliefs.”

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234 In 1989, in a published commentary on Michael Sandel’s Democracy’s Discontent, Taylor expressed his own views about school prayer: “I cannot see the justification of a universal ban on prayer in all public schools everywhere. I think this is an unfortunate example of a rigidity which has entered into the American system of judicial review and rendered it largely dysfunctional, and indeed, a major source of divisions and culture wars.” Taylor goes on to remark that for Christians [and indeed for Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.], the secular liberal’s expectation that they become “agnostic Kantians” in order to become “equally respected, qua rational agents or life-plan choosers” is more than highly questionable. “To take that [expectation] as a modality of respect in a plural society,” Taylor asserts, “sounds more like a bad joke than like good political philosophy.” See Charles Taylor, ‘Living With Difference’, in Anita L. Allen & Milton C. Regan, Jr., (eds.), Debating Democracy’s Discontent: Essays on American Politics, Law, and Public Policy, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 216-218.
236 Ibid.
world, advise Taylor and Maclure, it is more essential than ever before that future citizens understand the complex challenges of human diversity. By implication, then, “an education in tolerance and pluralism will in certain circumstances justify the denial of parents’ requests for exemption and the exposure of their children to subject matter at odds with the beliefs transmitted at home.”

Though the educational reflections offered in Part Two of Secularism and Freedom of Conscience are clearly in favour of restrictions on parental rights, Taylor and Maclure neglect the opposite side of the argument - that unchecked state authority can lead to intentional and/or unintentional indoctrination.

9.21 Eamonn Callan on Parental Rights

In his book Creating Citizens, Eamonn Callan favours a conception of parental rights in education “that will not license the oppression of children,” and at the same time, “will do justice to the hopes that parents have and the sacrifices they make in raising their children.” He argues this line on the basis of the moral equality of the members of a family. Callan refines his argument in an essay on ‘Indoctrination and Parental Rights’. It is worth pondering over Callan’s claims here, since Taylor and Maclure place a great deal of emphasis on the recognition of parental rights in the second half of their book.

Callan’s first claim is that “if one were to instill moral or religious beliefs in one’s children in such a way that they become unable or disinclined to engage in serious thought about their validity, then one is guilty of indoctrination.” Callan supports the moral equality of both parent and child. Both are accorded certain rights. These rights are not entirely commensurable, however. They often clash. Trade-offs need to be made. If, for example, the molding of a child to fit a predetermined image of what the child’s parent sees the child to be runs contrary to the true vocation of the child in question, the parent might be accused of indoctrination. If the avowed and/or actual intention of the parent runs contrary to the rational dignity of the child, indoctrination is surely present. Yet are the rational capacities of a seven year-old the same as the rational capacities of a seventeen year-old?

238 The ‘International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights’, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1966, makes an assertion about these rights that is relevant to both sides of the argument. Article 13.3 of this covenant states that the “Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.” [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/cescr.pdf]
All conditions remaining equal, it would seem that a greater amount of parental responsibility would be natural in the case of a seven year-old as opposed to the case of a seventeen year-old. The older a child becomes, the more his/her rational capacities mature, the less likely he/she is susceptible to unhealthy forms of indoctrination. The question Callan fails to answer is this: ‘At what point is a child responsible for his/her own indoctrination whether it be by way of parents, teachers, school, church, state, etc.?’

Callan’s second claim is that “arguments concerning the child’s needs for love and attention within the family cannot establish any parental right to indoctrinate and neither can arguments about the love and goodwill which parents naturally display toward their children.” Callan brackets emotional considerations from his right-to-indoctrinate equation. Yet if a parent truly loves his/her child and wants the best for said child, why else would the parent send his/her child to a school with the highest possible standards? It is not so much a matter of parental right, here, as Callan argues, as it is a matter of parental duty. While a case might be made for a moral equality between parent and child, it would be much more difficult to claim, I think, that a well-intentioned parent has no authority over his/her child. There may very well be moral symmetry in the relationship between parent and child, but such symmetry does not discount the fact that the parent is older than the child, more experienced than the child, and (often) more responsible than the child. These are not symmetrical considerations, but asymmetrical considerations. While it is true that a parental right to indoctrinate ought not to be established when and if a pejorative sense of indoctrination is operative, it is also true that a parental duty to indoctrinate (in a healthy way that allows for the child’s rational capacities to flourish) exists when and if indoctrination, in its more positive connotation, is operative. Callan’s discussion of indoctrination suffers from an overemphasis on parental rights over and against parental duties. The love of a parent for his/her child matters greatly and should not be so casually dismissed. Callan assumes that there is little trust between a parent and his/her child, when in the vast majority of family situations, there is much trust to be found.

Callan’s third claim is that “viewing the child as a mere extension of his parents’ lives is morally unacceptable.” The key word here is clearly ‘mere’. The expression, ‘living vicariously through one’s children’ comes to mind. The parent is not the potter for whom the clay is the child, however. Parents are, ideally, moral guides for their children, not moral dictators. Callan asserts that both

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242 Ibid., 137.
parents and children are ‘self-determining agents.’ This is, at least on a philosophical level, partially true. Yet both are surely ‘self-receiving agents’ as well. A parent receives the gift of fatherhood or motherhood. A child (ideally) receives the gifts of love, security, protection, along with the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter from his/her parents. There is an intimate connection here. The relationship between parent and child cannot be reduced to tension between opposing rational autonomies as Callan would have us believe. His perspective on parent-child relationships betrays a certain libertarian bias, a bias that overlooks the continuity between familial generations. While it is true that the child is not merely an extension of his/her parents’ lives, it is also true that the child is intimately connected to his/her natural (or adopted) parents, that there is a deep bond between them that is more than rational, and that the child will inherit certain attitudes, beliefs, and values from his/her parents that will, in turn, be passed on to future generations.

Callan’s fourth claim is that “[s]o long as parents act with sufficient regard for the child’s interests, it is at least plausible to say that they have a right to non-interference, a right that is their due as self-determining agents.” Callan is unclear on possible sources of interference, but one suspects that, (along with outright rejection of the parents’ intentions by the child), the school, church, state and/or mass media might be in mind here. Callan, however, provides little insight into how the delicate balancing between the rights of these stakeholders ought to be resolved in a free and democratic society. There is some discussion of civic virtues in a diverse society in his book Creating Citizens, but little in the way of practical advice on how citizens in said society ought to go about accommodating, in the case of religious education, the rights of the parent, the child, the school, the church, and the state, without surrendering to unhealthy forms of indoctrination.

Callan’s conclusion in his essay on ‘Indoctrination and Parental Rights’ is that “parents, as self-determining agents, have a substantial though not unlimited right to raise their own children as they see fit.” The assumption that parents are, in fact, ‘self-determining’ agents, is repeated here. This is a purely existential, immanentist view of human agency, however. A religious educator would counter Callan’s claim by arguing for the influence of a transcendent God in the determination of human agency. That aside, his claim that parents have a substantial though not unlimited right to raise their own children as they see fit, seems reasonable. There are moral limits to what parents can intend for their children. The parent-child relationship is also accountable to the larger society outside the family arrangement. Institutions like church and state act as checks and balances on

244 Ibid., 139.
potentially unhealthy (and often unwitting) forms of indoctrination present within the family
structure. These limits to a child’s (and, indeed, a parent’s) rationality are meant (ideally, at least) to
direct freedom to its proper course.

How might Callan’s claim that that “parents, as self-determining agents, have a substantial though
not unlimited right to raise their own children as they see fit” square with Taylor and Maclure’s
claim that “an education in tolerance and pluralism will in certain circumstances justify the denial of
parents’ requests for exemption and the exposure of their children to subject matter at odds with
the beliefs transmitted at home?”245 Whereas Callan holds to a qualified right on the part of parents to
educate their child as they see fit, Taylor and Maclure hold to a qualified restriction on that very right.
It is interesting to notice that absent in both analyses here is the judgment of the child – (i.e. the
elementary or secondary school student) – as to whether he/ she accepts or rejects the program of
study on offer. In responding to the tensions between parents and schools, neither Callan nor
Taylor and Maclure pay sufficient attention to student rights, that is, to the freedom of conscience of
the very persons they are discussing.

9.22 A Commitment to Pluralism

In their conclusion to Secularism and Freedom of Conscience, Taylor and Maclure reiterate their thesis
that cultural diversity is a permanent feature of western liberal democracies, that on account of this,
citizens holding different worldviews must learn to live together, and that the way to ensure social
harmony in light of such conditions is through a political commitment to pluralism. The authors
call for an ‘ethics of dialogue’ to support the political morality they espouse. “Under such an ethics
of dialogue,” write Taylor and Maclure, “citizens engage candidly in discussion about the
foundations and orientations of their political community, using the explanatory and justificatory
language of their choice, while at the same time displaying sensitivity or empathy toward core
convictions that are an integral part of their fellow citizens’ moral identity.”246 Here we see the
uniqueness of Taylor and Maclure’s approach, an approach offering more than a slight twist on
Rawlsian liberalism. Whereas Rawls argues that under conditions of radical pluralism, citizens
should speak in a language consistent with liberal democratic principles and political justice, Taylor
and Maclure argue that under those same conditions, citizens should speak, with sensitivity toward

Readings, (Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1988), 138; Charles Taylor and Jocelyn Maclure, Secularism and Freedom of Conscience,
their fellow citizens, “using the explanatory and justificatory language of their choice.”247 The liberalism espoused by Taylor and Maclure is less restrictive and more open-ended than Rawlsian liberalism. Part of what distinguishes the former from the latter is an appreciation for the connection between freedom of conscience and freedom of expression. For Taylor and Maclure, persons are free to express themselves in the manner they choose “except in flagrant cases of defamation or incitement to hatred.”248 It is hoped, they add, that persons will “seek to understand how their [speech] will be perceived by others and to anticipate its impact on the social bond.”249 Whereas Taylorian and Maclurian liberalism is more person-centred, Rawlsian liberalism is more constitution-centred. On the whole, then, while the idea of a perfect form of liberalism, satisfactory to all, is a utopian mirage, there is, arguably, a greater humanity in the liberalism espoused by Taylor and Maclure than the liberalism espoused by Rawls.

As Taylor’s work has demonstrated, the educational implications of a ‘politics of recognition’ in a modern liberal democracy are wide-ranging, both in theory and in practice. Recognizing what one of Taylor’s interlocutors, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, once called, ‘the dignity of difference,’ is a virtue all persons living in multicultural societies are called upon to fulfill.250 As a violation of human dignity, misrecognition is never a neutral act. Taylor’s politics of recognition is, as we have seen, a politics of inclusion. Whether one considers Taylor’s views on the Western Canon debate in higher education, or Taylor’s involvement in paving a path toward the Ethics and Religious Culture program in Québec’s elementary and secondary schools, his natural inclination is one of openness. Yet, in the full light of his educational thought, there is something much more fascinating at work here. It is a revealing insight, which, I think, brings all of the elements of Taylor’s educational thought to the fore. And it is this. The Western canon debate and the Ethics and Religious Culture program are consummate expressions of Taylor’s four-pronged genealogy of modernity, as described in this dissertation. Simply put, aspects of Descartes’ scientific rationality, Kant’s exclusive humanism, Herder’s ethics of authenticity, and Hegel’s politics of recognition, are reflected in, and are constitutive of, the inner logic of the Western canon debate and Québec’s Ethics and Religious culture program. Both are, in this sense, fulfillments of the true spirit of Charles Taylor’s educational thought.

248 Ibid., 108.
249 Ibid., 109.
Part IV

Taylor’s Critics
10

CLIFFORD GEERTZ

10.1 Naturalism Or Hermeneutics?

Clifford Geertz, who died at the age of 80 in 2006, was a renowned American anthropologist and Professor Emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. He is best known for his ethnographic fieldwork in Morocco and Indonesia, for his ‘thick description’ of religion as a web of symbolic meaning, and for his pioneering 1973 study on The Interpretation of Cultures. “If anthropology is obsessed with anything,” he once remarked, “it is with how much difference ‘difference’ makes … If you want a good rule-of-thumb generalization from anthropology, I would suggest the following: Any sentence that begins, ‘All societies have …’ is either baseless or banal.”

Notwithstanding the accusations of ‘relativism’ against him, Geertz was more interested in particular forms of human culture than he was in a ‘common humanity’ in the abstract. “To discover who people think they are, what they think they are doing, and to what end they think they are doing it, it is necessary to gain a working familiarity with the frames of meaning within which they enact their lives,” he writes. “This does not involve feeling anyone else’s feelings, or thinking anyone else’s thoughts, simple impossibilities. Nor does it involve going native, an impractical idea, inevitably bogus. It involves learning how, as a being from elsewhere with a world of one’s own, to

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1 In a rare interview conducted in 2004 with Cambridge anthropologist Dr. Alan Macfarlane, Geertz spoke at length about his personal and intellectual biography. The details he revealed are as follows. He was born in 1926 in San Francisco. His parents divorced before he turned three years old. Geertz admits to being “neglected” as a child. During the Depression, he was sent to the countryside, where he was cared for by an elder foster mother. He subsequently attended a two-room schoolhouse. He felt emotionally isolated during his childhood, and, to compensate, developed a passion for reading. He joined the U.S Navy at the age of 17, and served for two years as a Communications Specialist. Upon his return from World War II in 1946, he attended Antioch College in Ohio on a G.I. Bill. He studied English and Philosophy as an undergraduate, with an aspiration to become a novelist. His first marriage to Hildred Geertz, a fellow anthropologist, in 1948, ended in divorce. After graduating in 1950, he then moved to Harvard’s Department of Social Relations for a Ph.D. in Anthropology. Thereafter, he worked closely with anthropologists Margaret Mead and Talcott Parsons, pursuing ethnographic fieldwork in both Indonesia and Morocco. From 1970 onward, he served on the faculty at the School of Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, founding its School of Social Science in 1973. He also taught at Berkeley, M.I.T., Chicago, and Oxford (where, in 1978, he was made Eastman Professor, by way of a recommendation from Isaiah Berlin). (His honorary degrees and fellowships are too numerous to mention). He cites Paul Ricoeur and Ludwig Wittgenstein as influences on his own scholarly career. In the Cambridge interview, Geertz acknowledges his fascination for understanding the complexity of foreign cultures on their own terms, and not as reflections of other cultures. “I want to figure them out … what makes them tick … what they’re all about … what their way of being in the world is,” he explains. (A transcript of this interview is available at www.alanmacfarlane.com). For a reliable treatment of Geertz’ anthropological writings see Fred Inglis, Clifford Geertz: Culture, Custom, and Ethics (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000).

2 Geertz defines ‘religion’ as “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations [in human beings] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” See Clifford Geertz, ‘Religion as a Cultural System’ in The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

live with them.⁴ Though Geertz’s motive was largely cognitive, his method was largely empirical. To properly understand a given culture, he claimed, one had to fully immerse oneself in its way of life.

10.2 Similarities and Differences

Geertz and Taylor have much in common. Both men have not shied away from praising each other’s work. In a review quote on the back cover of a 2005 festschrift devoted to Geertz (one year before his passing), Taylor writes:

“Clifford Geertz is a central figure in the humanities in the last half century, whose work has transformed anthropology and social science in general. His interpretive turn has made it possible to grasp the particular, changing constellations of meaning which constitute human societies, and are often masked in the explanatory systems and over-arching generalizations of traditional social science. (His) work is of greater relevance than ever today, when very diverse societies are drawn ever tighter together, often in mutual incomprehension and conflict.”⁵

In his collection of essays Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics (2000), Geertz makes reference to Taylor in a similarly positive way:

“What we need are ways of thinking that are responsive to particularities, to individualities, oddities, discontinuities, contrasts, and singularities, responsive to what Charles Taylor has called ‘deep diversity,’ a plurality of ways of belonging and being, and that yet can draw from them - from it - a sense of connectedness, a connectedness that is neither comprehensive nor uniform, primal nor changeless, but nonetheless real.”⁶

Judging from these comments, then, it is clear that Geertz and Taylor share, among other things, a passion for learning, a love for the humanities, and an acute sensitivity to cultural diversity.

Yet there are differences. In the move from Taylor’s critique of Cartesian dualism to the effects of instrumental rationality in modern education, a key philosophical tension between ‘naturalism’ and ‘hermeneutics’ emerges. This tension is a subterranean preoccupation in Taylor’s more scientific writings, where he takes up such topics as the distinction between the natural and the human sciences, the hermeneutical turn in contemporary philosophy, and the teleological explanation of human behaviour. These topics neatly intersect in Geertz’s 1994 essay on The Strange Estrangement: Taylor and the Natural Sciences’. Geertz’s essay first appeared in a festschrift, edited by philosopher James Tully, in celebration of Taylor’s life and work. The festschrift includes replies

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⁵ Ibid., review quote on back cover.
⁶ Ibid., 224.
from Taylor to each of his interlocutors, including Geertz, and is, as far as the secondary literature is concerned, an ideal resource for those seeking sound objections to Taylor's position on 'scientific rationality' in education.\(^7\)

### 10.3 Taylor on the Natural Sciences

In his essay, Geertz criticizes Taylor's polemic, in the introduction to both volumes of his Philosophical Papers, for its caricature of the natural sciences. There, Taylor describes himself as a "monomaniac" in his lifelong effort to argue against "the ambition to model the study of man on the natural sciences."\(^8\) Such an ambition shares an allegiance to 'naturalism' by which Taylor means "not just the view that man can be seen as part of nature ... but that the nature of which he is a part is to be understood according to the canons which emerged in the seventeenth-century revolution in natural science."\(^9\) Taylor includes behaviourism, artificial intelligence programs, and atomistic political theories, as examples of scientific movements that flagrantly neglect 'the significance feature', which understands human persons as self-interpreting animals, embedded in a language community, "against a background of distinctions of worth."\(^10\) Motivated by the modern disengagement from a metaphysical order, by a tendency to view matter (separated from mind) as mere mechanism, and by an objectification of nature - all inspired by Cartesian ideas - these movements, which adopt a "thin theory of the self," bracket out considerations of human meaning, purpose, and intentionality.\(^11\) Taylor refers to such theories as "terribly implausible," as "leading to bad science," and as "manifestly reductive."\(^12\) His claim is that morality is intertwined with epistemology, that "the more we are led to interpret ourselves in the light of the disengaged picture, to define our identity by this, the more [naturalism] will seem right and proper to us."\(^13\) Much to the chagrin of Geertz, then, Taylor appears in his Philosophical Papers as a zealous, unrepentant, anti-naturalist.

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\(^7\) The irony here, however, is that Geertz's own brand of cultural anthropology has itself been taken to task by academic critics for its lack of scientific rigour.


\(^9\) Ibid., 2.

\(^10\) Ibid., 4.

\(^11\) Ibid.

\(^12\) Ibid., 1.

\(^13\) Ibid., 6.
10.4 A ‘Post-Galilean’ Approach

Taylor’s reference to “the canons which emerged in the seventeenth-century revolution in natural science” needs further elaboration. Taylor assumes that his reader is scientifically literate, yet he often skips over important historical events in the philosophy of science that are relevant to his argument. Which canons in seventeenth-century natural science is he referring to precisely? Taylor frequently makes use of the phrase ‘post-Galilean science’ in discussing such canons, without explanation. The reader is forced to turn elsewhere for clarification. John Gribbin, author of the magisterial *Science: A History* (1543-2001) has this to say about the aforementioned canons:

“For, quite apart from the importance of the discoveries he made, Galileo’s key contribution to the birth of science lay precisely in emphasizing the need for accurate, repeated experiments to test hypotheses, and not to rely on the old ‘philosophical’ approach of trying to understand the workings of the world by pure logic and reason – the approach that had led people to believe that a heavier stone will fall faster than a lighter stone, without anyone bothering to test the hypothesis by actually dropping pairs of stones to see what happened. From their habit of strolling around the campus of a great university or through the streets of the city while discussing such issues, the old school of ‘scientific’ philosophy was known as the peripatetic school... Galileo practiced what he preached, and it was the peripatetic approach that was blown apart by his work in Italy late in the sixteenth century and early in the seventeenth century.”

Gribbin’s description here is especially helpful in compensating for Taylor’s unwritten assumptions because it associates the canons operative in seventeenth-century natural science with the methodological process of “repeated experiments to test hypotheses.” Also known as the method of induction, this process is grounded in an observation of the facts, which, in turn, provide the foundation for a theoretical cause-and-effect explanation, in the hope of uncovering a law of nature. In the twentieth century, problems with the traditional method of induction – (e.g. that a particular observation cannot assume a general theory) – have been dealt with, most notably, by two philosophers of science, namely Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn, the former the author of *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, the latter the author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Popper argues that a scientific theory is merely tentative until falsified by a better theory and that the whole of the history of science can be seen as a perpetual process of conjecture and refutation. Kuhn argues that various paradigm shifts in the history of science have replaced prior orthodoxies, resulting in new incommensurable ways of understanding reality, ways that radically alter the validation of prior truth claims. In their respective challenges to post-Galilean methodology, both Popper and Kuhn

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sharpen our understanding of the history of science. As we shall see, Taylor’s failure to situate the insights of important scientific thinkers, (i.e. Galileo, Popper, and Kuhn), in their historical context significantly compromises his analysis.

10.5 Geertz on Taylor’s ‘Strange Estrangement’

Geertz opens his essay by criticizing Taylor for his reduction of ‘the natural sciences’ to a single entity. “We are confronted not with an articulated description of a living institution,” Geertz writes, “one with a great deal of history, a vast amount of internal diversity, and an open future, but with a stereotype and a scarecrow – a Gorgon’s head that turns agency, significance, and mind, to stone.” Geertz adds that Taylor’s references to natural science are far from circumstantial (in the sense of describing actual developments in a particular discipline), and are far from contemporary (in as much as Taylor’s primary focus is on the implications of the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century). Geertz attributes Taylor’s reduction of the natural sciences to a single entity as perpetuating “an eternal methodological civil war, the Hermeneuts versus the Naturalists.”

Geertz’s view is that such a war is definitively not in the interest of either side. In a footnote to his text, Geertz singles out Taylor’s Sources of the Self for its neglect of any sustained treatment of the relationship between the natural sciences and the making of the modern identity. In what many consider to be Taylor’s magnus opus, the cultural significance of the natural sciences is left untouched. “The whole issue needs to be approached in some other way,” Geertz asserts, “one which rather than polarizing the intellectual world into a grand disjunction seeks to trace out its obscured dependencies.” Whereas Taylor’s cause is one of sharpening the distinction, popularized by German scholar Wilhelm Dilthey, between Geisteswissenschaften (the moral, spiritual, and/or human sciences), and Naturwissenschaften (the natural sciences), Geertz’s cause is one of acknowledging a complementarity between the two.

Geertz views ‘the natural sciences’ not as an isolated continent, but as a chain of islands in an archipelago. He is, consequently, more inclined than Taylor to recognize the overlapping connections in both the human and the natural sciences. Geertz quotes mathematical physicist Richard Feynman to the effect that what is needed is a vision of the whole of reality:

18 Ibid., 85.
19 Ibid., 86.
20 Ibid., 86.
21 Ibid., 89.
“Which is nearer to God; if I may use a religious metaphor. Beauty and hope, or the fundamental laws? I think that ... we have to look at ... the whole structural interconnection of the thing; and that all the sciences, and not just the sciences but all the efforts of intellectual kinds are an endeavour to see the connections of the hierarchies, to connect beauty to history, to connect history to man’s psychology, man’s psychology to the working of the brain, the brain to the neural impulse, the neural impulse to the chemistry, and so forth, up and down, both ways ... And I do not think either end is nearer to God.”

Geertz, like Feynman, does not believe in a radical separation between intellectual disciplines, be they scientific or otherwise. A radical separation between the ‘meanings’ of religion and the ‘mechanisms’ of science, for example, leads, for Geertz, to “symmetrical complacency and the deflection of issues.” Geertz is just as concerned about the naturalization of the natural sciences as he is about the naturalization of the human sciences. He concludes his critique with a plea to Taylor to join in the enterprise of “reconnecting the natural sciences to their human roots.”

10.6 Taylor’s Reply to Geertz

In his brief reply to Geertz in the Tully festschrift, Taylor, taking Geertz’s criticism to heart, retreats, somewhat, on his allegiance to the Diltheyan distinction between the human and natural sciences. He writes that he is not keen on marking off “two big, internally homogenous domains sharply demarcated from each other” but that “some form” of the distinction between Geisteswissenschaften and Naturwissenschaften “is still very useful.” What Taylor does want to retain from the Diltheyan distinction “is the attempt to get clear on what makes a science really successful [and] what makes accounts insightful and illuminating.” Studies of human beings, he argues, are very different from those of stars and amoebas; different questions are asked, and different answers are provided for each. Taylor is interested in “putting the mind back into nature,” an exercise he associates with the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a key influence in his own philosophical development. He is by no means sorry, however, to see reductive scientific explanations fade into the ether: “I have seen behaviourism disappear over the horizon; the strong A.I. [artificial intelligence] model is following in its train; and with a few more years of life I shall see rational choice go the same way.” What we have in Taylor’s reply to Geertz, then, is a slightly diluted distinction between the natural sciences and...

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23 Ibid., 95.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 234.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 235.
28 Ibid.
the human sciences, an acknowledgement of their connection, and a rejection of any outright separation between the two. In the end, Geertz nudges Taylor in the direction of nuance on the matter of Naturwissenschaften versus Geisteswissenschaften.

10.7 A Long-Standing Debate

The intellectual debate between the proponents of the natural sciences and the proponents of the human sciences has a lengthy history. The debate stretches as far back, in modern times, to the dawn of the Enlightenment, to the seventeenth century writings of Descartes, Bacon, Galileo, and Newton, to the eighteenth century writings of Voltaire and Vico, to the nineteenth century writings of Comte and Saint-Simon, and to the nineteenth and twentieth century writings of Wilhelm Dilthey and C.P. Snow. Some of these thinkers have been in favour of what is best described as ‘the unity of science’, while others have sought clear epistemological distinctions between the God-made world and the human-made world. The nineteenth century writings of Dilthey and Snow, for example, the most recent of the aforementioned lot, still resonate today. Dilthey, in an essay on The Relationship of the Human Sciences and the Natural Sciences reminds us that “the antagonism between the philosopher and the natural scientist is conditioned by their antithetical starting points.” Snow, in his now-famous 1959 Cambridge lecture The Two Cultures reminds us that “there is [often] a gulf of mutual incomprehension [between literary intellectuals and physical scientists] … hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding. They have a curious distorted image of each other … The non-scientists have a rooted impression that the scientists are shallowly optimistic, unaware of the human condition. On the other hand, the scientists believe the literary intellectuals are totally lacking in foresight … It is all destructive (and) much of it rests on misinterpretations which are dangerous.” Without the promise of a clear resolution, Dilthey and Snow, and a host of others, have weighed in, at various levels, on the debate between the natural and human sciences.

10.8 Three Disciplinary Cultures

As Harvard professor Jerome Kagan has shown in his book The Three Cultures: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and the Humanities in the 21st Century, the debate between the naturalists and the hermeneuts

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continues to this day, affecting not only our epistemological and methodological assumptions, but the very ordering of academic disciplines in the contemporary academy. Kagan’s account differs from prior accounts in as much as it includes the Social Sciences as a third field of academic pursuit. The traditional branches of the Natural Sciences (astronomy, biology, chemistry, geoscience, and physics) and of the Humanities (classics, fine arts, history, languages, literature, philosophy, religious studies) are now joined by a new branch, the Social Sciences, which include anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. Kagan’s study acknowledges that there is some cross-over between the three branches and that interdisciplinarity is more common today than ever before, yet he reminds us that the specialized distinctions among the disciplines have significantly increased over time, further complicating relationships between practitioners within said disciplines. He leaves no doubt in the reader’s mind, however, as to which branch of learning predominates in today’s academy:

“Every democracy requires an opposition party to prevent the one temporarily in power from becoming despotic. And every society needs a cohort of intellectuals to check the dominance of a single perspective when its ideological hand becomes too heavy. The first cohort of natural scientists, especially Kepler, Galileo, Bacon, and Newton, assumed this responsibility when Christian philosophy dominated European thought and their work catalyzed the ideology of the Enlightenment era. However, following three centuries of increasing secular power, natural scientists have become members of the entrenched establishment. This new arrangement leaves writers, poets, philosophers, historians, and social scientists as the loyal opposition against a materialistic determinism that exaggerates the influence of genes and neurochemistry on human behaviour and emotion, while minimizing the influence of culture, values, and the historical moment, on the meanings of words, sources of uncertainty, and each person’s attempt to render their life coherent.”32

While conscious of the ascendancy of the natural sciences in the contemporary academy, Kaplan is nonetheless committed to intellectual balance, to disciplinary checks and balances preventing wholesale idolatry of one field over and against another. Each field has its own academic interest, sources of evidence, primary vocabulary, historical perspective, ethical influence, dependency for support, working conditions, economic contributions, and criteria for beauty.33 Taking the variable of ‘academic interests’ as an example, Kaplan claims that the academic interest of Natural Scientists is “prediction and explanation of all natural phenomena;” that the academic interest of Social Scientists is “prediction and explanation of human behaviours and psychological states;” and that the academic interest of Humanists is “an understanding of human reactions to events and the

33 Ibid., 4.
meanings humans impose on experience as a function of culture, historical era, and life history."³⁴ Kaplan’s plea is a plea for pluralism. As we learn from his concluding paragraph, what is needed, on all sides, is greater humility:

“There is no formula that can deliver all truth, all harmony, all simplicity. No Theory of Everything can ever provide total insight. For to see through everything would leave us seeing nothing ... It is time for the members of the three cultures to adopt a posture of greater humility for, like tigers, sharks, and hawks, each group is potent in its own territory but impotent in the territory of the other.”³⁵

The word ‘impotent’ might be too strong a word here. One ought to expect a modicum of openness to academic disciplines outside of one’s own expertise. The emergence of new fields of knowledge in the academy would seem to demand a greater fluency in these areas. A professional philosopher may not be as potent in discussing particle physics as he or she is discussing Descartes’ mind-body distinction, yet some effort in the former direction might enrich his/her writing and research, rendering mealtime conversations between colleagues in the faculty dining hall slightly less cumbersome. A sympathetic understanding of different points of view is vital for any healthy intellectual community.

10.9 The Meaning of ‘Meaning’

It would be fair to suggest, then, that Charles Taylor’s preoccupation with the tension between ‘naturalism’ and ‘hermeneutics’ in the contemporary academy is more multi-faceted than he allows. The tension is not merely an intellectual affair; it has political, economic, social, cultural, and professional implications, as well. There are a number of different ways of expressing the tension. Naturalism versus Hermeneutics could equally translate to ‘Facts’ versus ‘Values’, or ‘Explanation’ versus ‘Understanding’, or ‘Quantitative’ versus ‘Qualitative’, or ‘Physical’ versus ‘Mental’, or even ‘Outer’ versus ‘Inner’. Each of these reformulations lends further insight to the basic tension as described by Taylor. When Taylor’s critique of Descartes is applied to his observations on instrumental rationality in modern education, and, in turn, is subjected to various objections and replies, what emerges is a deeper moral concern with ‘meaning’ itself. What, alas, is the meaning of ‘meaning’? Taylor refuses to accept distortions, narrowings, and reductions of meaning to a dispassionate study of raw empirical data, without metaphysical presuppositions, value biases, or

³⁵ Ibid., 275.
humane interpretation. To do so would be to limit the very ‘meaning’ of science itself. Etymologically speaking, the word ‘science’, as derived from scientia in the Latin, simply means ‘knowledge’. The move the Naturalists make, a move Taylor is adamantly opposed to, is the sleight-of-hand employment of the word science as a synonym for empirical science, thereby rendering all forms of non-empirical science meaningless. But as a sign in Einstein’s office at Princeton once read, “Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.”

Taylor’s point, not unlike Einstein’s, is that ‘meaning’ cannot be limited to what human beings can empirically verify. “Nor is this just a trivial issue of redefinition; the implication is that other forms of reasoned account – those we might find in Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas – are to be presented as ‘philosophical’ or ‘metaphysical’ in the pejorative sense, which is to say that they cannot be considered claims to knowledge in the same serious sense as the deliverances of ‘science’.” As far as Taylor is concerned, a narrow-minded conception of science, can lead, consciously or not, to a narrow-minded morality. A narrow-minded morality can, in turn, lead to an impoverished humanism.

10.10 The Case For ‘Methodological Pluralism’

An argument on behalf of ‘methodological pluralism’ has the potential to overcome the disciplinary divide between the naturalism of Clifford Geertz and the hermeneutics of Charles Taylor. One of the now-classic statements of methodological pluralism is outlined in Against Method, a book, published in 1975, by the late Viennese philosopher of science and intellectual provocateur, Paul Feyerabend. Feyerabend rejects the notion that there is a single scientific methodology in the human quest for knowledge. To suggest that there is, is not only contrary to the history, progress, and subjectivity of science, it is mere ‘chauvinism’, he asserts.

In Against Method, Feyerabend affirms an ‘anarchistic’ approach to epistemology. According to Feyerabend, the false assumption that there is a right way to proceed in science must be set aside in favour of a plurality of methods. Maximum insight into nature’s secrets is gained when various scientific theories are considered,

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38 Here is Feyerabend on the ‘subjectivity of science’: “[T]heories are frozen emotions as it were, you know. People have a certain feeling for the world. And then they try to nail their feelings down, and out comes a theory … Rationality is an attitude, you see. To approach something rationally is to approach it with a certain attitude. The quest for clarity is a certain attitude … It is an emotional attitude.” See ‘Paul K. Feyerabend: Last Interview’ in The Worst Enemy of Science? Essays in Memory of Paul Feyerabend, ed. John Preston, Gonzalo Muñévar, & David Lamb, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), 158-168.
assessed, and evaluated, in relation to one another. “Science is neither a single tradition, nor the best
tradition there is,” writes Feyerabend. “[T]he wide divergence of individuals, schools, [and] historical periods ... makes it extremely difficult to identify comprehensive principles either of
method, or of fact. The word ‘science’ may be a single word – but there is no single entity that
corresponds to that word.” To Feyerabend, then, ‘science’ cannot be restricted to a single
methodology; the methodologies of the human sciences and the methodologies of the natural
sciences are equally legitimate.

Feyerabend offers a democratic justification for ‘methodological pluralism’. There are many paths
to truth, he argues, and no single path ought to be privileged:

“Science must be protected from ideologies; and societies, especially democratic societies, must be
protected from science. This does not mean that the scientist cannot profit from a philosophical
education and that humanity has not and never will profit from the sciences. However, the profits
should not be imposed; they should be examined and freely accepted by the parties of the exchange.
In a democracy, scientific institutions, research programs, and suggestions must therefore be subjected
to public control, there must be a separation of state and science just as there is a separation between
state and religious institutions, and science should be taught as one view among many and not as the
one and only road to truth and reality.”

Feyerabend is not opposed to ‘science’ as such, only to a ‘scientism’ that understands itself as the
only window to reality. Feyerabend seeks a multi-perspectival, multi-dimensional, and multi-
contextual point of view. In a democratic society – particularly in institutions of higher learning – all
points of view must be taken into account. Feyerabend’s argument on behalf of ‘methodological
pluralism’ has the potential to overcome the disciplinary divide between the naturalism of Clifford
Geertz and the hermeneutics of Charles Taylor, then, by expanding our conception of reason and
by attuning us to the limits of scientism.

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40 Ibid., viii.
11.1 Buffered Self or Porous Self?

We are now in a position to take up an important critique of Taylor's notion of ‘exclusive humanism’ in the writings of William Connolly, a distinguished professor of political science at Johns Hopkins University. The theme of exclusive humanism is enriched in Taylor's more recent writings, specifically in his 2007 publication of *A Secular Age*. A key tension arises in Taylor's discussion of exclusive humanism here, between the 'porous' self and the 'buffered' self. Before we examine Connolly's critique, we need to take a closer look at Taylor's enriched conception of exclusive humanism in *A Secular Age*, from which the tension between the porous and buffered selves arises. As we will see, Connolly argues that Taylor's 'porous vs. buffered' distinction is too simplistic and fails to account for 'middle' positions between opened and closed selves.

By 'porous self', Taylor means a self that is open to the transcendent. In an enchanted world, the world of pre-modernity, the boundary between the self and the world, between the moral and the physical, is 'thin'. A variety of meaningful spirits, forces, and powers, both good and evil, impinge upon, intersect upon, and are at work upon, states of the human condition, and a sense of vulnerability to these influences is commonplace. Lower secular time was understood to be grounded in higher sacred time. This was true for both persons as well as societies, both of which were conceived to be part of a larger cosmological order and purpose. Persons and societies relied upon each other, and upon God, for security. In *A Secular Age* Taylor argues that the rise of modernity has led to a fading of enchantment, which, in turn, has brought about a waning of the porous self:

"Perhaps the clearest sign of the transformation in our world is that today many people look back to the world of the porous self with nostalgia. As though the creation of a thick emotional boundary between us and the cosmos were now lived as a loss. The aim is to try to recover some measure of this lost feeling."^1

Taylor's point here is that it is not as if the reality of the porous self has somehow disappeared in modernity. Rather, it is that the majority of modern lives are lived in such a way so as to neglect the reality of the porous self altogether. While the fading of enchantment plunges modernity into the logic of a now-disenchanted immanent frame, closure to the transcendent is permitted but not

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demanded. In the introduction to *A Secular Age*, Taylor writes that religion can be defined in terms of transcendence, “but the latter term has to be understood in more than one dimension.” The crucial dimension for Taylor is “the sense that there is some good higher than, [and] beyond human flourishing,” a good which a ‘porous self’ can be open to receiving.

In the transformation to modern disenchantment brought upon by the Enlightenment, a different kind of relation to transcendence emerges, that of the ‘buffered self’. The buffered self is one in which the boundary (or buffer) between self and world, between the moral and the physical, is ‘thick’. According to Taylor, the buffered self is the agent who finds “the idea of spirits, moral forces, [and] causal powers with a purposive bent, close to incomprehensible.” More radically, these no longer impinge; they don’t exist for him; whatever threat or other meaning they proffer doesn’t ‘get to’ him.

For the buffered self, only that which exists inside the mind is essentially meaningful. The buffered self is ‘disengaged’ from meaning that exists outside the mind; meaning embedded in one’s natural and social environment is obstructed or blocked out. The buffered self, which supports exclusive humanism, ushers in a dramatic change in the way the world is experienced. The only normative demands that count now are the demands one makes upon one’s self. Meanings, purposes, and goals become self-generated. One’s belief in the free and rational dignity of one’s own controlling power takes over. Lives as well as societies are now seen as ‘made’ and not ‘received’. Both can be ordered according to human dictates. This, in turn, is perceived as great progress. No longer relying upon the power of God, the buffered self cultivates a sense of its own invulnerability. Taylor’s evaluation of the implications of the buffered self goes far beyond individual and social critique, however. Taylor is arguing that a buffered identity writ large, leads to a buffered civilization. Something of what Taylor is pointing toward can be found in his colourful and illuminating review of Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*:

“We can see [a] classic expression of [the enormous condescension of posterity] in the great era in which this anthropocentric consciousness comes into its own, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Gibbon is an excellent example. The sense of invulnerability and distance from the unreason of the past finds expression in the cool self-possession, the ‘unflappable’ tone in which the wild and disturbing antics of monks and bishops in Byzantium are recounted. Invulnerability is enacted in the style, in which the violent, extreme, God-haunted acts of our forebears are held at a fastidious distance through the imperturbable voice of a dry, ironic wit. This tone tells us: We no longer belong to this world; we have transcended it.”

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3 Ibid., 20.
4 Ibid., 539.
5 Ibid., 135.
6 Ibid., 301.
Contrary to Gibbon, however, Taylor sees the condition of a radically buffered modern civilization, in part, as one of malaise, emptiness, flatness, of a ubiquitous feeling that something profound is missing. “[T]his experience,” Taylor writes, “has been identified particularly with commercial, industrial, or consumer society. [People] feel the emptiness of the repeated, accelerating cycle of desire and fulfillment in consumer culture; the cardboard quality of bright supermarkets, or neat row housing in a clean suburb; the ugliness of slag heaps, or an aging industrial townscape.” 7 The fading of Christianity from public consciousness due to what Taylor sees as its perceived (or misperceived) anti-rationalism, authoritarianism, difficulty with the problem of evil, and threat to the order of mutual benefit, add further fuel to the fire of secularity, a further support to the buffered self of exclusive humanism. 8 In the new paradigm, suffering and death are to be avoided and combated at all costs. A host of intimacy-harming antidotes are sought, including violence, as replacements for lost transcendence. In a buffered world, “... we are trained to relate to each other as dignified subjects of rational control, whose defining relations are no longer intimate ones.” 9 In an intimacy-starved culture, loneliness and alienation abound. In such a context, Taylor observes, there is an urgent need to rescue the positive aspects of human nature. Is exclusive humanism really sustainable, does it make the best sense of the human condition, if some of its effects are potentially harmful? Taylor leans in the direction of a ‘no’ here. While he acknowledges ‘cross-pressures’ between immanence and transcendence, he is neither all-for-immanence nor all-for-transcendence, but is dialectically committed to both.

Exclusive humanism has an important part to play in the central thesis of A Secular Age, as articulated by Taylor in the opening pages of his book. He begins his study of the rise of modern secularization with a simple question: “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?” 10 In response, Taylor embarks on a comprehensive refutation of what has come to be known among theorists of secularization as the ‘subtraction thesis’. According to this thesis, modern secular societies have naturally emerged out of a ‘subtraction’ of outdated religious beliefs brought upon by the progress of scientific reason. In offering a more sophisticated alternative to the subtraction thesis, Taylor identifies three ways of understanding religion in the context of modern secularity: i) “as that which is retreating in public space,” ii) “as a type of belief and practice

8 Ibid., 305.
9 Ibid., 142.
10 Ibid., 25.
which is or is not in regression,” and/or iii) “as a certain kind of belief or commitment whose conditions in this age are being examined.” Taylor is most concerned with the third of these in his book, that is, with the historical, sociological, philosophical, and spiritual conditions that have led to the rise of modern secularity. (Political and economic conditions are considered, to a lesser degree, in his analysis, as well). Taylor’s thesis is that “the coming of modern secularity ... has been coterminous with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option, [a humanism] accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing. Of no previous society was this true.” Taylor admits one exception to his final proposition, that of ancient Epicureanism, (outlined in the naturalistic writings of Lucretius, for example), which “admitted gods, but denied them relevance to human life.” Taylor notes, however, that ancient Epicureanism pales by comparison in terms of its scope of influence when juxtaposed with modern exclusive humanism. Taylor is also quick to point out that exclusive humanism is not the only alternative to a religious option in the context of modernity; non-religious anti-humanisms such as deconstruction and post-structuralism and non-exclusive humanisms on a non-religious basis, such as deep ecology, compete as viable alternatives. Taylor’s extensive treatment of exclusive humanism in A Secular Age suggests that its attraction is more powerful than any of the modern alternatives on offer, however.

11.2 The Deistic Origin of a Secular Age

Taylor’s illuminating discussion of the rise of exclusive humanism via Providential Deism is, in my view, the most fascinating insight of A Secular Age. Taylor’s treatment of Providential Deism, which constitutes Part II of his nearly 900-page tome, falls under the title of ‘The Turning Point’. Providential Deism is a turning point in the story Taylor tells of the rise of secularity in modern Western societies in as much as it is a precursor to both exclusive humanism and, eventually, to contemporary atheism. Taylor focuses on the role of British deists such as John Toland, author of Christianity not Mysterious (1696), and Matthew Tindal, author of Christianity as Old as the Creation (1730), in paving the way for exclusive humanism. Toland, an Irish-born scholar and pamphleteer wrote in 1696 that “[W]e hold that Reason is the only Foundation of all Certitude; and that nothing

12 Ibid., 18.
13 Ibid., 19.
14 Ibid.
reveal’d, whether as to its Manner or Existence, is more exempted from its Disquisitions, than the ordinary Phenomena of Nature. Wherefore, we likewise maintain, according to the Title of this Discourse, that there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above it; and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call’d a Mystery.”

Tindal, a trained lawyer and long-time fellow of All Souls’ College, Oxford, wrote in 1730 that “Men, if they sincerely endeavour to discover the Will of God, will perceive, that there’s a Law of Nature, or Reason; which is so call’d, as being a Law, which is common, or natural, to all rational Creatures,” [such that] “God’s will is so clearly, and fully manifested in the Book of Nature.” Both Toland and Tindal trust in the sufficiency of natural reason for human salvation. Both were freethinkers who were harshly persecuted for their views, Toland by the Irish House of Commons, and Tindal by the Bishop of London.

There were, to be sure, a variety of eighteenth century Enlightenment deisms, both in Britain and in Continental Europe. Referring to deism as the “unofficial religious philosophy of the Enlightenment,” Matthew Kadane explains that deistic ideas were spread by way of “the ongoing recovery of works from antiquity; European encounters with non-European cultures; the confessional conflicts, both conceptual and material, that followed the Protestant and Catholic Reformations; and the spread of experimental science. All had the effect of destabilizing certainties and encouraging some men and women to recover fundamental truths from doubt.” Many of the deisms on offer tended: to view God as an impersonal, indifferent, non-interventionist ‘watchmaker’ of laws; to rely on reason and nature as their guiding principles; to oppose the need for special revelation; to shun divine mystery and/or pious superstition; to reject the accounts of miracles in Scripture; to deny the Christian doctrines of Original Sin, of the Incarnation, of the Sacrificial Atonement, and of the Trinity (i.e. deists were more or less Arians who tended not to accept the divinity of Christ); to be more optimistic than pessimistic about the capacities of human nature; to be anti-clerical; to be freely critical of religious orthodoxy; and to affirm a universal salvation.

According to Taylor, the Deistic turn had an enormous effect on the self-understanding of Western Civilization. “The move to Deism involves more than just a change of belief, more even than a shift in what was taken to be rational argument,” writes Taylor. “It really reflects a major

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16 Matthew Tindal, Christianity as Old as the Creation, (London: [s.n.], 1730), 8 & 28.
shift in our background understanding of the human epistemic predicament.”

Taylor describes this anthropocentric shift as “a change in horizon which profoundly alters what it means to reason about God, or religion.”

One of the crucial background assumptions of the Deist position is that religious truth is excised from “a community of practice ... into which facets of prayer, faith, and hope are woven.”

The cosmic connection between God and community is ultimately severed in the slide toward Providential Deism. Taylor’s language in describing the views of 18th century critics of Enlightenment Deism is revealing:

“To many, [Providential Deism and the exclusive humanism which flows from it], seemed to draw the compass of human life too narrowly. Pursuing the goods of life and prosperity, while eschewing ‘enthusiasm’, in a world designed especially to favour these ends, seemed to make life shallow, devoid of deep resonance and meaning; it seemed to exclude transports of devotion, of self-giving, to deny a heroic dimension to our existence; it reduces us by enclosing us in a too-rosy picture of the human condition, shorn of tragedy, irreparable loss, meaningless suffering, cruelty and horror.”

Taylor seems more than sympathetic to the counter-arguments of Deist critics in the above formulation. For Taylor, the ‘turning point’ of Providential Deism plunges us into the logic of radical immanence personified by the anthropocentrism of exclusive humanism. Helped along by the rise of science, Providential Deism moves us from a world of ‘enchantment’ to a world of ‘disenchantment’. An enchanted world, one in which religion plays a primary role, is one where reality is imbued by divine mystery. A disenchanted world, one in which science plays a primary role, is one where reality is flat, empty, and mundane. As Taylor puts it, “Once disenchantment has befallen the world, the sense that God is an indispensable source for our spiritual and moral life migrates.”

As the need for grace retreats, human beings grow increasingly confident of their own controlling powers.

The rise of exclusive humanism in the eighteenth century fractures the existing culture and gives birth to a plurality of positions, both religious and non-religious. Taylor refers to this point in history in astronomical terms as a ‘nova’ (i.e. a stellar explosion). In other words, options become multiplied, as do “alternatives to the God-reference of fullness.”

Much of A Secular Age is dedicated to identifying, explaining, and assessing these alternatives, with a view to demonstrating how various cross-pressures, zigzags, turns, mutations, and reconfigurations between and among

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21 Ibid., 293.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 338.
24 Ibid., 233.
25 Ibid., 531.
26 Ibid., 26.
positions have led to the variety of spiritual options on offer today. This situation has, in many ways, heightened, rather than mitigated, the modern tension between ‘human flourishing’ and the ‘will of God’.27

11.3 The Terms of Political Discourse

There are those who are not wholly persuaded by Taylor’s account of exclusive humanism, however. Take William Connolly, for instance. As academic contemporaries, Connolly and Taylor have differed, over the course of several decades, on a host of intersecting philosophical and political issues. In addition to their intellectual disagreements, Taylor and Connolly have held qualitatively dissimilar spiritual views. Some historical perspective on the interlocution between the two professors is needed, then, to better understand the rationale for Connolly’s critique of Taylor’s account of exclusive humanism.

Taylor’s single reference to Connolly in *A Secular Age* mentions his colleague in the same breath as Foucault and Derrida as “contemporary neo-Nietzscheans [who] couple their critique of discipline and order with a radical critique of modern society as based on power and inequality.”28 A footnote, in the appendix of *A Secular Age*, cites Connolly’s award-winning 1983 book *The Terms of Political Discourse*, a book that develops the idea of ‘essentially contestable concepts’ and explores related implications for the conditions of political dialogue. Connolly understands ‘the terms of political discourse’ as referring:

“first, to the vocabulary commonly employed in political thought and action; second, to the ways in which the meanings conventionally embodied in that vocabulary set the frame for political reflection by establishing criteria to be met before an event or act can be said to fall within the ambit of a given concept; and third, to the judgments or commitments that are conventionally sanctioned when these criteria are met.”29

The bulk of Connolly’s book analyzes three essentially contestable concepts in the discourse of contemporary politics – ‘power’, ‘interests’, and ‘freedom’. The contestability of each of these concepts cannot be expunged, Connolly argues, for to do so would be an expression of “a wish to escape politics” altogether.30 The depoliticization of the terms of political discourse can, in

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30 Ibid., 213.
Connolly’s eyes, lead to a rationalization and/or a moralization of public life, and, ultimately, to greater control by a systemic ‘consensus’. For Connolly, a false consensus in theory leads to a false consensus in the practices of public life.

11.4 Connolly and Taylor on Foucault

Much of Connolly’s work on the terms of political discourse is influenced by the writings of Michel Foucault, particularly Foucault’s ‘The Order of Discourse’, his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, given in 1970, which foreshadows his genealogical research into the effects that medical, psychiatric, and sociological discourses have had on our understanding of madness, the penal system, and sexuality. In his inaugural lecture, Foucault asserts that “[w]e must conceive discourse as a violence that we do to things [or] as a practice we impose upon them; it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity.” 31 Discourses select, organize, represent, and control knowledge, and in doing so, both include and exclude would-be participants. This is no less true in a system of education, which Foucault interprets as “a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it.” 32 To engage in a discourse, educational or otherwise, is to appropriate the ordering powers embedded within it that establish the limits of the possible.

In 1985, in the pages of Political Theory, Connolly published ‘Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness’, an article in which he addressed Taylor’s reading of Foucault. In ‘Foucault on Freedom and Truth’, Taylor had claimed that Foucault repudiates both freedom and truth, in so far as he claims that truth is relative to a ‘regime’. According to Taylor, “[t]his regime-relativity of truth means that we cannot raise the banner of truth against our own regime. There can be no such thing as a truth independent of its regime, unless it be that of another. So that liberation in the name of ‘truth’ could only be the substation of another system of power ...” 33 In his reply to Taylor, Connolly asserts that Taylor fails to show: i) precisely why Foucault’s genealogical approach to truth, which strives for the interrogation of and not the rejection of truth, is less viable than Taylor’s ontological approach; ii) how ‘otherness’ is to be integrated into Taylor’s ontology; and iii) how Taylor’s ontological approach is to be sustained in the modern age. 34

32 Ibid., 227.
In his reply to Connolly, (i.e. in ‘Connolly, Foucault, and Truth’), Taylor adds further clarification to his remarks. First, Taylor accuses Foucault of foreclosing the question of truth in so far as every truth claim is seen as an imposition of power, and not as an epistemic gain. At one point, he describes Foucault’s notion of truth as “confusion defending itself with confusion.”

Second, while acknowledging Foucault’s accomplishment in reminding us of “the denial of otherness” in certain modern notions of truth, at the same time, Taylor wonders “what doors to otherness we have closed, and how much they can be opened again without destroying ourselves.” Citing the example of the Aboriginal claim to self-government, Taylor adds that “[t]he solution of full integration into our self-governing community can demand too high a price from (Aboriginal communities) in terms of their identity and way of life.”

What we urgently need, Taylor writes, are “better ways of seeing what is possible in this domain.” Third, Taylor distinguishes between human teleology and historical teleology: “If we mean some inescapable design at work inexorably in history, à la Hegel, then of course I am not committed to it. But if we mean by this expression that there is a distinction between distorted and authentic self-understanding, that the latter can in a sense be said to follow a direction in being, I do indeed espouse such a view.” At the heart of Taylor’s response to Connolly, then, is the claim that self-understanding can guide us toward the truth about ourselves, the truth about others, and the truth about modernity.

11.5 Why Connolly is Not a Secularist

Connolly’s Why I Am Not a Secularist (1999), which was partially inspired by Bertrand Russell’s Why I Am Not a Christian (1957), was an attempt to work out his own ‘inner tensions’. It calls into question the dogmatic indifference toward religion from the political left. Connolly’s task here is not to dispose with secularism altogether, but to humble its conceit, by ‘refashioning’ it into “one perspective among several in a pluralistic culture.” Connolly argues here for a ‘multidimensional’

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35 Charles Taylor, ‘Connolly, Foucault, and Truth’ in Political Theory, Vol. 13 No. 3, August 1985, 383. In a 1983 interview, Taylor and his fellow questioners asked Foucault whether there are “relations of discipline which are not necessarily relations of domination?” Foucault’s response: “Of course, there are consensual disciplines ... [my] analyses can in no way, to my mind, be equated with a general analytics of every possible power relation.” [This is a significant qualification on the part of Foucault, one that tempers the prevailing tendency in some academic circles to apply the perspective of domination to every aspect of communal life]. See Charles Taylor et al, ‘Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault’, in Paul Rabinow, (ed.), The Foucault Reader, (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 380.

36 Ibid., 383.
37 Ibid., 384.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 William E. Connolly, Why I Am Not a Secularist, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11.
pluralism in keeping with what he calls ‘the politics of becoming’. All points of view, be they secular or religious, should be acknowledged, included, and considered in public discussion, and no point of view should be unfairly privileged. “The need today,” Connolly writes, “is to cultivate a public ethos of engagement in which a wider variety of perspectives than heretofore acknowledged inform and restrain one another. Today reflective engagement is needed among a variety of religions and irreligions to support a more vibrant public pluralism.”

Connolly is intent on restoring the equilibrium between identity and difference. He does this by casting himself as a pluralist of peaceful co-existence, and not as a militant secularist.

### 11.6 Clashing Spiritualities

In a 2004 piece entitled ‘Catholicism and Philosophy: A Nontheistic Appreciation’, Connolly turns his attention to the spiritual differences between him and Taylor:

“It is just that where he projects or confesses a loving God who transcends articulation, I project a reserve or virtual field below articulation without intrinsic purpose or salvational promise. The contestable source I cultivate exceeds articulation not because its intelligence transcends us but because its energies have a complexity that does not correspond entirely to human capacities for conceptual thought. Whereas Taylor seeks to give greater expression to the God who inspires him, who precedes his subjectivity, and who informs his ethical practices, I seek inspiration from a nontheistic reserve of being that energizes me, that precedes my subjectivity, and that embodies a protean diversity that can help to inspire a positive vision of pluralism. My ethic of cultivation, like his, is not entirely reducible to subjectivity or intersubjectivity. But the slack is not taken up by a designing or loving God; it is taken up by an abundance of being over identity that can exceed and energize us.”

Connolly admits to endorsing elements of Taylor’s analysis of exclusive humanism, though he remains uncertain about “the breadth of his commitment to deep pluralism” defined as “agonistic respect for a variety of ethical sources operative on the same politically organized territory.” For Connolly, Taylor remains “a little too close for comfort to Vatican reductions of nontheistic faith to nihilistic atheism, negative freedom, warrior ethics, and self-indulgent aestheticism.” If given the choice, Connolly would live neither in a militantly Catholic nor in a militantly atheistic regime. It is complexity he is after: “My focus” he explains, “is on the cultural promise of a network of connections across multiple dimensions of difference in the domains of religion, ethnicity, moral

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41 William E. Connolly, Why I Am Not a Secularist, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 5.
43 Ibid., 173.
44 Ibid., 181.
source, gender practice, and sexual orientation.” Connolly seeks a middle path between theism and non-theism. This middle path is justified by Connolly’s commitment to pluralism, a commitment that, in Connolly’s mind, is more inclusive and less prejudicial than Taylor’s.

11.7 Time as Becoming

In his 2010 essay ‘Belief, Spirituality, and Time’, Connolly challenges Taylor’s two-fold distinction between immanence and transcendence. He argues for an in-between time, a time between the temporal and the eternal, which, in its own way, is receptive to a dimension of mystery. He refers to this as a time of becoming. Connolly characterizes his own position as “radical immanence replete with fugitive encounters with mundane transcendence.” He places his own perspective in the context of two sets of modern thinkers: the “immanent naturalists” (e.g. Epicurus, Lucretius, Spinoza, and Foucault) and the “philosophers of immanence in a world of becoming with a trace of transcendence” (e.g. Henri Bergson, William James, Marcel Proust, and Alfred North Whitehead).

In formulating his own spiritual position, Connolly draws on both sets of these modern thinkers. All of the names he mentions are what he calls “philosophers of time as becoming” who posit “a world in which time is not circular, linear, or purposive [but] periodically folds the new into being in a universe that is intrinsically open to an uncertain degree.” There is a certain degree of vagueness in these lines, to be sure, but Connolly is, I think, fundamentally committed to a temporal and existential spirituality.

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46 Connolly has expressed his commitment to pluralism in two published 2008 interviews. In a conversation with Samuel A. Chambers, he reveals that “every issue and theme I have explored over the last thirty years is somehow linked to the question of pluralism.” See ‘An Interview with William Connolly’, in Democracy, Pluralism, and Political Theory, ed. Samuel A. Chambers & Terrell Carver, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 324. In a discussion with David Campbell and Morton Schoolman, Connolly sheds biographical light on his pluralistic perspective: “My concern [for pluralism], I suppose, grew out of my childhood in a pro-union, working class family, raised by nonreligious parents. They allowed me to go to church with my friends whenever I wanted. But it did not take. The neighbourhood was full of Southern Baptists who had trekked north to Flint, Michigan, to work in the auto factories. I found myself hard-pressed to gain respect for my developing non-theism (as I call it now) in my neighbourhood, school, extended family, and sports teams. Many friends, relatives, and teachers loved the sinner but not the sin. I must have been fairly articulate, however, because when friends from the day contact me after many years, they often ask, ‘Are you still an atheist?’ The McCarthyism of the time, taking a heavy toll on adults I knew, also deepened my visceral commitment to diversity and my awareness of how intense opposition to it can be underneath generic expressions of support.” See ‘An Interview with William Connolly’ in The New Pluralism: William Connolly and the Contemporary Global Condition, ed. David Campbell and Morton Schoolman, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 305.
48 Ibid., 129.
49 Ibid.
A further elaboration of Connolly’s spiritual perspective is offered in his most recent book, *A World of Becoming* (2011). Here, Connolly criticizes Taylor for his ‘open’ vs. ‘closed’ (i.e. ‘porous’ vs. ‘buffered’) distinction outlined in *A Secular Age*. Connolly finds the distinction “misleading.” It is misleading because it fails to specify the multiple possibilities of openness and closure:

“A philosophy of radical immanence, for instance, is closed to faith in a personal divinity. But it is open, first, to an eternity of time whose scope exceeds every specific force-field, second, to exploration of different degrees of agency, feeling, and creativity in several nonhuman force-fields, third, to exploring two registers of temporal experience within the human estate, and, fourth, to the idea that a modicum of mystery is apt to accompany some key assumptions in this perspective as well as others. Closed along one dimension and open along four others.”

Faith in a personal divinity is not the only transcendent variable for Connolly. In Connolly’s view, then, Taylor is closed to the fullness of transcendence: “Taylor, I suspect, is closed to time as becoming, and he plays down modes of non-divine agency beyond the human estate. He may also reserve real creativity to God alone, while we distribute it to different zones of the universe and the relations between them.” Connolly’s point here is that Taylor’s open vs. closed / enchanted vs. disenchanted schemata is far too simplistic; it needs, in Connolly’s words, “to be complicated and pluralized.”

Connolly’s ethical creed is grounded in what he calls a “care for the diversity of life.” Connolly affirms the world as it is. Human activity is meaningful in itself. There is no need for divine inspiration. “[W]e relocate the element of mystery projected by many into radical transcendence into natural and cultural processes themselves,” he explains. He rejects both purely materialistic and purely metaphysical outlooks on life. His philosophy of becoming has no need for stable essences. He is also critical of ‘exclusive humanism’ for its tendency to pull humanity “too far above the rest of nature.” In short, Taylor’s philosophy is too theological for Connolly’s taste.

One of the unique features of Connolly’s scholarly work is its persistent attentiveness to the politics of ‘deep pluralism’. In *A World of Becoming*, Connolly underscores the point that the cultivation of deep pluralism is much needed in today’s rapidly changing world. He defines deep pluralism as “the readiness to defend your creed in public while acknowledging that it so far lacks

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 70.
54 Ibid., 79.
55 Ibid., 80.
56 Ibid., 79.
the power to confirm itself so authoritatively that all reasonable people should embrace it." In Connolly’s "world of becoming", all creeds are contestable - humbly open to correction and revision. Connolly links his commitments to pluralism, democracy, and egalitarianism with his interpretation of Taylor’s account of exclusive humanism in *A Secular Age*, and, by implication, with ‘openness’ and ‘closure’ to transcendence. For Connolly, the spiritual and the political are clearly interconnected. One’s spiritual views help shape, and are reflected in, one’s political views. This is no less true in the world as a whole. Connolly asserts that the onset of globalization (and its transnational movements of persons, capital, media, etc.) has resulted in a “minoritization of cultural life.” It is quickly becoming a world of multiple minorities, organized along several dimensions,” observes Connolly, a world where persons “will either negotiate creative ways to co-exist and interact with respect on the same territories (and across territories too), or increasingly confront each other in bellicose struggles for hegemony." As a committed ‘deep pluralist,’ then, what Connolly fears most in the present global situation are strong claims of universality. He points to a stark example of this in what he labels “the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine,” comprised (among other neo-conservative entities) of Fox News, the American Enterprise Institute, and assorted ‘cowboy capitalists’. For Connolly, then, an unreflective evangelical spirituality can lead to a violent evangelical politics. This is precisely what he fears in Taylor. If one reads between the lines, it would be fair to suggest that Connolly interprets Taylor’s *A Secular Age* as championing the superiority of a divinely transcendent view of the world. This naturally offends his pluralistic, democratic, and egalitarian sensibilities. His critique of Taylor’s account of exclusive humanism is marshaled as a corrective against Taylor’s view becoming, as it were, excessively evangelical. Connolly values diversity over dogma, fragility over certainty. He swims in the waters of possibility, not of limitation.

This is all well and good, of course, but I think Connolly overstates his case against Taylor. Notwithstanding his praise for Taylor’s nobility of mind, at times, Connolly’s critique is defensive in tone, and skeptical of Taylor’s motivations. “Taylor is dubious about our creed, though he acknowledges that he cannot give knockdown arguments against it,” notes Connolly. If it is true that he interprets Taylor’s *A Secular Age* as a religious apologetic, rather than as an exercise in the history of ideas, that is, as a normative account rather than a descriptive account of modern secularity, as such, he perceives Taylor as denying his reader the free right to make up his/ her own

58 Ibid., 89.
59 Ibid., 84.
60 Ibid., 88.
61 Ibid., 79.
mind about whether a position of transcendence or a position of immanence is more or less justifiable. The fact that Taylor acknowledges his preference for theism in A Secular Age, and elsewhere, however, in no way implies that he is incapable of appreciating the fullness of immanence. Indeed, Taylor would not have written A Secular Age were it not for the central question of his book, the question of what gave rise in the modern West to alternative forms of ‘fullness’ in the first place. Such a question seems to me to presuppose rather than to neglect intellectual sympathy. Taylor is, time and time again in his text, more than eager to point out the range of positions within the immanent frame, in a respectful and pluralistic manner, including those positions with varying forms of naturalistic transcendence. In the end, I think, Connolly’s fear of Taylor’s theism partially distorts his reading of A Secular Age.

11.8 Taylor’s Reading of Proust

We can, to some extent, discern Taylor’s views of Connolly’s commitment to ‘philosophers of immanence in a world of becoming with a trace of transcendence’ by way of Taylor’s readings of Bergson, James, and Proust in A Secular Age. Taylor reads Bergson as a philosopher who “thematizes lived time” in a single stream, James as a “quintessentially modern” philosopher of experience, and Proust as “the most brilliant articulator of the lost connection across time, but also the inventor of new experience-immanent ways of restoring it.” Taylor diverges most sharply from Connolly in his reading of Proust:

“That the repeatable cycles of life connect over time, and make a continuity, is an essential condition of a life having meaning ... But where the credibility and force of these narratives weaken, the unity comes under threat. Now with hindsight, we can hold that this threat of disunity and meaninglessness was implicit in the original move to a purely secular time, to a life lived unconnected with higher times ... What Proust gives us is a sense of a higher time, built out of the sensibility of a modern living in the flow of secular time.”

Based on the views expressed in his critiques of Taylor, Connolly would surely disagree with Taylor on three points here: i) that temporal continuity is an essential condition of a life having meaning; ii) that meaninglessness is implicit in the move to a purely secular time; and iii) that a life lived without a connection to higher time is a threat to unity. Connolly would, on the contrary, claim that a commitment to ‘immanence in a world of becoming with a trace of transcendence’ can be just as

62 In public discussions about the concept of ‘fullness’ in A Secular Age, Taylor has acknowledged that the phrase ‘well-being’ might have better expressed what he sought to convey.
64 Ibid., 719-720.
continuous, meaningful, and unified as a commitment to a life fully lived in connection with higher time. Which of these two positions is more persuasive, Taylor's or Connolly's? There is a clash of sensibilities here. Through Proust, Taylor interprets worldly reality as being wholly connected to higher time, while Connolly interprets worldly reality as being partially connected to higher time. It is the depth of their respective qualitative commitments to transcendence that is at issue here. Since there is no obvious criteria upon which to judge the matter, we have the makings here of a genuine philosophical predicament.

11.9 Similarities and Differences

We have, from the aforementioned list of sources, at least some sense of Taylor's understanding of Connolly, and, indeed, of Connolly's understanding of Taylor. Taylor sees Connolly, first and foremost, as a political philosopher, while Connolly sees Taylor, first and foremost, as a theological philosopher. What we have between Taylor and Connolly is a classic confrontation between the hedgehog and the fox, with Taylor in the role of hedgehog and Connolly in the role of fox. Whereas Taylor is attuned to the transcendental unity of 'the one', Connolly is attuned to the immanent complexity of 'the many'. Whereas Taylor's observations on the human person and society at large are more teleological in orientation, Connolly's observations on the human person and society at large are more existential in orientation. Both are profoundly committed to an ethic of pluralism. What they are in disagreement about, however, is the meaning of pluralism itself. Taylor looks upon radical pluralism from the vertical standpoint of 'exclusive humanism'; Connolly looks upon radical pluralism from the horizontal standpoint of 'inclusive diversity'. Neither of the two views modernity in wholly positive or wholly negative terms.

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65 In his essay 'Agonism and Liberalism', Connolly asserts that "(Taylor) thematizes politics as a gathering together of disparate forces into a shared purpose realized in common, deflating the corollary idea of politics as a perpetual contestation of established commonalities that prevents injuries and injustices within them from becoming too thoroughly naturalized, rationalized, or grounded in a higher direction in being." See William E. Connolly, 'Agonism and Liberalism', in Democracy, Pluralism, and Political Theory, ed. Samuel A. Chambers & Terrell Carver, (New York: Routledge, 2008), Pg. 170.

66 Connolly sounds very much like Taylor when outlining the pros and cons of modernity: "Even if modernity is not unique (it is too early to tell), it is at least distinctive. In its optimistic moments it defines itself by contrast to earlier periods which are darker, more superstitious, less free, less rational, less productive, less civilized, less comfortable, less democratic, less tolerant, less respectful of the individual, less scientific and less developed technically than it is at its best ... Modernity has lost a world of rich tradition, a secure place in the order of being, a well-grounded morality, a spiritual sensibility, an appreciation of hierarchy, an attunement to nature; and these vacated places have been filled by bureaucracy, nationalism, rampant subjectivism, and an all consuming state, a consumer culture, a commercialized world or, perhaps, a disciplinary society." See William E. Connolly, 'The Order of Modernity' in Democracy, Pluralism, and Political Theory, ed. Samuel A. Chambers & Terrell Carver, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 281.
11.10 Educational Implications

In *A Secular Age* Taylor affirms that the modern West is characterized by what he calls ‘the immanent frame’, yet he also points out that this frame is spun “in ways of openness and closure.”\(^{67}\) He admits that much depends on the milieu in question. In the contemporary Academy, for example, Taylor describes the spin of closure as ‘hegemonic’. But what precisely does he mean by this? We need to unpack this, I think, by revisiting the distinction Taylor makes in *A Secular Age* between the ‘porous self’ and the ‘buffered self’ and by unraveling their related educational implications.

The potential educational implications of the porous-buffered distinction as formulated by Taylor in *A Secular Age* are significant. Virtually every aspect of the student-teacher relationship is affected, one way or another. There are a number of possible configurations here. Imagine, in the context of a college or university, a ‘buffered teacher’ closed to transcendence, instructing a ‘porous student’ open to transcendence. Or a ‘buffered student’ closed to transcendence being taught by a ‘porous teacher’ open to transcendence. How might the dynamics between teacher and student be affected when both are committed to either one of the two aforementioned positions, that is, when both teacher and student are ‘porous’, or, alternatively, when both student and teacher are ‘buffered’? The same holds true for the classroom at large, where either a minority or majority can emerge in favour of one position over the other. A number of educational factors are affected by these configurations: pedagogical style, the quality of classroom discussion, course and curricular content, values, expectations, relationships between (and among) teachers, students, and administrators – the list goes on. A ‘porous school’ is likely to produce a ‘porous student’ just as a ‘buffered school’ is likely to produce a ‘buffered student’. Some would make use of this distinction, for example, in comparing a privately-funded, faith-based college or university to a publicly-funded secular-based college or university. In both cases, the school’s educational philosophy (and, thus, its practice) will be profoundly shaped by whether it is committed, to a lesser or greater degree, to the nurturing of a ‘porous’ or a ‘buffered’ milieu.

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RICHARD RORTY

12.1 Relative Truth or Objective Truth?

The key tension in Charles Taylor's consideration of the modern notion of authenticity, I want to argue, is that of 'relative truth' versus 'objective truth'. Another way of phrasing this tension would be to say that there is a difference between a private notion of authenticity and a public notion of authenticity. The claim that there is a Platonic idea of authenticity writ large in the heavens is difficult to square with the reality on the ground. There are, it seems, as many ways of defining 'authenticity' as there are persons and cultures. Some of these definitions are commensurable, some are not. We need to think more about how the concepts of 'truth' and 'authenticity' are intertwined.

I want to illustrate the connection between 'truth' and 'authenticity' by contrasting Taylor's writings to that of the American post-modern, neo-pragmatist philosopher, Richard Rorty. Before his passing in 2007, Rorty had participated in a more than fifty-year debate with Taylor on a variety of philosophical issues, including the distinction between the human and the natural sciences, mind-body identity, the nature of personhood, the legitimacy of metaphysics, realist and non-realist epistemology, the significance of analytic philosophy, and the historiography of Western philosophy. It would be impossible to do justice to the richness of these discussions in the brief space I have here; I want instead to focus on exchanges between Rorty and Taylor in print that are relevant to our theme of 'authenticity'. In addition to these exchanges, I will attend to Rorty's pragmatism, as well as his views on contemporary higher education. In considering such sources, I argue that Rorty and Taylor hold different understandings of truth, which, in turn, influence their respective understandings of authenticity, and, by implication, their philosophies of education.

12.2 Understanding Rorty

Understanding the life and work of American philosopher Richard Rorty (1931-2007) is no elementary task. He was an immensely complex and multi-layered thinker, one of the more talked-about intellectuals of his generation, once described as “the most interesting philosopher in the world.”1 Engagement with Rorty can be daunting. His acrobatic, free-wheeling, deflationary mind, which produced highly provocative (and often highly controversial) writings, serves as a window into post-war intellectual life in America. He is an 'air balloon' thinker; he takes you up, high in the

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sky, and illuminates the colourful contours of the landscape below. Yet he is also a ‘quicksand’ thinker, one who weightlessly stands on a groundless platform. Rorty covered a wide range of topics: in the history of philosophy, analytic and continental philosophy, the philosophy of science, politics, literary criticism, the arts, and culture. He was a self-identified ‘pragmatist’ in the mold of John Dewey, his main philosophical influence, whom he saw as doing philosophy between Hegel and Darwin. Rorty’s main intellectual project throughout his career was to apply pragmatist thinking to every realm of intellectual life, including language itself, which he saw as a naturalistic tool that humans ‘use’ to cope with the world and satisfy their utilitarian need for greater happiness. In keeping with the medieval English Franciscan friar, William of Ockham, whom many regard as the true father of modern epistemology, Rorty was a nominalist who denied the existence of universal forms in human language. For Rorty, words are merely words; they do not point to anything metaphysical. Words are chosen to achieve pragmatic purposes. “Pragmatists think that if something makes no difference to practice, it should make no difference to philosophy,” he once explained. Nietzsche had an influence on his thinking, particularly with respect to ‘facts’ and ‘interpretations’. For Rorty, there are no facts or interpretations outside of language. “There is no interesting difference between tables and texts, between protons and poems,” he observed. “To a pragmatist, these are all just permanent possibilities for use, and thus for redescription, reinterpretation, [and] manipulation.” Rorty thought that no particular way of describing the world should be privileged over any other. He was a patriotic American, deeply committed to progressive social democracy, freedom, and equality. A series of ‘antis’ characterize his philosophical stance: Rorty was anti-Platonist, anti-essentialist, anti-metaphysical, anti-foundationalist, anti-representationalist, and anti-dualist. He was a staunch atheist and secular humanist, who held that ‘authority’ ought to be replaced by ‘fraternity’ since there is nothing in the universe we can rely upon except each other. He believed there was no way of escaping time, space, and the contexts of human history, into a vision of eternity. He denied the correspondence theory of truth and/or any theory that professed to capture the ‘essence’ of reality. Rorty equated ‘truth’ with ‘solidarity’; truth is merely a by-product of ‘justified’ descriptions of the world, that is, of descriptions emerging from conformity to shared linguistic norms and practices. Rorty was all too aware of past moral abuses of

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3 In a footnote to his response to Robert Brandom’s ‘Vocabularies of Pragmatism: Synthesizing Naturalism and Historicism’, Rorty has this to say about Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language: “Wittgenstein was right to reply to the question ‘How do you know that that is red?’ with ‘I know English.’” See ‘Response to Brandom’, in Rorty and His Critics, ed. Robert Brandom, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 186.

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the concept of ‘truth’ and more than eager to direct his philosophical talents toward its deconstruction.5 “Part of my ambition,” he revealed, “is to help it come to pass that where epistemology and metaphysics were, sociology and history shall be.” 6 The problem with metaphysics, he observed, is that “it is a game without rules ... anyone can say anything and get away with it.”7 There were, for Rorty, two kinds of philosophers: those who invented new language games and those who were stuck in old ones. “[G]reat philosophers [are those] who ask bold new questions and revolutionize philosophical discourse and lesser philosophers [are those] who work out the details, implications, internal tensions, and contradictions.”8 Despite different aims, interests, and methods, both are part of “a single, continuing conversation.”9 For Rorty, philosophy is a science and an art; the boundaries of the discipline can be stretched to include both and more.10

Rorty was born on October 4, 1931 to James Rorty (of Irish descent) and Winifred Raushenbush (of German descent, and daughter of Baptist minister and professor of divinity Walter Raushenbush, a leader in the social gospel movement). Both of his parents were writers and anti-communist activists well-known within the New York City intellectual scene. “I was just brought up a Trotskyite ... the way people are brought up Methodists or Jews ... It was just the faith of the household.”11 “At 12, I knew that the whole point of being human was to spend one’s life fighting social injustice,” recounted Rorty in his biographical essay ‘Trotsky and the Wild Orchids’.12 Growing up in northwest New Jersey was difficult for Rorty. Shy and sensitive, he was regularly beaten up by bullies in the playground of his high school. To escape, he turned to nature, specifically to exotic birds and to wild orchids. He also turned inward. Rorty was a prolific reader, so prolific, in fact, that his parents sent him, at the tender age of 15, to the University of Chicago

5 Rorty thinks that the shift from ‘eternity’ to ‘history’ marked a great improvement in the consciousness of the West: “Pragmatists regard the Platonist attempt to get away from time into eternity or get away from conversation into certainty as a product of an age of human history where life on earth was so desperate and it seemed so unlikely that life could ever be better that people took refuge in another world. Pragmatism comes along with things like the French Revolution, industrial technology, all of the things that made the 19th century believe in progress. When you think that the aim of life is to make things better for our descendants rather than to reach outside of history and time, it alters your sense of what philosophy is good for ... At some point we stopped hoping for immortality and in place started hoping for our great great grandchildren. This was a sort of turn in the culture of the West ... I think that it had to do with simple improvement of material conditions. When we got a comfortable bourgeois existence for large numbers of people, the bourgeoisie was able to think not about escape from the world and pie in the sky but about creating a future world for future mortals. This seems to me to have been, you know, a great improvement.” (See ‘Rorty on the End of Inquiry’, youtube.com).


8 Ibid., 164.

9 Ibid., 164.

10 “There is no more reason for pitting the world-disclosing ‘poetic’ philosophers against action coordinating ‘scientific’ philosophers than there is for pitting construction workers against ballet dancers, or accountants against comedians. The two may not be able to work together, but culture and society will always need to have both on hand.” (Richard Rorty, ‘Response to Bouveresse’, in Rorty and His Critics, ed. Robert Brandom, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 152.


for schooling in their experimental ‘Great Books’ program. He was a gifted student, who went on
to write a Master’s thesis at Chicago on Alfred North Whitehead’s metaphysics. His teachers at
Chicago included Rudolph Carnap, Charles Hartshorne, Richard McKeon, and Leo Strauss.
Though he read Plato intensively, Rorty was unable, in the words of Yeats, to “hold reality and
justice in a single vision,” and his yearning for Platonic absolutes waned.13 “Platonism had all the
advantages of religion, without requiring the humility which Christianity demanded, and of which I
was apparently incapable … I wanted very much to be some kind of Platonist, and from 15 to 20 I
did my best. But it didn’t pan out,” he admitted.14 His disillusionment with Plato would cause him
to question the entire inheritance of the Western philosophical tradition to the point where he saw
‘Platonism’ as an obstacle to social progress.15 After Chicago, he ventured to Yale for a Ph.D. on
the concept of ‘potentiality’. There he met his first wife Amelie Oksenberg, a talented philosopher
in her own right, whom he married in 1954. After receiving his doctorate, Rorty served a two-year
tour of military duty, eventually working as a computer programmer, a job he found emotionally
trying. (His father had had recurring bouts of mental illness having suffered shell shock during his
own military service in World War II). After his time in the military, Rorty moved to Wellesley
College for a short time, and then to Princeton, where he remained for some twenty years.

At Princeton, where he was granted full tenure, he became deeply immersed in debates in
contemporary analytic philosophy, editing The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method
published in 1967. “Linguistic philosophy, over the last thirty years, has succeeded in putting the entire
philosophical tradition, from Parmenides through Descartes and Hume to Bradley and Whitehead,
on the defensive,” wrote Rorty at the time. “It has done so by a careful and thorough scrutiny of
the ways in which traditional philosophers have used language in the formulation of their problems.

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14 Ibid., 9.
15 In a telling remark, the philosopher John McDowell criticizes Rorty’s anti-Platonism for its failure to retain a sense of
objectivity: “[Plato’s] forms are an image to enable us to sustain the idea that there is such a thing as getting things right …
One would not expect Plato to have had the sort of concern Rorty has with contingency. But it is one thing to lack
that concern, and quite another to have a metaphysical picture that excludes it.” See John McDowell, ‘Towards
other words, whereas Plato’s picture of reality makes room for both the eternal forms and temporal contingency,
Rorty’s picture of reality rejects the eternal forms and clings only to temporal contingency. In doing so, Rorty alters
the frame of Plato’s picture. The irony here is that this is precisely what Rorty is up to. Unlike McDowell, he has no fidelity
to Plato. Plato’s picture of reality is, for Rorty, the cause of much confusion in the history of philosophy. Plato’s ‘older’
picture of reality must be replaced by a ‘newer’ picture of reality, a picture that excludes the eternal ‘forms’ and centres
entirely upon temporal contingency. When Plato’s forms are done away with, there is no need for any ‘sense of
objectivity’. Rorty’s project raises the important question as to whether ‘new frames of reality’ can be conjured up ex
nihilo by way of human language, without implicit reference to the insights of the past.
This achievement is sufficient to place this period among the great ages of the history of philosophy.” This was a statement Rorty would later regret. In 1979 he served as president of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, where he was instrumental in persuading ‘the analytic establishment’, then dominant in the profession, to ‘pluralize’ its intentions and broaden its scope of philosophical involvement. Frustrated with his Princeton colleagues, Rorty sought a move out of analytic philosophy: “Roughly speaking, I tell historical stories and everybody else in the department analyzes arguments,” he confessed. I find it a bit terrifying that we keep turning out PhDs who quite seriously conceive of philosophy as a discipline in which one does not read anything written before 1970, except for the purposes of passing odd examinations.” He turned to the writings of Wilfrid Sellars on ‘the myth of the given’ and Thomas Kuhn on ‘paradigm shifts’ (as well as to Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Dewey) as a way to “find a middle road between technicism and historicism” and to “a broader conception of the philosophical enterprise.”

With this in mind, in 1979 Rorty published his best-selling book Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, a book that attacked the post-Cartesian invention of the mind as a ‘mirror of nature’ accurately representing the world. “The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and capable of being studied by pure, nonempirical methods,” wrote Rorty. “Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself.” If there is no such thing as a ‘mind’ at all, Rorty argued, the metaphor of the mind as a mirror of nature must be abandoned, and with it, the idea that ‘certainty’ can ever be achieved. If certainty cannot be achieved, the idea of philosophy as an exact science is rendered unintelligible. And, in turn, if the idea of philosophy as an exact science is rendered unintelligible, philosophical thought must become less rigid in its proclamations, and much more flexible. Among other things, Rorty’s book was an attempt to undermine scientifically-oriented analytic philosophy from within, by way of its own assumptions. Once the metaphor of ‘mind as a mirror’ was shelved, Rorty claimed, all that was left for philosophy to do was to find new and interesting ways of describing and rediscribing the world. Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature created a firestorm of debate in the philosophical community, and many of Rorty’s analytically-minded colleagues were infuriated by his ‘betrayal’ of the profession. The book was soon followed by The Consequences of Pragmatism, Rorty’s

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18 Ibid., 197.
19 Ibid., 161 & 209.
attempt to carve out a new ‘post-philosophical’ image for his profession, by way of a pragmatism which “does not erect science as an idol to fill the place once held by God (but) views science as one genre of literature - or, put the other way around, literature and the arts as inquiries, on the same footing as scientific inquiries.”21 A non-essentialist ‘pragmatism’ fused with insights from the philosophy of language was Rorty’s answer to (what he saw as) the demise of Platonic/ Cartesian certainty.

In 1982, after having been awarded a lucrative McArthur Fellowship, Rorty left Princeton for the University of Virginia, to become a non-departmental ‘Professor of the Humanities’ (a position unique to American academe at the time). He would remain there for sixteen years, teaching survey courses on the history of philosophy in his trademark dead-pan style, and writing on a variety of literary topics, including topics inspired by the deconstructionist writings of Jacques Derrida. Seven years after arriving at Virginia, Rorty published Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, an attempt to articulate what intellectual life would look like if the ‘otherworldiness’ of Platonism were abandoned. Rorty saw human life as ‘contingent’ in so far as beliefs and desires are products of time and chance, and most importantly, of language. “Where there are no sentences there is no truth,” Rorty asserted, and since language is made by human beings, so too is truth.22 ‘Irony’ was the term used by Rorty to describe a person who has doubts about whether the vocabulary he or she is using is any closer to ‘reality’ than any other vocabulary. “I call people of this sort ‘ironists’ because [of] their realization that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed.”23 According to Rorty, there is no way to ‘jump’ outside of one’s language into some sort of metalanguage that can account for the truth of all possible vocabularies. Rorty applied his ‘ironic’ theory to concepts of ‘self’ and ‘community’. Invoking Harold Bloom’s literary criticism, Rorty argued that poetic selves are created, not discovered. There is no unity to the self, because there is no self to be unified - we give birth, as it were, to ourselves. Rorty quoted the poet William Blake to the effect that “I must create a system, or be enslav’d by another man’s.”24 The ironist does not want to be a copy of someone else’s predetermined design, but rather to reimagine the self anew. As far as ‘solidarity’ is concerned, Rorty claims that a liberal society is held together by a common hope to diminish cruelty and suffering. Solidarity, he claims, “is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of others ... Such increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to

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21 Richard Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xliii.
23 Ibid., 73.
24 Ibid.
marginalize people different from ourselves." 25 Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity was Rorty's attempt, then, to imagine a world in which no metaphysical justification for human life would be required. The only justification worthy of the name would be temporal, limited, and human.

Rorty's final years, 1998-2007, were spent as a professor of comparative literature at Stanford University, where his writing turned increasingly to socio-political considerations. In 1998, he published A Democratic Country, a book which chastised the American left for its unpatriotic attitude toward America, its excessive philosophising, and its spectatorial attitude toward the concrete problems of the day. "National pride is to countries what self-respect is to individuals - a necessary condition for self improvement," he wrote, adding that "[d]isengagement from practice produces theoretical hallucinations." 26 Rorty urged his fellow American liberals to end the retreat from a more activist stance, and not to lose hope in the project of America. "Few in 1897 would have predicted the Progressive Movement, the forty-hour week, Women's Suffrage, the New Deal, the Civil Rights Movement, the success of second-wave feminism, or the Gay Rights Movement. Nobody ... can know that America will not, in the course of the next century, witness even greater moral progress." 27 Ten years later, in Philosophy and Social Hope (1999), Rorty continued to apply the premises of pragmatism to an assortment of issues in law, education, religion, and politics, in defense of a global community of inclusive democracy (to replace the traditional notion of 'Christian brotherhood'). He took the opportunity to defend himself against the charge of relativism, a charge often directed to his fellow pragmatist, John Dewey. "Dewey was often denounced as a relativist, and so am I," explained Rorty. "But of course we pragmatists never call ourselves relativists. Usually, we define ourselves in negative terms. We call ourselves 'anti-Platonists' or 'antimetaphysicians' or 'antifoundationalists'. Equally, our opponents almost never call themselves 'Platonists' or 'metaphysicians' or 'foundationalists'. They usually call themselves defenders of common sense, or of reason. Predictably, each side in this quarrel tries to define the terms of the quarrel in a way favourable to itself." 28 Rorty denied that pragmatists thought values were equally interchangeable, that "anybody's values are as good as anybody else's ... I have never met anyone who actually held this latter view," he affirmed. "Indeed it is hard to imagine how such

a view could be put into practice ... For nobody can act without implicitly adopting some values rather than others." 29 He ducked the charge of relativism by arguing that he had no use for a theory of 'truth', and, by implication, could not be labelled a relativist.

Rorty was, in many respects, an academic celebrity, though a heavily criticized one. In addition to his essays, book reviews, and four volumes of papers - [Essays on Heidegger and Others (1991); Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth (1991); Truth and Progress (1998); and Philosophy as Cultural Politics (2007)] - he lectured around the world and gave countless interviews. His output was exhaustive. Toward the end of his career, as he battled pancreatic cancer, Rorty had time to reflect on the nature of the holy:

"My sense of the holy, insofar as I have one, is bound up with the hope that someday, any millennium now, my remote descendants will live in a global civilization in which love is pretty much the only law. In such a society, communication will be domination-free, class and caste would be unknown, hierarchy would be a matter of temporary pragmatic convenience, and power would be entirely at the disposal of the free agreement of a literate and well-educated electorate." 30

Quotable views such as these made Rorty famous. Yet Rorty's celebrity was also due, in part, to his critics. He was scolded for his iconoclastic views from all sides, from the left, from the right, and from the centre, by those within the discipline of philosophy, and by those outside of it. Rorty has been faulted by an army of critics for a variety of intellectual 'missteps', including his denial of truth, his secular atheism, his playful nihilism, his vacuous epistemology, his trivialization of philosophical controversies, his intellectual irresponsibility, his evasiveness, his interpretive anarchy, his misrepresentation of the classical pragmatists, his failure to acknowledge that pragmatism is itself a form of masked ideology, his inability to offer guidance on moral distinctions, and his failure to engage on important policy matters to alleviate societal ills. 31 The Catholic theologian Richard Neuhaus has said that Rorty's ironist vocabulary "can neither provide a public language for the citizens of a democracy, nor contend intellectually against the enemies of democracy, nor transmit

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the reasons for democracy to the next generation.” 32 “I am sometimes told by critics from both ends of the philosophical spectrum, that my views are so weird as to be merely frivolous,” replied Rorty. “They suspect that I will say anything to get a gasp, that I am just amusing myself by contradicting everybody else. This hurts.” 33

12.3 Rorty’s ‘Taylor on Truth’

‘Taylor on Truth’, Rorty’s contribution to the 1994 festschrift, Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism, is, along with Rorty’s reviews of Sources of the Self and The Ethics of Authenticity, an important touchstone for understanding the Taylor-Rorty debate. Despite admitting that “Taylor is one of the philosophers from whom I have learned most,” Rorty begins his essay by acknowledging, somewhat surprisingly, that the basic disagreement between him and Taylor pertains to poetry. 34 Rorty argues that whereas he sees poets as “edifying examples of how to be mere human self-fashioners,” Taylor sees poets as “people who open us up to something other than themselves, and perhaps other than human.” 35 Rorty finds Taylor’s view of poetry “universalistic” whereas Taylor finds Rorty’s view of poetry “self-enclosed.” 36 Underlying the Taylor-Rorty debate on poetry is a deeper disagreement about the connection between ‘truth’ – which Rorty describes as a “parochial topic” – and language. 37

At issue between the two is the ‘correspondence theory of truth’, a theory Taylor accepts and Rorty rejects. According to the theory, a propositional statement is true if it accurately describes an independently existing fact. The statement “the keys are on the kitchen table,” for example, can be verified, and is therefore true, if one checks for the keys on the kitchen table, and finds them. In his rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, Rorty asks, “can we distinguish the role of our describing activity, our use of words, and the role of the rest of the universe, in accounting for the truth of our true beliefs? I do not see how we can.” 38 Rorty has much sympathy with the postmodern Nietzschean view that there are no facts, only interpretations. In a footnote, Rorty describes himself as a “psychological nominalist, who believes that all awareness is a linguistic affair”

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33 Ibid., 5.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 21.
38 Ibid., 23.
His nominalism alternatively commits him to a coherence theory of truth, according to which a propositional statement is true if it co-dependently relates to other statements in a whole linguistic system. For Rorty, then, there is no escape from language; truth can only be justified within language itself. Unlike Taylor, he sees no distinction between one's mental picture of an object and the physical existence of that object; there is no distinction between the two because there is no such thing as 'a mind' that contains mental pictures and/or representations of any sort. Language is characterized by Rorty naturalistically as "marks and noises," not as an expression of 'a mind' as such. For him, mental consciousness is a biological, not a spiritual, phenomenon.

Rorty's naturalism commits him to philosophical positions that run contrary to those of Taylor. Fascinatingly, Rorty defines 'naturalism' in his article 'Taylor on Truth' 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." On this view, language is itself immersed in a single spatio-temporal web. This holds further implications for words like 'truth'. Is the word 'truth' of the same descriptive order as the word 'mouse' in the aforementioned spatio-temporal web? Rorty's mentor in analytic philosophy, Donald Davidson, whom Rorty footnotes in 'Taylor on Truth', argues in an essay on 'Reality Without Reference' that concepts like 'truth' and 'meaning' can and ought to be reductively understood "in the light of" other space-time concepts. Responding to Davidson's directive, Rorty replaces the concept of 'truth' in his own writings with that of 'solidarity'. In the absence of a concept of truth, Rorty claims, the charges of 'relativism' and 'anti-realism' simply dissolve: "The pragmatist does not have a theory of truth, much less a relativistic one. As a partisan of solidarity, his account of the value of cooperative human inquiry has only an ethical base, not an epistemological or metaphysical one. Not having any epistemology, a fortiori he does not have a relativistic one. Rorty's naturalism ultimately commits him to the view that no particular vocabulary - metaphysical or otherwise - can represent reality more adequately than any other. In his view, morality has no need of ontology; pragmatic compromises more than suffice. There is no such thing as 'intrinsicality'; there is only 'relationality'. Now that we have outgrown our

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40 Ibid., 31.
41 Ibid., 30.
45 Ibid., 32.
‘primitive’ need for God, all we can rely upon and have a duty to is ourselves. For Rorty, struggling for freedom, striving for the greatest good for the greatest number, coping with one’s environment, opting for tolerant persuasion over aggressive force, nurturing peace and prosperity, leaving a happier world for future generations, all of these worldly goals trump fidelity to more ‘profound’ aspirations.

Taylor’s reply to Rorty admits that there remain substantive disagreements between the two philosophers. One of the points at issue between Taylor and Rorty involves the ‘scheme/content’ distinction, that is, the distinction between mental concepts and sense data. Whereas Taylor accepts the scheme-content distinction, Rorty rejects it. Taylor defines ‘schemes’ as “alternative ways of describing the same reality.”46 He argues, contra Rorty, that some descriptions of reality are better than others. Turning to astronomy, Taylor asserts that a description that fails to note the categorical difference between stars and planets must be rejected in favour of a description that succeeds in doing so. Some descriptions of reality are better than others because they facilitate a clearer understanding of that reality. According to Taylor, failure to rank such schemes makes one “incapable of saying important things ... [and forces one] to banalize important distinctions.”47 He thinks a rejection of the scheme-content distinction runs into incoherence when faced with the question of different human cultures. The danger here is one of ‘ethnocentrism’, which Taylor defines as “misunderstanding the other because he/she is interpreted as operating with the same classifications as we are.”48 Imposing one’s own frame of reference on another human being can do grave harm to that person. Accepting the scheme-content distinction in human affairs expands one’s capacities for empathetic understanding.

If one looks for a counter-argument to Taylor’s position on ‘scheme-content’ and on ‘ethnocentrism’ in the corpus of Rorty’s writings, one sees the following. On the issue of ‘scheme-content,’ Rorty holds that it is yet another ‘dualism’ that can be rejected. If one accepts Thomas Kuhn’s theory of paradigm shifts, Rorty says, there can be no permanent conceptual framework that grounds one’s inquiries, no neutral criteria one can appeal to when moving from one paradigm to another. “Once schemes became temporary, the scheme-content distinction itself was in danger, and with it the Kantian notion of philosophy as made possible by our a priori knowledge of our own contribution to inquiry.”49 Yet even if one accepts Kuhn’s theory of paradigm shifts – according to which historical transitions from one scientific paradigm to another have changed our

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47 Ibid., 222.
48 Ibid., 221.
understanding of reality – one fails to see how the scheme-content distinction can be wholly set aside. Rorty's position amounts to the claim that because the scheme-content distinction is 'temporary' due to the variety of paradigm shifts in the past, and the likelihood for further paradigm shifts in the future, the distinction must therefore be rejected. Taylor's claim contra Rorty, however, is that the scheme-content distinction is perpetually operative whether a given paradigm is 'temporary' in the light of scientific history or not; human beings 'contribute' to their inquiries in an apriori fashion in as much as a conceptual framework of understanding along with intuitional data from the world (i.e. scheme and content) are dynamic in human understanding within any given scientific (or indeed metaphysical) paradigm. On the related issue of 'ethnocentrism', Rorty holds that the recent trend among intellectuals on the left to treat every culture as a work of art is consistent with a "a sense of guilt about 'Eurocentrism' and with the rage at the suggestion that any culture might be seen as less 'valid' than another." Rorty holds that the recent trend among intellectuals on the left to treat every culture as a work of art is consistent with a "a sense of guilt about 'Eurocentrism' and with the rage at the suggestion that any culture might be seen as less 'valid' than another."50 "This set of attitudes," he adds, "is an attempt to preserve the Kantian notion of 'human dignity' even after one has given up on rationality."51 While Rorty makes no claim on behalf of the conceptual superiority of Western rationality, he makes no apologies for his defense of the experiential success of liberal democracy either:

"I think that the rhetoric we Westerners use in trying to get everyone to be more like us would be improved if we were more frankly ethnocentric, and less professedly universalist. It would be better to say: Here is what we in the West look like as a result of ceasing to hold slaves, beginning to educate women, separating church and state and so on. Here is what happened after we started treating certain distinctions between people as arbitrary rather than fraught with moral significance. If you would try treating them that way, you might like the results. Saying that sort of thing seems preferable to saying: Look at how much better we are at knowing what differences between persons are arbitrary and which not – how much more rational we are."52

Rorty's explicit ethnocentrism must be understood in a pragmatic sense, then. He is not arguing that some cultures are theoretically better, but that some cultures are practically better. Cultures should be judged according to the consequences they manifest, rather than on any appeal to 'universal' standards. When one sets the positions of both Taylor and Rorty on 'scheme-content' and on 'ethnocentrism' side-by-side, we see a marked difference in sensibility between Taylor's tendency to want to understand human difference versus Rorty's tendency to want to explain such difference. Whereas Taylor's approach to human difference is decidedly hermeneutical, Rorty's approach, is decidedly behaviouristic. Whereas Taylor sees Rorty's claims as 'impoverished' and 'anthropocentric',

51 Ibid.
Rorty sees Taylor’s claims as ‘unDarwinian’ and ‘unnatural’. Which set of claims is correct? One or the other? Both or neither? While Taylor holds that both immanence and transcendence need to be considered when approaching the whole of reality, Rorty thinks otherwise: “the controversy between those who see both our species and our society as a lucky accident, and those who find an immanent teleology in both, is too radical to permit of being judged from some neutral standpoint,” he writes. Where Taylor is open to a complementarity between a religious perspective on the world and a scientific perspective on same, Rorty is decidedly not. In Rorty’s worldview, human beings are not God’s creatures, only clever animals who have learned, over time, to co-operate.

12.4 Taylor’s ‘Rorty and Philosophy’

In his 2003 essay ‘Rorty and Philosophy’, a sweeping critique of Rorty’s philosophical project, Taylor defines himself as a ‘maximalist’, as one who thinks “we badly need to recast our distorted understanding ... inherited from the epistemological tradition,” while defining Rorty as a ‘minimalist’, as one who thinks “we had best just forget about the whole range of issues that concern how our thought relates to reality.” In his minimalist stance, Taylor is adamant that Rorty has missed out on a key insight in the philosophies of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty, an insight that relates to the taken-for-granted ‘background’ behind all human knowing. The ‘background’ enframes our thinking such that “we don’t even notice, because in the nature of frames, it is invisible as long as we’re operating within it.” Taylor is convinced that some frames capture the nature of reality better than others. He sees Rorty as being held captive by a certain philosophical framework, a framework described by Taylor not only as ‘relativist’, ‘non realist’, and ‘subjectivist’, but also as historically ‘revisionist’. In his view, Rorty is “trapped ... under the canvas [of language].” Rorty’s thought remains inside of language, inside of mere sentences. As an epistemological realist, who holds that interacting with the world is essential for actually knowing the world, Taylor rejects what he sees as Rorty’s ‘representational’ or ‘mediational’ epistemology, defined as “knowledge that comes through something ‘inner’, within ourselves or produced by the mind ... that is in principle separable from what it is a grasp of.” Though Rorty denies the

55 Ibid., 171.
56 Ibid., 158-181.
57 Ibid., 159.
58 Ibid., 162.
accusation, Taylor reminds Rorty that he is still very much in the thrall of a Cartesian epistemology; he is locked in his own mind, out of touch with the world of fact, and, by implication, with reality.

In what amounts to his most damning criticism of his colleague, Taylor chastises Rorty for his narrative frame of ‘the Enlightenment as emancipation’:

“Before getting to my main point, I can’t resist a remark about the narrative frame offered [by Rorty] for modern history: the Enlightenment as emancipation. What we are freed from is belief in a transcendent God; this represented an earlier, more infantile stage in human development; now we attain to maturity.”

Taylor knows that believers, too, have their own caricature of the Enlightenment:

“This narrative can be set over against one adopted by many believers, that this humanist breast thumping, and self-declaration of maturity and mastery, betoken an adolescent infatuation with one’s own powers.”

Both stories of the Enlightenment, Taylor remarks, “offer a picture of oneself as grown up and the opponent as stuck in an earlier stage, in one case as a child, in the other as a teenager.” Taylor does not deny that there is at least some validity in these caricature Enlightenment narrations:

“But to assume that the transition from the infantile-dependent to the mature-emancipated sums up the movement of the twentieth century, besides being rather ex parte, is a simplification of almost comic-book crudity. It adopts a naïvely flattering view of self and an utterly unobservant view of the other. If we were dealing with one culture’s view of another, we would speak of ‘ethnocentrism’; what is the corresponding word when it’s a matter of metaphysical views? (And some of these people call themselves pragmatists! What would William James say to this?)”

Much is revealed in Taylor’s comments here. The expression ex parte is a Latin phrase referring to a legal action brought forward for the benefit of a single party, without notice to other involved parties. What Taylor means by this is that Rorty has failed not only to consult, but also to understand, the views of his metaphysical opponents, a failure which results in Rorty’s ‘crude comic-book simplification’ of his opponents’ views. There is, according to Taylor, little or no intellectual sympathy on Rorty’s part to enter into the metaphysical mind. Unlike the pragmatist William James who, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, did his homework in arriving at a better appreciation of religious experience in its various forms, (including ‘the consciousness of a presence’), Rorty, alas, has not. To imply, as Rorty does, that Enlightenment rationalism has altogether superseded religion is historically erroneous. From an educational perspective, then, what

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 179.
is at stake in the long-standing debate between Taylor and Rorty is not only a clash of paradigms, but also a clash of histories, one which includes, and one which excludes, transcendence.

12.5 ‘Sources of the Self: Rorty’s Review and Taylor’s Reply

In March of 1994, a ‘book symposium’ on Taylor’s Sources of the Self made its way to the pages of Philosophy and Phenomenological Research. The contents of the symposium include a précis of Taylor’s book, three responses by philosophers Alasdair MacIntyre, Frederick Olafson, and Richard Rorty, and replies to each response by Taylor himself. In Rorty’s case, this was, to the best of my knowledge, his first published engagement, some five years after its initial publication, with Taylor’s landmark work.

Rorty’s review of Sources of the Self is critical, though not uncharitable. He reads Taylor as taking on two sets of opponents, “reductionist naturalists, heirs of the Enlightenment, on the one hand, and self-involved expressivists, heirs of Romanticism, on the other.” Rorty offers remarks on both sets of opponents. First, he interprets Taylor as arguing, with respect to the reductionist naturalists, that they refuse to acknowledge a ‘moral source’ (i.e. a ‘constitutive good’ or ‘hypergood’) that underlies, empowers, and motivates their position. Rorty criticizes Taylor for failing to explore the possibility of a “non-reductive naturalism,” one that rejects “the disengaged subject” yet embraces the “situatedness of the self.” By ‘non-reductive’, Rorty means that truth is not reducible to a single description of the world. There are many ways of describing the world in language, and none of these descriptions is closer to the truth than the next. There is no single language that captures the intrinsic nature of reality. The post-modern side of Rorty appears less interested in this familiar thread of argument, however. He is more impressed with Taylor’s ‘fresh’ approach to Romanticism. In perhaps the most insightful passage in his review, Rorty remarks that Sources of the Self is an exercise in self-understanding: “[p]art of the book’s power is that one becomes increasingly aware of Taylor’s need to bring Taylor the social democratic politician, Taylor the believing Christian, Taylor the historian of philosophy, and Taylor the reader of Rilke together. He wants to find words of power which satisfy all these Taylors equally.” Rorty’s use of the phrase ‘words of power’ is revealing here in that the ‘truth’ about one’s self-understanding is, for him, a matter of finding the right descriptive words, the relevant bits and pieces of vocabulary, and tying the loose ends of

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 198.
language together in a coherent fashion. Self-understanding is, for Rorty, a matter of description and of re-description; there is no deeper unity or essence to a person apart from linguistic formulations. He sees the tension confronting Taylor, in its broadest terms, as a tension "between moral universalism and romance." He agrees with Taylor that there is a paradox at work in the tension between Enlightenment and Romanticism, both of which have conspired to "make it impossible for us to conceive of a spiritual order of correspondences ... We cannot be moral realists any longer," Rorty writes, "yet, (Taylor) believes, we cannot give up the urge which led to moral realism without spiritual self-mutilation." Rorty’s answer on how to harmonize the ideals of both Enlightenment and Romanticism is to propose ‘the creative imagination’ as a hypergood. He sees such a hypergood in the literary genius of poets like Walt Whitman and in the social romanticism of democrats like John Dewey. He prefers a hypergood that is made, to one that is found. Anticipating Taylor’s objection, he admits that Taylor might not be satisfied with such sources. “In short,” asserts Rorty, Taylor wants “gratitude rather than ... social hope ... in the end, the tension Taylor sees is not between universalistic private morality and private expressivity, but rather between a sense that we are alone and a sense that we are not.” Whereas Taylor takes a theistic, cosmic, and transcendental approach to the significance of human life, Rorty takes an atheistic, worldly, and immanentist approach to same. In place of metaphysical truth, Rorty substitutes the solidarity of conversation and poetry.

In his reply to Rorty, Taylor admits that he “found [Rorty’s] attempt to recontextualize what I was doing very illuminating” and that “he has taken me to the boundaries of my thinking.” Taylor pushes Rorty, by way of an assortment of literary references, (e.g. Albert Camus’ novel The Plague), to see that part of being a human being is the realization that there are things in the world which are not of one’s making, that there is such a thing as the ‘human condition’, and that there is an ethical dimension in the way we respond to the suffering within that very condition. “Even in the most anti-theological and anti-metaphysical ethic,” Taylor writes, “there is such a moment of the recognition of something which is not made or decided by human beings, and which shows a certain way of being to be good and admirable.” Rorty, whose parents were Trotskyites and whose maternal grandfather, Walter Rauschenus, was a prominent figure in the Social Gospel Movement, would surely agree with Taylor. For Rorty the pragmatist, however, fighting social

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67 Ibid., 199.
68 Ibid., 200.
70 Ibid., 212.
injustice is a matter of actual practice, not a matter of theoretical principle. Rorty is an anti-Platonic, non-foundationalist as far as ethics are concerned. He is fiercely antagonistic toward the notion that there are unified ‘absolutes’, ‘essences’, or ‘forms’, of any kind; these are mere words that have been inherited from a Greek philosophical vocabulary that must be superseded. In an essay entitled ‘Beyond Realism and Anti-realism’, Rorty unveils part of the rationale for his strong anti-Platonism:

“On a Platonic view, we already have at our disposal a language which has the resources for posing the important questions – where ‘important’ means something like ‘the ones human beings always have asked and will ask, or at least always should ask.’ To say that we have such a language is a consequence of the claim that we have a built-in apparatus for attaining truth on the most important matters. By contrast, to deny this claim leads to an historicist and instrumentalist view of language: to the suggestion that there are no questions, and no vocabularies, which are more than temporary expedients.”

For Rorty, there is no ‘crane’, ‘skyhook’, ‘view from nowhere,’ and/or ‘God’s eye view,’ no atemporal escape from our historical context and contingency. Ethics is first philosophy for him; all metaphysical ladders should be thrown overboard. For Rorty, acting on the basis of past experience is synonymous with morality. Taylor finds Rorty self-delusional: “[t]he naturalist mind tends to want to slither away from the recognition of constitutive goods; it smacks too much of theology and Plato. But this, I believe is continuing self-delusion,” he asserts. But for Rorty, Taylor’s notion of “a certain way of being to be good and admirable” is merely an existential proposition, not an essentialist one. To Rorty’s claim that Deweyan social democracy and expressive creativity are all that is required for moral living, Taylor replies that he is “not satisfied with Deweyan constitutive goods” and that “every anthropocentrism pays a terrible price in impoverishment.” For Taylor, unlike Rorty, there is a deeper yearning of the human spirit that mere pragmatism is inadequate to fulfill.

12.6 Rorty’s Review of ‘The Ethics of Authenticity’

‘In a Flattened World’, Rorty’s review of Taylor’s The Ethics of Authenticity (published as The Malaise of Modernity in Canada), appeared in The London Review of Books in April of 1993. Rorty sees three ways of describing modern culture in his review: as narcissistic, as tolerant, and as authentic. The way in which one interprets a culture depends on one’s point of view. Rorty is receptive to Taylor’s notion of the dialogical self, that, as Rorty puts it, “we are what we are because of the people, real

73 Ibid., 212.
74 Ibid., 213.
or imaginary, with whom we have talked ... that we are only individuals in so far as we are social." \(^{75}\) Rorty goes on to say that “[n]one of us has a self to be faithful to except the one which has been cobbled together in interchanges with parents and siblings, friends and enemies, churches and governments ... Being authentic, being faithful to ourselves, is being faithful to something which was produced in collaboration with a lot of other people.” \(^{76}\) These observations are consistent with his existential, non-essential view of human personhood. To suggest, however, in rather casual fashion, that the self is a mere cobbling together of fragments of conversation seems, I think, to deflate, trivialize, and ultimately misinterpret Taylor’s actual position. Taylor does not reduce authentic personhood in the manner Rorty implies. In Taylor’s moral framework, horizons of significance guide human thought and action. Human beings make ‘strong evaluations’ depending on their horizons of significance. Yet these horizons are not so much made as received. While Taylor would certainly agree that the self is dialogical, he would disagree with Rorty, I think, insofar as the world is meaningful in and of itself apart from the language human beings use to describe it. Whereas Rorty affirms that there is no meaning (or truth) apart from language, Taylor affirms that there is. Epistemologically speaking, (at least from Taylor’s point of view), Taylor is a realist, whereas Rorty is not. Taylor’s notion of truth is one of correspondence between things in the mind and things in the world; Rorty’s notion of truth is radically linguistic. For Taylor, there can be no truth apart from our physical interaction with the world; for Rorty, there can be no truth apart from its description in language.

Rorty also seems much less sympathetic than Taylor is to diversity. Rorty writes that “fellow-feeling degenerates into self-indulgent cant and political frivolity when we forget that some cultures, like some people, are no damn good: they cause too much pain, and so have to be resisted (and perhaps eradicated) rather than respected.” \(^{77}\) Taylor is nowhere near as harsh as this in the pages of *The Ethics of Authenticity*. It is not that he is naïve about the power of evil in the world, but he rather thinks that we ought not to prejudice either persons or cultures as embodiments of such evil. Rorty does touch on an interesting point, however, in reference to diversity, when he questions “the insistence that you are only an authentic black if you identify your self with blackness, only an authentic gay if you identify your self with your gayness, etc.” \(^{78}\) There is little consideration of this in Taylor’s book, that is, of the reason why some human beings identify so strongly - intellectually,

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\(^{76}\) Ibid.

\(^{77}\) Ibid.

\(^{78}\) Ibid.
emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually – with merely one aspect of their identity over and against all others.

Rorty is unimpressed with a number of Taylor’s arguments, including arguments relating to ‘a liberalism of neutrality,’ the view, which he attributes to Isaiah Berlin - (though Rorty would have been better off attributing it to Berlin’s student John Rawls) - that “a liberal society must be neutral on what constitutes a good life,” and arguments relating to ‘moral subjectivism,’ the view that “moral positions are not in any way grounded in reason or the nature of things but are ultimately just adopted by each of us because we find ourselves drawn to them.” Rorty reads Taylor as objecting to both aforementioned arguments, on account of their ‘anthropocentrism,’ a term used pejoratively by Taylor, which Rorty finds vague. Rorty argues that anthropocentrism cannot be avoided if one does not believe in God, and that there is nothing wrong with committing oneself on the horizontal plain of history to the hope of social democracy. Underlying the differences between Taylor and Rorty are opposing conceptions of ‘reason’, with Taylor advocating a more metaphysically oriented rationality, and Rorty advocating a more naturalistically oriented rationality. Taylor cites post-modern anthropocentric thinkers like Derrida and Foucault, toward whom Rorty is favourable, as examples of the deconstruction of reason itself. In Taylor’s mind, such deconstruction leads to a delegitimization and ultimate abolishment of horizons of significance, which in turn leads to a profound loss of meaning. Rorty, for his part, denies that horizons of significance can ever be negated: “The only way somebody could arrange for you to have no horizon of significance would be to lobotomize or enslave you,” writes Rorty. Further into his review of The Ethics of Authenticity, he makes it clear that what is at stake here is not the existence of a horizon of significance as such, but rather the kind of horizon of significance acknowledged. Taylor sees the anthropocentric side of the modern ecological movement as representing the ‘flatter’ and ‘shallower’ form of authenticity, in that its pragmatic and instrumental appeal fails to realize that “we need to see ourselves as part of a larger order that can make claims on us.” The order Taylor is referring to here is a metaphysical order, a cosmic order, an order that places the modern ecological movement, for example, in a perspective greater than itself. What is interesting about Taylor’s example is not the fact that he raises it, but more the fact that Rorty is silent on where he stands on the issue. In the face of an alternative vision of reality, Rorty’s defense of an entirely non-metaphysical horizon is not altogether articulate.

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
Rorty is, however, more than articulate in his support for Taylor’s championing of the ‘subtler languages’ of imaginative literature. Inspired by Taylor’s interest in poetry, Rorty writes that “Wordsworth is more useful than Mill or Russell, Rilke more useful than Aristotle or Hegel.”82 Poets are more ‘useful’ than philosophers in expressing what might be lost in a non-metaphysical world. “Maybe,” Rorty opines, “Wordsworth and Rilke can help us find a horizon of significance which is no more anthropocentric than it is theocentric, no more subjectivist than it is metaphysical.”83 For Rorty, ‘imagination’, not ‘reason’, is what lies between such dichotomies. Much of his preference for poetic imagination is biographical. In essays like ‘Philosophy as a Transitional Genre’, he argues that human civilization has passed from an age of religion, to an age of philosophy, to an age of literature. Philosophy, as it were, is no longer needed.84 Following Dewey, Rorty insists that “the idea of thorough-going and deep-seated harmonizing of the self with the Universe ... operates only through imagination.”85 Dewey’s use of the word ‘only’ confirms Rorty’s own attraction to the transcendence accessible in imaginative literature. “I think Taylor would be more authentically himself, more faithful to his own best, most Rilkean insights,” Rorty surmises, “if he gave up on the rather flat and shallow question of whether our moral positions are, or should be, ‘grounded in reason’. He could then move on to the more useful question of whether they are sufficiently imaginative.”86

12.7 Rorty on ‘Authenticity’

How might Rorty understand the idea of ‘authenticity’? In his essay ‘Philosophy as a Transitional Genre’, Rorty turns to two of his favourite writers, the philosopher Martin Heidegger and the literary critic Harold Bloom:

“The larger genus is what Heidegger called the hope for authenticity – the hope to become one’s own person rather than merely the creation of one’s education or one’s environment. As Heidegger emphasized, to achieve authenticity in this sense is not necessarily to reject one’s past. It may instead be a matter of reinterpreting that past so as to make it more suitable for one’s own purposes. What matters is to have seen one or more alternatives to the purposes that most people take for granted, and to have chosen among these alternatives – thereby, in some measure, creating yourself. As Harold Bloom has recently reminded us, the point of reading a great many books is to become aware of a great number of alternative purposes, and the point of that is to become an autonomous self. Autonomy,

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83 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
At the heart of Rorty’s understanding of ‘authenticity’, then, is the existential notion of self-creation. Self-creation entails a certain skepticism toward received wisdom, be it secular or sacred. To create oneself is, in the words of author Samuel Johnson, to clear one’s mind of ‘cant’. As defined by Rorty, ‘cant’ “means something like ‘what people usually say without thinking’, ‘the standard thing to say’, [and/or] ‘what one normally says’.”88 All of these forms of ‘cant’ are forms of received wisdom. To be caught up in too much ‘cant’, is, for Rorty, an exercise in self-surrender; what is needed, however, is self-creation. To be authentic is not to attune oneself to any vertically-disposed non-human truth, but to ask what models on the horizontal plane of human history one can use as inspiration for one’s own life. Once a model has been chosen, it must be hermeneutically reinterpreted. Once hermeneutically reinterpreted, it must be imaginatively redescribed. Once imaginatively redescribed, it then becomes authentic. Rorty refers to this process as an exercise in ‘cultural politics’. In short, Rorty’s notion of authenticity – which combines Heidegger’s idea of ‘reinterpreting the past’ with Bloom’s idea of ‘alternative purposes’ – amounts to an imaginative act, an act of self-creative freedom.

12.8 Rorty’s Views on Education

What might an education based on the ‘authentic’ precepts of pragmatism look like? As it turns out, Rorty has had a great deal to say about this question. Rorty’s philosophy of education has been spelled out in a variety of published articles, book reviews, and conference exchanges, all of which have underscored his pragmatic approach to educational issues.


The first of these articles, ‘Education as Individualization and Socialization’, is the most important of the lot. In it, Rorty distinguishes between talk of education on the political right, which centres on ‘truth’, and talk of education on the political left, which centres on ‘freedom’. He argues that the political right has traditionally maintained control over primary and secondary education in America, while the political left has gradually won control over higher education. The concept of

‘education’ includes both ‘socialization’ and ‘individuation’; primary and secondary schools are responsible for socialization, while colleges and universities are responsible for individuation. For Rorty, the cycle of education runs from indoctrination to deconstruction:

“Primary and secondary education will always be a matter of familiarizing the young with what their elders take to be true, whether it is true or not. It is not, and never will be, the function of lower-level education to challenge the prevailing consensus about what is true. Socialization has to come before individuation, and education for freedom cannot begin before some constraints have been imposed. But, for quite different reasons, non-vocational higher education is also not a matter of inculcating or [extracting] truth. It is, instead, a matter of inciting doubt and stimulating imagination, thereby challenging the prevailing consensus.”

As a leftist academic, Rorty favours individuation over socialization, ‘freedom’ over ‘truth’. “[I]f you take care of freedom,” he asserts, “truth will take care of itself.” The function of higher educational institutions is to make students aware that “the national narrative around which their socialization has centred is an open ended one.” In ‘The Humanistic Intellectual’, Rorty links the concept of socialization with that of the self-image of the student. In as much as the process of socialization changes from one generation to the next, so too, in time, does the self-image of the student. A professor’s task is to cultivate a spirit of questioning in the moral consciousness of his/her students. Rorty is a firm believer in academic freedom - on both sides of the classroom; professors ought to be free to design their own course outlines, and students ought to be free to challenge whatever assumptions are found therein. His vision for the humanities in general is a vision that is and ought to be in constant flux: “Philosophers of education, well-intended committees, and governmental agencies have attempted to understand, define, and manage the humanities,” he writes. “The point, however, is to keep the humanities changing fast enough so that they remain indefinable and unmanageable.” In ‘The Inspirational Value of Great Works of Literature’, Rorty defends a notion of the canon that is temporary and replaceable, while respectful of greatness. “We should see great works of literature as great because they have inspired many readers, not as having inspired many readers because they are great ... This difference may seem a quibble, but it is the whole difference between pragmatist functionalism and Platonist essentialism.” Rorty is equally pragmatic when it comes to evaluating the moral and intellectual

90 Ibid., 115.
91 Ibid., 124.
progress of educational institutions. In ‘Does Academic Freedom Have Philosophical Presuppositions’, he cautions that we should be “fully prepared to judge institutions, traditions, and practices by the good they seem to be doing than by the philosophical or theological beliefs invoked in their defense.” He opts for praxis over theory at every turn. As he reiterates in ‘The Unpatriotic Academy’, an academic left more concerned with ideological purity than with the nation’s politics will “have no impact [and] will eventually become an object of contempt.” In short, the views expressed in his published articles on education are consistent with Rorty’s anti-Platonic, pro-Darwinian, pragmatist approach to reality.

**12.9 A Conversational Pedagogy**

If the point of education is the alleviation of human suffering by way of social justice, what is needed in our universities, according to Rorty, is a pedagogy of conversation. He distinguishes between two kinds of philosophy, systematic philosophy and edifying philosophy.

“Great systematic philosophers are constructive and offer arguments. Great edifying philosophers are reactive and offer satires, parodies, aphorisms ... Great systematic philosophers, like great scientists, build for eternity. Great edifying philosophers destroy for the sake of their own generation. Systematic philosophers want to put their subject on the secure path of a science. Edifying philosophers want to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause ...”

Rorty names Descartes, Kant, Edmund Husserl, and Bertrand Russell, as examples of systematic philosophers and Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, the later Wittgenstein, and the later Heidegger as examples of edifying philosophers. Rorty places himself firmly in the edifying camp:

“The point of edifying philosophy is to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth ... For the edifying philosopher, the very idea of being presented with ‘all of Truth’ is absurd, because the Platonic notion of Truth itself is absurd ... To see keeping a conversation going as a sufficient aim of philosophy, to see wisdom as consisting in the ability to sustain a conversation, is to see human beings as generators of new descriptions rather than beings one hopes to be able to describe accurately. To see the aim of philosophy as truth - namely, the truth about the terms which provide ultimate commensuration for all human inquiries and activities - is to see human beings as objects rather than subjects.”

Transposing the implications of the above remarks by Rorty, then, into the university classroom, one can see just what kind of philosophy of education will emerge. An edifying philosophy of

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97 Ibid., 369.
98 Ibid., 377-378.
education is one where the goal of rational inquiry is to follow a conversation on any topic of interest, non-dogmatically, wherever it leads. Edifying conversations are those where pragmatic compromises take the place of strict rules, methods, and procedures. There is no teleology, no providential goal, objective, aim, or end to such conversations. The only measure of success is the continuance of the conversation itself. As Rorty explains, “[s]uch an education tries to sublimate the desire to stand in suitably humble relations to nonhuman realities into a desire for free and open encounters between human beings, encounters culminating either in intersubjective agreement or in reciprocal tolerance.”

99 Edifying conversation is also non-prejudicial. As Rorty explains, “[w]hen we deem people as irredeemably crazy, stupid, base, or sinful, we fail to see these people as possible conversation partners.”

100 Though the idea of conversation is at the heart of his edifying philosophy, he does not limit himself to the realm of educational praxis alone. For Rorty, conversation is the only ground upon which American culture can stand. “The real issue,” he writes, “is between those who think our culture, or purpose, or intuitions cannot be supported except conversationally, and people who still hope for other sorts of support.”

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12.10 Taylor vs. Rorty: Two Philosophical Frameworks

Notwithstanding the similarities between Taylor and Rorty – their commitment to interdisciplinarity, to historically-minded philosophy, to epistemological inquiry, to the philosophy of language, and to social democracy, for example – the question remains: which philosophical framework is more authentic – Taylor’s or Rorty’s? One could argue that both philosophical frameworks are authentic in light of the ‘inner logic’ associated with each. Taylor’s philosophical framework is authentic in so far as he consistently includes transcendence as part of his historical analysis. Rorty’s philosophical framework is authentic in so far as he consistently excludes...

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102 Despite their differences of opinion, there was a great deal of professional respect between both Taylor and Rorty. Each had admiration for the other’s work. Taylor’s back cover review of Rorty’s book on Truth and Progress reads as follows: “This volume is Rorty at his best, again and again making us see things from a new, unexpected angle, strenuously engaging with those of us who resist his startling and unsettling ‘take’ on things. Convinced or not, you come away feeling that this is what philosophy ought to be doing, steadily extending the range of imaginable thoughts.” See Richard Rorty, Truth and Progress, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), back cover. Rorty, too, pays tribute to Taylor’s contributions. As revealed by Neil Gross, in his excellent overview of Rorty’s career, Rorty once wrote to the philosophy editor at Prentice-Hall to recommend Taylor as an author for a series of books on Continental Philosophy. See Neil Gross, Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher, (Chicago: IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 195.
transcendence as part of his historical analysis. Both frameworks are authentic in so far as they allow for a particular mode of human existence. Is there any way to rationally arbitrate which of these perspectives is closer to reality? Rorty thinks not. Yet Taylor disagrees: “That the espousal of authenticity takes the form of a kind of soft relativism means that the vigorous defense of any moral ideal is somehow off limits. For the implications ... are that some forms of life are indeed higher than others and the culture of tolerance for individual self-fulfillment shies away from these claims.”103 We have seen how Rorty’s non-idealistic pragmatism justifies a democratic way of life, a life of equal opportunity for all. But while Rorty’s post-metaphysical pragmatism does imagine better ways of democratic life (e.g. courtesy of material progress, human rights, fervent patriotism, etc.), it neglects to imagine higher ways. Rorty’s ‘horizon of significance’ may resonate with some like-minded pragmatist democrats, but it cannot be shared by all his fellow citizens. According to Taylor, soft relativism collapses into subjectivism:

“Your feeling a certain way can never be sufficient grounds for respecting your position, because your feeling can’t determine what is significant. Soft relativism self-destructs ... It follows that one of the things we can’t do, if we are to define ourselves significantly, is suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us. This is the kind of self-defeating move frequently being carried out in our subjectivist civilization.”104

If a notion of authenticity is to be defended in modern culture, argues Taylor, that notion must be defended in a manner which allows for a variety of ‘horizons of significance’, including “the vigorous defense of [a] moral ideal.”105 The suppression of such a moral ideal is a conscious act of inauthenticity. In stark contrast to Rorty, then, the recognition of a variety of authentic horizons of significance in the context of liberal democracy – both metaphysical and non-metaphysical – informs Taylor’s educational philosophy.

104 Ibid., 37.
105 Ibid., 17.
13
JÜRGEN HABERMAS

13.1 A Critical Theorist

Charles Taylor has described Jürgen Habermas as “the most important successor of the post-Marxist line of thought known somewhat strangely as critical theory.” Born in 1929 and raised in the Lutheran tradition, Habermas is best known as a German philosopher, sociologist, and theorist of democracy, and as an early member of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theorists, where he was a close collaborator with colleagues Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. “Critical social theory offered me a perspective from which I could embed the emergence of American, French, and English democracy, and the repeated failure of attempts to establish democracy in Germany, in the larger contexts of social modernization,” explains Habermas. During the course of his career, Habermas has taught at such universities as Heidelberg, Frankfurt, and Northwestern (in Chicago); served as Director of the Max Planck Institute for Research into Living Conditions in the Scientific-Technological World (near Munich) and as Director of the Institute for Social Research (in Frankfurt); published and lectured widely throughout the world; and participated as a public intellectual in some of the major debates of our time, including the future of Europe, the war on terror, and the ethical implications of genetic research. In an essay on his intellectual biography, he has admitted to being deeply influenced by childhood humiliations associated with his physical handicap (i.e. a cleft palate), by his painful experience of the Holocaust and the Nuremberg trials, and by his political involvement in the post-war liberalization and unification of German society.

2 In The Dialectic of Enlightenment (1947), co-authored by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the pessimism, disillusionment, and alienation of the post-Holocaust age is readily apparent. In said text, written in the United States after the Nazis had expelled the authors, Adorno and Horkheimer lament the phenomenon known as ‘the culture industry’, an industry of mass capitalist production, run by film companies, broadcasting media, and publishing firms, intent on manipulating the public at large into a false sense of reality and an affirmation of oppressive social conditions. Led by Adorno and Horkheimer, the work of the Marx-inspired Frankfurt School of Critical Theorists established a powerful intellectual movement, from which Habermas, one of the leading thinkers of our day, has emerged. What motivated the work of the Frankfurt School, above all, was the need “to order [its] thought and action such that Auschwitz never reoccurs, and that nothing similar ever happens.” See James Gordon Finlayson, Habermas: A Very Short Introduction, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 76.
4 Habermas’ reflections on the effect his cleft palate has had on his life and, indeed, on his intellectual pursuits, are psychologically revealing: “I remember the difficulties I encountered when I tried to make myself understood in class [as a schoolboy], or during break while speaking with my nasal articulation and distorted pronunciation ... Only when communication fails do we become aware of the medium of linguistic communication as a shared stratum without which individual existence would also be impossible. We invariably find ourselves with the element of language. Only someone who speaks can remain silent. Only because we are inherently connected with one another can we feel lonely or isolated.” Jürgen Habermas, ‘Public Space and Political Public Sphere – The Biographical Roots of Two Motifs in my Thought’, in Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays, trans. Ciaran Cronin, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 15.
Fundamental to Habermas' work is the notion of modernity as 'an unfinished project'. Habermas is neither a pre-modernist nor a post-modernist; he is intent rather, on the redemption of modernity. Habermas asserts that the errors of modern enlightenment can only be corrected by way of reason itself. According to Thomas McCarthy (Habermas' best-known English translator), "Habermas views reason as inescapably situated, as concretized in history, society, body, and language." Habermas' writing, often dense and impenetrable, is Kantian in its separation of faith and knowledge, post-metaphysical, thoroughly secular, scientific in approach, pragmatic in intention, attentive to language, and sociologically oriented. One of the distinguishing features of Habermas' philosophy is its methodological atheism. "In my view," opines Habermas, "a philosophy that oversteps the bounds of methodological atheism loses its philosophical seriousness."

### 13.2 Three Identifiable Themes

There are three identifiable themes in the long-standing philosophical debate between Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas. The first involves the relation between language and society; the second involves the relation between the rights of the individual and the rights of the community; and the third involves the relation between religious discourse and the public sphere. These three themes are clearly inter-connected; each is concerned with the modern nature of human communication and 'the politics of recognition'. There are, as we will see, profound differences between Taylorian and Habermasian approaches to the three themes in question. These differences, in turn, shape their respective understandings of cognitive communication.

### 13.3 Language and Society

Let us begin, then, with the first of the aforementioned themes, the relation between language and society. In a co-authored essay, 'From an Analytic Perspective', by Taylor and Oxford colleague Alan Montefiore, which first appeared in 1980 in professor Garbis Kortian's Introduction to Metacritique: The Philosophical Argument of Jürgen Habermas, Taylor and Montefiore strive to make Kortian's critique of Habermas accessible to philosophers schooled in the British analytic tradition.

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They begin their essay by pointing out that the Habermasian project has its roots in the tradition of German Idealism, and, particularly, in Hegel’s critique of Kant. Taylor and Montefiore argue that Habermas’ “own work thus constitutes an attempt to redefine and to carry forward an enterprise which has been going on in European philosophy for nearly two centuries and which has been among the formative ideas of our culture as we now have it.”9 They add that “for Habermas, the renewal of critical theory has necessarily involved the renewal of its links with the critique of epistemology, and this in turn has required a retracing of its roots in Kant and Hegel.”10 By way of this insight, Taylor and Montefiore are thus keen to situate Habermas’ epistemological thought in its proper historical context, as a further elucidation on Hegel’s communitarian critique of Kantian individualism.

In his preface to Knowledge and Human Interests (1971), Habermas argues that “[t]he analysis of the connection of knowledge and interest should support the assertion that a radical critique of knowledge is possible only as a social theory.”11 According to Taylor and Montefiore, Habermas links Kantian subjectivity and Hegelian inter-subjectivity with a ‘metacritique’ of “forms of social reality.”12 These forms of social reality reflect a plurality of human interests. These human interests serve as “the motivations for the acquisition of knowledge in different domains.”13 Each domain establishes its own criteria for valid knowledge claims. “With this conception of a plurality of interests,” explain Taylor and Montefiore, Habermas “tries to break loose from the assumption of the classical epistemological condition that all knowledge claims are to be understood on the basis of a single model.”14 Taylor and Montefiore thus interpret Habermas as concerned with the sociological implications of epistemology, with the variety of social contexts within which knowledge claims are made. Human language, which facilitates the expression of knowledge claims, “presupposes a context of communication.”15 Habermas’ ‘metacritique’ points to an ideal standard of speech activity within each communicative context. “In other words,” write Taylor and Montefiore, “speech activity itself is seen as based on certain standards which allow us to recognize the distortions in our present forms of communication for what they are.”16 Habermas’ unique theoretical mélange of epistemology, social critique, and philosophy of language, earns high praise

10 Ibid., 17.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
from Taylor and Montefiore, who cite Habermas as "one of the most original and fertile of contemporary philosophers," whose "theory, if developed further, might provide one of the most powerful and penetrating avenues of social criticism, and could set the tradition in which it stands on a new path."17

With the publication of Sources of the Self in 1989, (a mere nine years after his laudatory essay 'From an Analytic Perspective'), Taylor begins to express his reservations about Habermasian social theory, in particular, its move toward an 'ethics of discourse'. In Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity, Taylor calls Habermas' discourse ethics into question, arguing that “[t]he idea that a norm is justified only to the extent that all could uncoercedly accept it” transforms a substantive notion of the good into procedural rationality.18 Taylor adds that the change from a pre-modern sense that human beings were duty-bound by way of a larger cosmological order to a modern sense that the development of rational autonomy has made the earlier cosmological view incoherent “seems a step forward [for Habermas] precisely because it involves a fuller acceptance of the free self-determination of diverse people.”19 In Taylor's mind, Habermas' pragmatic ethics of discourse suppresses important moral considerations: “It has no way of capturing the background understanding surrounding any conviction that we ought to act in this or that way ... clearly there is a gaping hole here.”20 Taylor is well aware, however, that the rationale for Habermas' discourse ethics is to affirm a “universal validity” by guarding against “ethnocentric aggression in the name of one's way of life, or tradition, or culture.”21 In short, the procedural rationality of Habermas' discourse ethics is designed to support a post-metaphysical pluralism.22 Taylor argues, however, that Habermas' sociological theory fails to embrace “moral sources outside the subject through languages

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 87.
21 Ibid., 88.
22 In 'Discourse and Democratic Practices' Simone Chambers provides a useful summary of the political implications of modern pluralism from a Habermasian perspective: “[T]he rise of pluralism in the modern world has made reliance on such shared community feelings increasingly implausible. Pluralism does not necessarily undermine the substance of traditional ways; rather it undermines 'the sanctity ... of a politics attached to traditional ways'. Pluralism challenges the authority of tradition more than its content. When this authority is challenged, then reverence and respect must be earned; it cannot simply be assumed to be the natural by-product of the passage of time. The historical circumstances in which we, in modern liberal democracies, find ourselves, point to the conclusion that we can no longer depend on unquestioned veneration for our stability. We no longer share a common religious view nor a comprehensive moral outlook. The authority of tradition has been greatly weakened in a world where 'nontraditional' perspectives are gaining an ever stronger voice. We have very little homogeneity to fall back on to do the work of keeping our world together when a normative dispute arises. Thus, we must construct a consensus; we can no longer appeal to one that is ready-made. The conditions for producing, reproducing, or maintaining a consensus in the modern political world point to the necessity of rationalizing and democratizing our public debates." While affirming Habermas' conception of modern pluralism, Chambers criticizes Habermas for underestimating the difficulty of converting democratic discourses into democratic practices. See Simone Chambers, 'Discourse and Democratic Practices', in The Cambridge Companion to Habermas, ed. Stephen K. White, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 244.
which resonate within him or her." 23 In other words, Habermas' discourse ethics has no place for the modern citizen who is uninspired by the public language of post-metaphysical pluralism.

Continuing with the first of our themes, namely, the relation between language and society, we can now turn to Taylor's critique of Habermas' theory of communicative action. 24 Taylor reconstructs Habermas' theory of communicative action by way of four approaches: i) the fundamental relation between the capacity for discourse and the given norms of a linguistic community; ii) the connection between language as structure and language as practice; iii) the implicit 'background' knowledge which orients both speech and action; and iv) the complementarity between 'I', 'you', and 'we'. 25 Each of these approaches informs how a particular society, and, by implication, its individual members, rationally arrive at mutual understanding. Taylor is persuaded by Habermas' "rich," "complex," and "fruitful" theory insofar as it shines new light on the (often distorting) influence of market/state dynamics on the processes of human understanding in modern societies. 26 In Habermasian parlance, the 'lifeworld' must be protected from technical colonizaton by the 'system'.

On the other hand, however, Taylor argues that Habermas' theory of communicative action is "impaired by a severe weakness." 28 It is impaired, Taylor explains (once again) in that it favours a 'procedural' Kantian rationality over and against a 'substantial' Aristotelian rationality. Whereas as with Kantian rationality 'the ethical' is determined by an adopted procedure, with Aristotelian rationality 'the ethical' is determined by a conception of the good life. As we have seen, Taylor recognizes the merits of a procedural rationality: "only a [proceduralist] ethics can fully distance itself from all specific cultural forms of life," he writes. "A substantialist ethics, by contrast, which is informed by a concept of the good life, is always more closely bound to the ideals and values of a particular culture and therefore more or less seals itself off from all other cultures." 29 Taylor's objection this time 'round, however, offers a further elaboration on the issue of justification. Why bother to act in accordance with a particular procedure at all? "This is a question," Taylor writes, "which one can

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25 Ibid., 23-27.
26 Ibid., 29.
27 The 'life-world' is Habermas' term for the realm of shared understandings within the family, mass media, community organizations, etc. 'Life-world' is distinct from 'system' in Habermasian parlance. 'System' refers to the political and economic structures that permeate a given society. A fragile equilibrium exists between life-world and system. When colonized by the system, the lifeworld can produce an assortment of social pathologies, including instability, alienation, and demoralization.
29 Ibid., 30.
only answer ... with ‘strong valuations’.”

Human beings must be motivated to act in a certain way. Morality and motivation are intimately connected. As Taylor argues, Kant’s notion of human dignity is itself a substantial moral and ethical consideration. Taylor wonders aloud why a special preference for rational understanding (i.e. in Habermas’ theory of communicative action) should outweigh other aims, interests, and objectives. “I must be able to show why I attach a value to rational understanding so great that it should be preferred to all other purposes,” claims Taylor. As Taylor points out, ecological crises (to take one example) cannot be resolved by way of mere procedure; such questions “require substantialist determinations of what constitutes the good life.” Taylor holds that the language of justice must be capable of “disclosing the morality involved [and] not just serve to enable understanding to be reached.”

Habermas’ reply to Taylor’s essay on ‘Language and Society’ challenges Taylor’s theory of language. Referencing the Prussian philosopher of language Wilhelm von Humboldt – a point of reference for both he and Taylor – Habermas identifies a tension at work in Humboldt’s writings between a philosophy of intersubjectivity, on the one hand, and a philosophy of subjectivity, on the other. “My theory is drawn more towards the one pole [i.e. intersubjectivity], Taylor’s more towards the other [i.e. subjectivity],” observes Habermas. “This is the source of the controversy between us.” Habermas asserts that “language, world view, and form of life are interwoven.” Mere attentiveness to subjectivity “does not offer a sound basis for a theory of society.” In Habermas’ view, Taylor is wrong to impose pre-existent moral claims upon communicative discourse via his expressive theory of language. Habermas explains that there is a telos intrinsic to

31 Ibid., 31.
32 Ibid., 31.
33 Ibid., 34.
34 Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) was a philosopher of language and the founder of the University of Berlin. He argued that the thoughts and feelings of human beings were ingrained in the variety of languages they spoke, and that the study of the history of languages revealed the development of the inner states of human beings. In his book On Language, Humboldt wrote that, “[t]he division of mankind into peoples and races, and the diversity of their languages and dialects are indeed directly linked with each other, but are also connected with, and dependent upon, a third and higher phenomenon, the growth of man’s mental powers into ever new and often more elevated forms ... Language is deeply entangled in the spiritual evolution of mankind, it accompanies the latter at every stage of its local advance or retreat, and the state of culture at any time is also recognizable in it ... [Language] possesses an autonomy that visibly declares itself to us, though inexplicable in its nature, and, seen from this aspect, is no production of activity, but an involuntary emanation of the spirit, no work of nations, but a gift fallen to them by their inner destiny.” Wilhelm von Humboldt, On Language: The Diversity of Human Language Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind, trans. Peter Heath, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21-24.
36 Ibid., 218.
37 Ibid., 219.
socio-linguistic understanding that is self-generated by discourse itself. As for Taylor’s charge that his procedural rationality lacks a conception of the good life, Habermas responds that “every concept of rationality [is] enmeshed with … a particular vision of the good life.” From Habermas’ vantage point, Taylor’s allegiance to a particular brand of morality is an error in “epistemological perspectivism.” In short, Taylor’s hermeneutical subjective perspective cannot satisfy the wider epistemological range of pragmatic intersubjective validity sought by Habermas.

In Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics (1993), Habermas offers further clarification of his differences with Taylor on the question of ‘the good’. Habermas admits that “[t]he priority of the right over the good is also the main bone of contention in the disputes between communitarians and liberals.” As we have seen, Habermas sides with the priority of ‘the right’, with the priority of establishing a correct procedure for rational understanding. Taylor sides with the priority of ‘the good’, with the priority of acknowledging a universal ethical standard. These intellectual rationales are clearly at odds with one another. The reasons as to why Habermas distances himself from the priority of the good, however, are revealing. In Justification and Application, Habermas writes that “[b]y endeavouring to revive the claims of an ethics of the good under modern conditions, Taylor is disputing … the autonomy of rational morality.” He further notes that “if it were open to philosophy to uphold its classical claim to make universally valid statements about the meaning of the good … then it would also have to accept the task of privileging one particular way of life over others – for example, the classical project of living an examined life.”

Taken together, these remarks testify not only to Habermas’ liberal, post-modern sensibility, but also to his view of Taylor as a classical communitarian. Later in his essay, he adds that “Taylor is neither a metaphysician in his theoretical orientation nor an antimodernist in the conclusions he arrives at, but his Catholic skepticism toward the potential self-sufficiency of a purely secular,
proceduralist ethics leads him to cling to the classical claim of philosophy."44 Habermas implies here that it is primarily on account of religious reasons that Taylor ascribes to the priority of the good.

The word 'Catholic' (katholikos in Greek) means ‘universal’ and/or ‘of the whole’, but its usage is by no means confined to religion. The ancient philosopher Aristotle, whom Taylor cites as his key intellectual source for the priority of the good, (defined by Aristotle as “an activity of soul exhibiting excellence”), makes generous use of the term ‘universal’ in his Nicomachean Ethics.45 There, Aristotle asserts that “if a man does wish to become master of an art or science he must go to the universal, and come to know it as well as possible; for, as we have said, it is with this that the sciences are concerned.”46 This is a fascinating assertion from Aristotle, latent with ironic possibilities when applied to the Taylor-Habermas debate. In Justification and Application Habermas claims that “under the premises of post-metaphysical thinking, this route [i.e. Taylor’s] is closed to us.”47 Taylor’s route is closed to us, Habermas suggests, because it is justified on ‘Catholic’ (i.e. ‘metaphysical’) as opposed to ‘post-metaphysical’ grounds. Yet if Taylor’s defense of the priority of the good makes use of Aristotle on his own terms, (and there is no evidence to suggest that Taylor does otherwise), then the ethical universality that Taylor seeks by way of the priority of the good cannot, as claimed by Habermas, be purely metaphysical, insofar as Aristotle’s conception of ‘universality’ is rooted in the sciences.

Is Habermas an authentic pluralist? It would appear, from Taylor’s perspective at least, that Habermas is locked in the assumption of a post-metaphysical framework. Habermas justifies his position as follows: “In view of the morally justified pluralism of life projects and life-forms, 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.”48 The fact that the discipline of philosophy includes both metaphysical and post-metaphysical thinkers, and the fact that a true pluralism necessarily includes both religious and secular points of view, would appear to rule out, on pragmatic scientific grounds, Habermas’ sociological insistence on the inevitability of a post-metaphysical worldview. The wider range of rational understanding that Habermas seeks in his theory of communicative action is thus compromised by its lack of attentiveness to pluralism in the public domain. Later in Justification and Application, Habermas writes that “only the transition to the

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46 Ibid., 273.
48 Ibid., 75.
post-traditional level of moral judgment liberates us from the structural constraints of familiar discourses and established practices.\textsuperscript{49} The post-metaphysical leap out of tradition is here depicted as a 'liberation'. Habermas then takes his critique of Taylor a step further: “Charles Taylor counters ... with a universalistic ethics of the good that appeals to supreme goods transcending all particular forms of life. The examples he proposes, however, derive from Plato, the Stoics, and Christianity, that is, from the traditions that appeal to the authority of reason, universal natural law, or a transcendent deity,” writes Habermas. “These are the forerunners of moral universalism but are grounded in cosmological and religious worldviews that are even more difficult to reconcile with postmetaphysical thought than the teleological worldview of Aristotle.”\textsuperscript{50} The essence of Habermas’ claim here, is that in the context of the post-modern world, all things non post-metaphysical must be reconciled with post-metaphysical thought. With these remarks, the methodological chasm between Habermas and Taylor on the issue of contemporary pluralism is widened. Whereas Habermas delegitimizes metaphysical perspectives in favour of an exclusively post-metaphysical framework, Taylor seeks a ‘fusion of horizons’ between metaphysical and post-metaphysical worldviews.

\textbf{13.4 Individual Rights or Communal Rights?}

The second major theme in the philosophical debate between Taylor and Habermas involves the relation between the rights of the individual and the rights of the community. The expanded edition of Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition (1994) includes a response to Taylor’s essay on ‘The Politics of Recognition’ by Habermas entitled ‘Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State’. During the course of his essay, Habermas acknowledges Taylor’s “fascinating” effort to apply relevant philosophical insights to contemporary political questions, an effort described by Habermas as “unusual as it is brilliant.”\textsuperscript{51} In his reply to Taylor, Habermas formulates the central question at hand in the following manner: “Can a theory of rights that is so individualistically constructed deal adequately with struggles for recognition in which it is the articulation and assertion of collective identities that seems to be at stake?”\textsuperscript{52} As Habermas sees it, Taylor wrongly “attacks [liberal principles] and calls into question the individualistic core of the

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 107.
modern conception of freedom." Habermas' reply amounts, then, to a 'liberal' critique of Taylor's 'communitarian' understanding of political recognition. The long-standing debate on the status of Québec in the Canadian federation serves as an important pretext for their exchange of opinions.

Habermas' reply to Taylor aims to persuade us that on account of "the internal connection between democracy and the constitutional state ... the [modern] theory of rights is by no means blind to cultural differences." Habermas contrasts a liberal understanding of equality via 'legal neutrality' (Rawls and Dworkin) with a communitarian understanding of the state's need to actively promote a vision of 'the good' (Taylor and Walzer). Taylor argues in his essay on 'The Politics of Recognition' that a purely liberal understanding of rights is insufficient to protect the distinct identity of Québec's French-speaking majority culture. On Habermas' reading, Taylor wishes to advance the cultural survival of French-speaking Québec through policies that support the active creation of new members of the province's francophone community. Habermas, however, views such allowances as having the potential to turn into "new forms of discrimination" that deprive persons of their freedom.

Habermas sees no need for an alternative theoretical model. He argues, in reply to Taylor, that individual rights and communal rights are essentially intertwined:

"Persons, and legal persons as well, become individualized only through a process of socialization. A correctly understood theory of rights requires a politics of recognition that protects the integrity of the individual in the life contexts in which his or her identity is formed. This does not require an alternative model that would correct the individualistic design of the system of rights through other

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54 Ibid., 112-113.
55 Ibid., 135. According to Habermas, 'legal neutrality' is necessary because 'a vision of the good' cannot be agreed upon in a pluralist society. On page 135 he observes that "[t]he 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." This raises two questions: i) Is 'legal neutrality' really neutral? and ii) Is 'legal neutrality' any less biased than 'a vision of the good?'
56 Ibid., 115.
57 Habermas highlights the 'vulnerability' and 'fragility' of the individual-communal relationship in other writings: "The more the subject becomes individuated, the more he becomes entangled in a densely woven fabric of mutual recognition, that is, of reciprocal exposedness and vulnerability. Unless the subject externalizes himself by participating in interpersonal relations through language, he is unable to form that inner centre that is his personal identity. This explains the almost constitutional insecurity and chronic fragility of personal identity ... Consider suicide, for example ... This seemingly loneliest of deeds actually enacts a fate for which others collectively must take some of the blame, the fate of ostracism from an intersubjectively shared lifeworld." See Jürgen Habermas, 'Morality and Ethical Life: Does Hegel's Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics?', in Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action, trans. by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 199-200.
Habermas is also aware, as Taylor is, of the devastating consequences of non-recognition: "The growing number of hospital beds occupied by psychiatric patients, the epidemic proportions of behaviour disturbances, alcoholism, the phenomena of addiction per se, the rising suicide and juvenile delinquency rates are all signs of unsuccessful processes of integration and failed socialization." See Jürgen Habermas et al., Observations on 'The Spiritual Situation of the Age', trans. Andrew Buchwalter, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 17.
normative perspectives. All that is required is the consistent actualization of the system of rights.”

In Habermas’ theoretical model, then, communal rights are presumed and subsumed in individual rights.

According to Habermas, the political debate between Québec and Canada is largely defined by the tension between nationalism and multiculturalism. Struggles for recognition of group identities take place on both levels. Nations and cultures that find themselves in a minority position have the fight against “oppression, marginalization, and disrespect” in common. Nations and cultures differ, however, in their recognitive dynamics; whereas the fundamental dynamic in nationalism is the protection of a single communal identity, the fundamental dynamic in multiculturalism is the liberation of a variety of communal identities. Habermas is attentive, on both levels, to the way in which demographic change can influence communal self-understanding, and, in turn, the struggle for recognition.

Applying this line of reasoning to Québec, Habermas claims that the province is aspiring to become “a state within a state.” This aspiration is primarily a legal issue. Habermas defines modern law as formal, individualistic, coercive, positive, and procedurally enacted. He adds that “[a] legal order is legitimate when it safeguards the autonomy of all citizens to an equal degree,” that “[t]he citizens are autonomous only if the addressees of the law can also see themselves as its authors,” and that “[i]n

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58 Jürgen Habermas, ‘Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State’, in Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition, ed. Amy Gutmann, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 113. Habermas offers a further elaboration of this point on page 129, in the second half of his reply to Taylor: “For from a normative point of view, the integrity of the individual legal person cannot be guaranteed without protecting the intersubjectively shared experiences and life contexts in which the person has been socialized and has formed his or her identity. The identity of the individual is interwoven with collective identities … Hence the individual remains the bearer of ‘rights of cultural membership’ in Will Kymlicka’s phrase.”

59 Habermas has been criticized elsewhere for his lack of theoretical consideration toward ‘group rights’ and toward the ‘differences’ within and among group identities in general. Craig Calhoun writes, for example, that “[g]roup identity has not been [Habermas’] interest and he has pursued a theory of communicative action grounded in the universal presuppositions of language and the potential of individuals. In their accounts of the universal conditions of human life, Habermas and his predecessors failed to come adequately to terms with the basic and constitutive importance of collective and individual difference for human beings … In a basic and intrinsic sense, if the public sphere has the capacity to alter civil society and to shape the state, then its own democratic practice must confront the questions of membership and the identity of the political community it represents. These questions cannot be settled ‘objectively’, but only through the politically charged – but potentially also theoretically informed – discourse of publics both large and small. And the extent to which these various publics themselves manage to be inclusive of different voices will be crucially telling for their practical significance.” See Craig Calhoun, ‘Social Theory and the Public Sphere’, in The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory, ed. by Bryan S. Turner, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996), 455-462.


61 Ibid., 119.

62 Ibid., 121. Habermas continues on page 121 as follows: “Modern law is formal, because it rests on the premise that anything that is not explicitly forbidden is permitted. It is individualistic, because it makes the individual person the bearer of rights. It is coercive, because it is sanctioned by the state and applies only to legal or rule-conforming behavior – it permits the practice of religion but it cannot prescribe religious views. It is positive law, because it derives from the (modifiable) decisions of a political legislature; and finally, it is procedurally enacted, because it is legitimated by a democratic process.”
normative terms, there is no such thing as a constitutional state without democracy.” 63 Notwithstanding the tension between nationalism and multiculturalism, then, the fate of Québec must thus be resolved in a legal, constitutional, and democratic fashion.

A major source of the disagreement between Habermas and Taylor on the question of Québec concerns the two kinds of liberalism identified by Taylor in his essay on ‘The Politics of Recognition’ – a liberalism in which the state protects individual rights (Liberalism 1) vs. a liberalism in which the state protects individual rights and acts on behalf of a particular community (Liberalism 2). Whereas Taylor sees a conflict between these two kinds of liberalism, Habermas does not. Taylor thinks that Liberalism 1 has a “leveling” effect, which is “blind” to the claims of Liberalism 2. In contrast, Habermas thinks that “the [modern] theory of rights [asserts] the absolute precedence of rights over collective goods.” 64 In other words, from Habermas’ point of view, Taylor’s Liberalism 2 is incompatible with the modern theory of rights; as such, it contradicts the very ground upon which modern liberalism stands. For Habermas, Liberalism 1 is neither ‘leveling’ nor ‘blind’. “Every legal system,” he notes, “is also the expression of a particular form of life and not merely a reflection of the universal content of basic rights.” 65 In Habermas’ opinion, the modern theory of rights does allow for a conception of the good within a given legal system, but it does not allow for the privileging of “one form of life at the expense of others within the nation.” 66 Habermas is unclear on the meaning of the word ‘privileging’ here. Does the transfer of certain powers by the federal government of Canada to the province of Québec amount to such a ‘privileging?’ In remarks on Canadian federalism, Habermas contradicts his earlier view that a liberalism in which the state acts on behalf of a particular community is unnecessary, and, indeed, incompatible with the very notion of liberalism itself: “[In Canada] ... reasonable efforts are being made to find a federalist solution that will leave the nation as a whole intact but will try to safeguard the cultural autonomy of a part of it by decentralizing state powers ... If I am not mistaken, in Canada the debate is not about this principle of equal rights but about the nature and extent of the state powers that are to be transferred to the Province of Québec.” 67 Not only does Habermas support a ‘reasonable’ decentralization of powers to Québec, (itself a type of ‘privileging’), he seems unaware that equal rights are at stake here, namely, equal rights among provinces (and territories).

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64 Ibid., 123.
65 Ibid., 124.
66 Ibid., 128.
67 Ibid., 127-128.
within the Canadian federation. In short, Habermas dismisses the need for Taylor’s ‘Liberalism 2’ in theory, while acknowledging its need in practice.

Further differences of interpretation over the nature of modern societies emerge in the latter stages of Habermas’ reply to Taylor. From a Habermasian perspective, Taylor has a much more static, much less fluid conception of a modern community than Habermas. In Habermas’ opinion, modern majority cultures must be flexible, humane, and compassionate enough to integrate immigrant cultures, even at the cost of a break with majority tradition. “The accelerated pace of change in modern societies explodes all stationary forms of life,” explains Habermas. “In the modern era, rigid forms of life succumb to entropy.” 68 Habermas cites “growing interdependencies,” “the capitalist world market,” “electronic mass communications,” and “the United Nations” as sources of a new global consciousness.69 Individual nations ought to be in sync with the new paradigm, Habermas believes, yet they are not. He is particularly frustrated with his fellow Europeans, (including his fellow Germans). He notes that “[x]enophobia is widespread these days in the European Community” and that “the number of people wanting to immigrate manifestly exceeds the willingness to receive them.”70 With rising poverty, unemployment, and terror in various parts of the world, Habermas sees an urgent humanitarian need for more generous immigration policies. Taylor, interestingly enough, says very little about immigration policy in his essay on ‘The Politics of Recognition’. The little he does say is tightly measured: “[A]ll societies are becoming increasingly multicultural, while at the same time becoming more porous,” he writes. “Indeed, these two developments go together. Their porousness means that they are more open to multinational migration; more of their members live the life of diaspora, whose centre is elsewhere.”71 Given Taylor’s basic view of the human person as intimately attached to his/her community, the premise here is that complex multicultural societies can have a potentially adverse effect on one’s personal identity. Taylor adds that “awkwardness arises from the fact that there are substantial numbers of people who are citizens and also belong to the culture [of Islam] that calls into question our philosophical boundaries. The challenge is to deal with their sense of marginalization without compromising our basic political principles.”72 The boundaries at issue here are those of western liberalism. In these remarks, Taylor is cautious about the implications of

69 Ibid., 141.
70 Ibid., 136-142.
72 Ibid., 63.
integrating migrant peoples who eschew the principles of liberalism. Though the human sense of marginalization from the culture of liberalism must indeed be addressed, the limits of the communal law must nevertheless be upheld. Whereas Habermas is more attentive to individual human needs in his stance on migration, Taylor balances individual human needs with the needs of the community. In the end, then, the positions held by Habermas and Taylor on the issue of migration are rooted in their respective liberal and communitarian approaches.73

13.5 Religious Discourse and the Public Sphere

This brings us to our third theme – the relation between religious discourse and the public sphere.74 In the late 1990s, the intellectual exchange between Habermas and Taylor began to include aspects of the ‘transcendental’. In 1999, an essay by Habermas and a reply from Taylor appeared in the European Journal of Philosophy under the title ‘From Kant to Hegel and Back Again: The Move Toward Detranscendentalization’.75 It is important to see here, in analyzing these two pieces, how the dialectic between Kant and Hegel – a frequent preoccupation in Habermas’ writings – frames the way in which Habermas incorporates ‘transcendence’ (or, in this case, a lack thereof) into his philosophical picture. Habermas’ thesis in the aforementioned article is that post-Hegelian philosophy can be described as a “movement towards detranscendentalizing the knowing subject,” and that Hegel, though not explicitly part of that movement, did more than anyone “to set the stage for it.”76 “Hegel,” writes Habermas, “was the first to put [Kant’s] transcendental subject back into context and to situate reason in social space and historical time.”77 Habermas’ paper outlines Hegel’s critique of Kant’s ‘mentality’. “[I]t is mentality that stands out as the real watershed separating Kant [from] Hegel,” notes Habermas.78 By ‘mentality’, Habermas is referring to Kant’s view that the subjective mind determines the conditions for objective knowledge. In the opening

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73 Habermas has consistently argued on behalf of a global cosmopolitanism, both in legal and in political terms. “The European Union,” he observes, “can be understood as an important stage along the route to a politically constituted world society.” [See Jürgen Habermas, The Crisis of the European Union: A Response, trans. By Ciaran Cronin, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012), 2.]

74 In his doctoral dissertation, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Habermas traced the history, of what has come to be known as the ‘public sphere’, back to 18th Century Western Europe. Free-flowing political discussions among the bourgeois in cafés, salons, halls, and piazzas, as well as critical ideas and opinions expressed in newspapers, letters, pamphlets, and assorted media, began to serve as a rational democratic counterbalance to the authority of state power.


76 Ibid., 129.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.
stages of his paper, Habermas details Hegel’s critique of Kant’s disconnection of the mental from the physical, that is, his separation of internal understanding from external sensation.79 Contra Kant, Hegel argues that “self-awareness emerges only from encounters with others.” 80 Habermas describes this epistemological shift as resulting in a “new historical consciousness.”81 In other words, Kant’s move toward transcendental subjectivity is ‘detranscendentalized’ by way of Hegel’s move toward historical inter-subjectivity. As Habermas puts it, “[a]ll historical phenomena participate more or less in the dialectical structure of those networks of mutual recognition, within which persons become individuated through socialization.”82 According to Habermas, Hegel was the first to realize that the form and content of human interaction is reflected in social structures and practices. (In modern times, for example, the acceptance of ‘human rights’ is mirrored in democratic institutions). In Hegel’s view, history is a rational process. Habermas’ sympathetic reading of Hegel’s role in the ‘detranscendentalization’ of Kantian subjectivity suggests that Hegel’s epistemological move is also part of a larger unfolding of historical rationality.

Taylor offers an unconventional reply to Habermas in the European Journal of Philosophy. His comments have more to do with questions Habermas does not address in his essay. While he applauds Habermas’ “interesting and convincing” reconstruction of Hegel’s detranscendentalization of Kant’s epistemology, Taylor is more interested in “the issues where there is still substantial disagreement” between him and Habermas.83 Taylor focuses on two such issues: i) “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?” and ii) “how does a society assure [that] the highest standards of the political morality that our civilization has evolved will be in force?”84 Both of these questions share a common search for what Taylor calls a “secure grounding for our standards.”85 From the outset of his reply, Taylor acknowledges that these questions have arisen because we have “cut loose from seeing our moral-political ethos as grounded in the order of things, in an ontic logos” and instead seen it as “arising

79 Habermas refers to Kant’s philosophy of mind, elsewhere, as “a relatively narrow conception of morality that is uncompromisingly abstract.” Habermas’ ‘discourse ethic’ is meant to replace Kant’s categorical imperative with a Hegel-inspired dialogical imperative. See Jürgen Habermas, ‘Morality and Ethical Life: Does Hegel’s Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics?’ in Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Sherry Weber Nicholsen, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 210.
80 Jürgen Habermas, ‘From Kant to Hegel and Back Again’, European Journal of Philosophy, 7/2 (1999), 134.
81 Ibid., 135.
82 Ibid., 137.
83 Charles Taylor, ”Comment on Jürgen Habermas’ ‘From Kant to Hegel and Back Again’,” European Journal of Philosophy, 7/2 (1999), 158-159.
84 Ibid., 159.
85 Ibid.
in historical evolution."³⁶ Taylor then proceeds to devote much of the remainder of his reply to Habermas to a summary of the genesis of Western Civilization - a tall order, to say the least.³⁷ For Taylor, ‘Western Civilization’ is synonymous with a culture of democracy and human rights, a culture characterized by four main features: a) it is detached from any hierarchical order; b) it takes human beings as essentially equal; c) it values freedom and self-determination; and d) the order it supports is one of mutual benefit.³⁸ In Taylor’s view, these are the features that constitute ‘the modern social imaginary’. Yet identifying the main features of Western Civilization is only a first step to a more substantive question Taylor is asking, namely, how has Western Civilization, with its culture of democracy and human rights, been justified as the highest moral and ethical option available to us? The answer, Taylor argues, lies in a greater understanding of the rise of modern science and the critique of traditional religion, both of which are associated with the 18th Century Enlightenment. While Taylor acknowledges that modernity has resulted in positive gains, he does not deny that there have been negative losses along the way:

“[I]t may easily be that the road taken has excluded other roads which would also have conferred great benefit. This is what all those suspect who sense that modernity has come at great cost – be it proponents of an ethic of heroism (Tocqueville, Nietzsche), of a fuller and more intense community (Rousseau, Marx), of a greater communion with nature (the Wordsworthian tradition), [or] of a sense of transcendence (Hopkins, Chateaubriand). Each of these lines of criticism may be right, as well as others. I believe that there is some truth in all the ones I have just mentioned.”³⁹

Taylor ends his reply by pointing out that modernity has brought on “tensions and unresolved conflicts between goods we don’t yet know how to combine.”⁴⁰ In this sense, then, Western Civilization’s culture of democracy and human rights may not be the final word. So though Taylor applauds Habermas’ reading of Hegel’s ‘detranscendentalization’ of Kant, he by no means assumes, as Habermas does, that the combined effects of modern epistemology (including those effects brought on by the dialectic between Kant and Hegel) have, on the whole, been altogether good. As we will see, interpretive differences on the question of modern epistemology play into the debate between Taylor and Habermas on religious discourse in the public sphere.

On June 18, 2009, ‘Das Leuchtende Beispiel’ ('The Shining Example'), a short piece authored by Charles Taylor in honour of Jürgen Habermas’ 80th birthday, appeared in the Munich-based newspaper Sddeutsche Zeitung. Taylor’s piece, full of laudatory commentary, is a thoughtful reflection

³⁶ Charles Taylor, “Comment on Jürgen Habermas ‘From Kant to Hegel and Back Again’,” European Journal of Philosophy, 7/2 (1999), 159.
³⁷ The summary Taylor provides here, is, in many respects, an early blueprint of the argument he unfolds in his later works, particularly in A Secular Age (2007).
³⁹ Ibid., 163. These premises were first articulated in Taylor’s Sources of the Self (1989).
⁴⁰ Ibid.
on Habermas’ philosophical achievements. “Jürgen Habermas,” writes Taylor in his opening paragraph, “is one of the most prominent philosophers on the global scene of the last half century,” whose “extraordinary” work “is of an impressive range and depth,” and whose “fame and influence” are well-deserved.\footnote{An English translation of Taylor’s 80th birthday tribute to Habermas can be found at the Social Science Research Council’s website, The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere – [http://blogs.ssrc.org]. As far as I am aware, Habermas did not pay tribute, in any public forum, to Taylor’s own 80th birthday.} Taylor focuses on three facets of Habermas’ contribution: i) his understanding of the dialogical and deliberative nature of moral normativity; ii) his attentiveness to modernity’s ‘post-metaphysical’ turn and its pluralizing effect on rational justification; and iii) his exemplary life as a public intellectual. Taylor is most impressed by the third of these three facets, that is, with Habermas’ public engagement in some of the more important debates of his generation.\footnote{Habermas thinks highly of Taylor’s standing as a ‘public intellectual’, as well: “Can there and should there be philosophers who, without lowering their theoretical standards, and indeed by virtue of their theoretical expertise, can conceive of their profession as entailing public, politically effective role? I think the answer is yes; and as the example of Charles Taylor proves, such people can also exist in the Anglo-Saxon world, and even in Oxford.” See A utonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas, ed. Peter Dews, (London, UK: Verso, 1986), 59.} “[Habermas] lives his philosophy, with a kind of passionate integrity,” notes Taylor. “And it is [his] courageous and consistent stance which has made a deep impression on thinkers and citizens, not only in Germany, not only in Europe, but world-wide ... We, in democratic countries and beyond, are all in his debt, and that more than anything else accounts for his unparalleled prominence. He is an inspiration to us all.”\footnote{See <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2009/10/19/philosopher-citizen/> .} At one point in his otherwise glowing review of Habermas’ accomplishments, however, Taylor includes more than a hint of criticism. He states that however important and influential Habermas’ dialogical/post-metaphysical brand of philosophy has been, “[t]here are rival attempts [that counter Habermas’ ‘discourse ethic’] which many (including this writer) would find more convincing.”\footnote{Ibid.} Taylor offers no elaboration of such ‘rival attempts’, but it is clear that there are strong differences of opinion here.

The nature of the intellectual divide between Habermas and Taylor is further illustrated in Rethinking Secularism: The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere, a unique event held in New York City a few short months after Taylor’s 80th birthday tribute to Habermas. The event, moderated by Professor Craig Calhoun, included public presentations by Habermas, Taylor, Judith Butler, and Cornel West, a dialogue between Habermas and Taylor, a dialogue between Butler and West, and a final discussion involving all four thinkers. In light of the task at hand, then, our focus here, in
examining the proceedings, will be on the relevant contributions from both Habermas and Taylor.  

As mentioned, both Habermas and Taylor presented papers at the gathering in New York City, and both participated in on-stage discussions.  

Habermas gave a paper on ‘The Political: The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology’, in which he argued that since western societies have maintained a connection to traditional religion in their historical transformations to liberal democracy, such societies have a need for ‘a translation proviso’ in their respective public discourses. Habermas defines his translation proviso as follows:

“According to this proposal, all citizens should be free to decide whether they want to use religious language in the public sphere. Were they to do so, they would, however, have to accept that the potential truth contents of religious utterances must be translated into a generally accessible language before they can find their way onto the agendas of parliaments, courts, or administrative bodies and influence their decisions.”

Habermas claims that the translation proviso is “the price to be paid for the neutrality of the state authority toward competing worldviews.” In light of the proviso, he adds, secular citizens have a reciprocal responsibility not to dismiss religiously inspired public reasons in advance of their articulation. Both religious and secular contributions to public debate are important, emphasizes Habermas, and both sides must be open enough to learn from each other.

Taylor’s paper, on ‘Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism’, argued that an incorrect
understanding of ‘secularism’ has misguided the contemporary debate on the place of religion in the public sphere. “We think that secularism (or laïcité) has to do with the relation of the state and religion; whereas in fact it has to do with the (correct) response of the democratic state to diversity,” claims Taylor.99 A true secular democracy secures basic goals such as liberty, equality, and fraternity between fundamental beliefs. “We are condemned to live an overlapping consensus,” he asserts, in a striking phrase, adding that “[t]he state can be neither Christian nor Muslim nor Jewish, but, by the same token, it should also be neither Marxist, nor Kantian, nor utilitarian.”100 Much of Taylor’s paper questions the view of contemporary political thinkers (i.e. Rawls and Habermas) on the status of religious language in a secular democracy. These thinkers assume that secular reasoning is rationally credible in that it is accessible to one and all, whereas religious reasoning is not in that it relies upon ‘faulty’ and ‘threatening’ premises acceptable only to dogmatic believers. Taylor rejects this assumption as “utterly without foundation.”101 There is no a priori explanation, Taylor claims, as to why secular language ought to be preferred to religious language. Indeed, Taylor goes so far as to describe certain aspects of the secular demand to alter religious language in the public sphere as “tyrannical.”102 Though he is in agreement with Habermas, that in keeping with the principle of diversity, the ‘official’ language of the democratic state ought to be as practically neutral as possible, Taylor is much more sensitive to the right to ‘freedom of speech’ and much more open to the possibility of religious reasoning (in parliamentary debates for example) than Habermas appears to be. In a footnote to his paper, Taylor adds that the difference between him and Habermas on why the scope of religious reasoning ought to be restrained in a secular democracy is perhaps due more to ‘rationale’ than to ‘practice’: “I am not sure whether I am disagreeing with Habermas ... [O]fficial language in diverse democracies must avoid certain religious references ... but this is not because they are specifically religious, but rather because they are not shared.”103 So is there, in fact,

100 Ibid., 48-50. John Rawls defines the idea of ‘an overlapping consensus’ as follows: “The idea of an overlapping consensus enables us to understand how a constitutional regime characterized by the fact of pluralism might, despite its deep divisions, achieve stability and social unity by the public recognition of a reasonable political conception of justice.” According to Rawls, a society built on an overlapping consensus “encourages the co-operative virtues of political life: the virtue of reasonableness and a sense of fairness, a spirit of compromise and a readiness to meet others halfway, all of which are connected with the willingness if not the desire to cooperate with others on political terms that everyone can publicly accept consistent with mutual respect.” [See John Rawls, The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus, Oxford Journal of Legal Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring, 1987), 2 & 21]. Apart from broadening the scope of competing goods in a pluralist society beyond the sole principle of justice, Taylor would not likely find fault with Rawls’ definition here; he would, however, take issue with Rawls’ reluctance to affirm the use of religious language in modern democratic deliberation.
101 Ibid., 53.
102 Ibid., 49.
103 Ibid, 58.
a disagreement here between Taylor and Habermas on the rationale for why certain religious references ought to be avoided in a diverse democracy? In his public presentation in New York City, Habermas argued that by virtue of their very nature, religious claims cannot be shared by all citizens in a diverse democracy without translation into secular language. Taylor, on the other hand, argued that religious claims that are not shared by all citizens should be avoided in a diverse democracy. There is a subtle but profound difference at play here. Whereas in the context of a diverse democracy Habermas rejects the potential universality of purely religious claims, Taylor affirms the potential universality of purely religious claims. For Habermas, secular translation of religious claims is a necessary condition for universality; for Taylor, it is not. In responding to Habermas, Taylor attributes the skeptical attitude of contemporary secular thinkers toward religion in the public sphere to a widespread 'myth' perpetuated by the Enlightenment:

“There certainly is a common view that sees the Enlightenment as a passage from darkness to light, that is, as an absolute, unmitigated move from a realm of thought full of error and illusion to one where the truth is at last available. To this one must immediately add that a counterview defines 'reactionary' thought: the Enlightenment would be an unqualified move into error, a massive forgetting of salutary and necessary truths about the human condition.”

The Enlightenment disconnection of 'reason' from 'revelation' is not a wholly positive move for Taylor. For Habermas to assume otherwise is mistaken, he adds: “Habermas reminds us [that] originally political authority was defined and justified in cosmic-religious terms. It was defined within the terms of a 'political theology'. But Habermas seems to think that modern secular states might do altogether without some analogous concept, and this seems to me not quite right.” The real root of the larger divide separating Taylor and Habermas emerges here. Taylor wants to retrieve the pre-Enlightenment connection between the political and the theological, whereas Habermas sees the post-Enlightenment disconnection of the political from the theological as irrevocable. In many ways, the philosophical differences between Taylor and Habermas on matters of modern 'public reason' are conditioned, to a great extent, by their respective readings of the 'political-theological' question.

In their face-to-face encounter in New York City, it became clear, according to the moderator of the discussion, that Habermas and Taylor agree on the need for a "greater integration among citizens

105 Ibid., 46.
106 According to theologian Nicholas Adams, "Habermas dissociates subjectivity from the doctrine of the Trinity, and from any account of divine action." See Nicholas Adams, Habermas and Theology, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 162.
who enter public discourse with different views."  

What also became clear, however, is that Habermas and Taylor disagree on how such integration is to be achieved. On the one hand, Habermas maintains that secular reasons and religious reasons are different in kind. Whereas secular reasoning is naturally inclusive, argues Habermas, religious reasoning is naturally exclusive. Whereas religious reasoning appeals to members of a particular religious community, secular reasoning transcends particular discourses. According to Habermas, the exclusive nature of religious reasoning is such that “religious speech in the political public sphere needs translation if its content should enter and affect the justification and formulation of binding political decisions that are enforceable by law.” The ‘translation’ referred to here is a translation of propositions expressed in ‘exclusive’ religious language to propositions expressed in ‘inclusive’ secular language. Religious talk of ‘creation in the image of God’, for example, could, Habermas claims, be easily translatable into secular talk of ‘autonomy’ and ‘human rights’. Translation of religious discourse into secular discourse is politically significant for Habermas because he rejects the need for a “deeper (i.e. religious) grounding” in the context of a liberal democratic constitution. In his view, secular reasoning is more than sufficient for constitutional justification.

In response to Habermas, Taylor claims that religious utterances are not easily translatable into secular language in that “they are references that really touch on certain people’s spiritual lives and not others.” Taylor points out that a phrase such as ‘human beings were created in the image of God’ does not indicate whether the speaker in question is Christian, or Jewish, or Muslim, or indeed someone of a non-religious persuasion for whom the phrase has meaning. Such a phrase is relevant across a number of communities, be they religious or non-religious. No one had trouble understanding the message of Martin Luther King, adds Taylor, and King spoke from within the Christian tradition. Conversely, Kant’s secular line about ‘the starry sky above and the moral law within’ may not necessarily be understood by a person of religious sensibility. How then, Taylor asks, can one possibly keep track of the fluidity, of all the instances where propositions of one sort or another will be understood by

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109 Ibid., 65.
110 In an engaging discussion on ‘The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a Free State’ with (then) Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger on January 19, 2004, at the Catholic Academy of Bavaria, Habermas argued that “[I]n constitutional states, there is no ruling authority derived from something antecedent to the law” and that “the constitution of the liberal state can satisfy its own need for legitimacy in a self-sufficient manner (by way of the democratic process itself).” In response, Cardinal Ratzinger reminded his colleague that “majorities, too, can be blind or unjust, as history teaches us very plainly” and that “the majority principle always leaves open the question of the ethical foundations of the law.” See Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, The Dialectics of Secularization, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. by Brian McNeil, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 27, 29, & 60.
all? One cannot do this in advance of a dialogue. Religious persons cannot assume, in advance, that the language they use in the public sphere will be wholly understood by secular persons, nor can secular persons assume, in advance, that the language they use in the public sphere will be wholly understood by religious persons. Against Habermas, Taylor rejects the notion that there is a difference in kind between religious reasons and secular reasons. Both are instances of a larger diversity, he argues, and neither should be treated as a ‘special case’. People who do not think in secular terms should not be blocked from a public expression of their views. The same holds true the other way around. People who do not think in religious terms should not be blocked from a public expression of their views, either. One way of thinking cannot be held hostage by the other. Unlike Habermas, Taylor advocates ‘liberty, equality, and fraternity’ between religious and secular views in the public sphere. A Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Taylor adds, “can’t be in Benthamite language, it can’t be simply in Kantian language, it can’t be in Christian language.”

Taylor prefers a ‘neutral’ democratic language to a ‘secular’ democratic language: “What Jürgen calls ‘secular’ I’ll call ‘neutral,” asserts Taylor. “That’s how I see it. I see it as absolutely indispensable.” Though Taylor does not expound on the meaning of the term ‘neutral’ in his discussion with Habermas, one can, in light of his other comments on ‘absolute neutrality’, reasonably discern what is being said here. A ‘neutral’ language in a democratic public sphere neither privileges nor suppresses either the secular or the religious. Taylor reads Habermas as committing both of these sins in his favouring of the secular. Taylor wants to leave room for an ‘overlapping consensus’ in diverse democratic discussion.

13.6 Toward a Recognitive Education

The three identifiable themes in the long-standing philosophical debate between Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas – the relation between language and society, the relation between the rights of the individual and the rights of the community, and the relation between religious discourse and the public sphere – all intersect in ‘the politics of recognition’. As we have seen, there are profound differences between Taylorian and Habermasian approaches to the three themes in question, differences that, in turn, shape their respective understandings of recognitive communication. For Habermas, democratic recognition is a purely rational matter – the recognition of legitimate reasoning in the public sphere is a function of the clear administration of secular procedures. For Taylor, democratic recognition is more than a purely rational matter – the recognition of legitimate reasoning in the

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113 Ibid., 67.
public sphere cannot be reductively disassociated from the moral intentions of human minds, bodies, and souls, be they secular or religious. Whereas Habermas argues for a one-sided secular consensus, Taylor argues for a neutral overlapping consensus. In short, Taylor's brand of recognition is much more comprehensive, much more humane, and much more sensitive to the dynamics of diversity in a liberal democratic society, than is the brand of recognition championed by Habermas. In Taylor's words, "[i]t is obvious that what divides me ... in general from 'proceduralists' [like Habermas] is a quite different view of the human condition." Contra Habermas, Taylor holds that democratic 'translation' is not a one-way street, that recognition must come from all sides, and that a language which simultaneously includes and transcends religious and secular particularities is a real possibility for a modern liberal society.

The need for a broader recognition is no less true for institutions of higher learning. In keeping with Taylorian logic, colleges and universities, and their related mission statements, policy documents, codes of conduct, administrative processes, faculty and staff meetings, course offerings, daily lectures, assigned texts, classroom discussions, student life programs, extra-curricular activities, etc., should strive, both in word and in deed, for the widest possible recognition among persons. While such recognition need not dilute the institutional assertion of a particular academic identity, it should nonetheless heighten the sensitivity toward diversity on campus. In the context of a modern liberal democracy, the public expectation for colleges and universities to shape their educational offerings in accordance with 'the politics of recognition' cannot be overlooked.

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114 See Nigel DeSouza, 'Models of Moral Philosophy: Charles Taylor's Critique of Jürgen Habermas', *Eidos*, 15/1 (Jan. 1998), 61. For Habermas's own (Kantian) view of the human condition see Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, trans., William Rehg et al., (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003). In taking up the ethical implications of genetic engineering, and the present need for legal regulation, Habermas underscores the potential threat to the autonomy and self-understanding of the human species. In an echo of Kant, Habermas holds that a human being ought not to be treated as a means to a genetic designer's end. Unlike Taylor, Habermas does not conceive of human dignity on religious and/or metaphysical terms, however.
Conclusion

Taylor’s Educational Contributions
CONCLUSION

I hope to accomplish two objectives in the following conclusion. First, I provide a brief summary of each of the thirteen chapters of this dissertation. Second, based on the content I have covered, I offer my own reflections on what I see to be Charles Taylor’s particular contributions to the Philosophy of Education. The fulfillment of each of these objectives should help illuminate the significance of Taylor’s educational thought.

The first task at hand is a brief summary of each of the thirteen chapters. Since the architectural structure of the dissertation consists of four parts – with Part One devoted to a literature review, Part Two to Taylor’s readings of modern philosophers, Part Three to key themes in Taylor’s educational thought, and Part Four to Taylor’s critics – I will proceed accordingly.

In Part One of the thesis, the literature review, we saw how the majority of education scholars who make use of Taylor’s writings in their own academic work are interested in the topic of ‘recognition’. In our overview of the literature we found that there were four intellectual ‘strands’ within this School of Recognition: the identity strand, the multicultural strand, the globalization strand, and the pedagogical strand. We learned, in our analysis of the four strands, that recognition of human difference in contemporary education cannot be accomplished without due attention to immanence, humanism, community, and dialogicality. I went on to claim that there were several ‘blind spots’ in the academic conversation at hand, and that the scholars who cite Taylor in their work pay insufficient attention to historical context, thematic connections, and dialectical tensions, and do not have the benefit of Taylor’s most recent writings which cast much light on his scholarship as a whole. In light of these ‘blind spots’, I argued that there are four major thinkers (Descartes, Kant, Herder, and Hegel), and four major themes (scientific rationality, exclusive humanism, the ethics of authenticity and the politics of recognition), that are operative in Taylor’s educational thought, and that the relations between these major thinkers and themes express an ‘internal logic’.1

In Part Two, we looked at Taylor’s readings of the aforementioned modern philosophers: Descartes, Kant, Herder, and Hegel. We saw how Taylor’s reading of Descartes focuses on three important aspects: skepticism of God, skepticism of humanity, and skepticism of the natural world, each of which contributes to a ‘disenchanted’ epistemology. In Taylor’s reading of Kant, we learned

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1 The four themes mentioned here are artistically depicted in a host of modern paintings. For Scientific Rationality see ‘An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump’ by Joseph Wright (1768); for Exclusive Humanism see ‘The Frascati Café’ by Louis-Philibert Debucourt (1807); for the Ethics of Authenticity see ‘Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog’ by Caspar David Friedrich (1818); and for the Politics of Recognition see ‘The Signing of the American Constitution’ by Thomas Rossiter, (1860).
how four issues rise to the fore, (namely, Kant's epistemology, moral theory, political philosophy, and aesthetics), and how all of these point to an 'immanent frame'. With Herder, we noted how Taylor is indebted, as a French-Canadian, to a philosopher who understands the mutual relationship between language and national culture, and how linguistic differentiation, which grounds nationalistic thinking, can, in its lesser light, justify repression and/ or marginalization of human beings. In our analysis of Taylor's reading of Hegel, we discovered that Taylor's interpretation is unique in the history of Hegelian scholarship in terms of both its metaphysical perspective and its emphasis on a communitarian corrective to modern liberalism.

In Part Three, we tackled the key themes in Taylor's educational thought - scientific rationality, exclusive humanism, the ethics of authenticity, and the politics of recognition. We saw how Taylor's educational critique of mechanistic explanations, of quantitative methods, of technology, of corporatism, and of the desire of the Humanities to imitate the Natural Sciences, all find echoes in the scientific rationality of Cartesian philosophy. We then moved to Taylor's reading of modern Kantian freedom, and its accompanying phenomenon of exclusive humanism, defined by Taylor as a view of life that recognizes no higher goal than that of human flourishing. Through Taylor's interpretation of Herder, we observed that an ethic of authenticity, which allows for the expression of one's unique personal identity, is pervasive in modern culture. In Taylor's Hegel-inspired consideration of both the Western Canon debate as well as Québec's Ethics and Religious Culture Program we saw how both are manifestations of the politics of recognition in contemporary education.

Part Four of the dissertation gave voice to four major critics of Taylor: Clifford Geertz, William Connolly, Richard Rorty, and Jürgen Habermas. In Geertz' critique of Taylor's theme of scientific rationality, we saw how the operative tension between him and Taylor is one of naturalism versus hermeneutics. In Connolly's criticism of Taylor's work on exclusive humanism, we learned that the main difference of opinion is the commitment to a more buffered self, closed to transcendence on one hand, and the commitment to a more porous self, open to transcendence on the other. With Richard Rorty's questioning of Taylor's notion of an ethic of authenticity, the tension of relative truth vs. objective truth is evident. And with Jürgen Habermas' assessment of Taylor's politics of recognition, the main point of contention is the relationship between individual rights and communal rights. In each case, Taylor is calling for two things - a balance between rather than an either/ or approach to the two tensions at hand, and an attempt to incorporate both tensions into a more holistic vision.
Conclusion: Taylor's Educational Contributions

An understanding of Taylor’s views on the modern condition walks hand-in-hand with an understanding of Taylor’s views on modern education. My focus throughout this dissertation has been on what has motivated ‘the politics of recognition’ in modern Western societies and, more precisely, what are some of the intellectual currents in modern Western history that have contributed to the rise of ‘the politics of recognition’ as we know it today. I have argued that the four major influences on Taylor’s educational thought – a Descartes-inspired scientific rationality, a Kant-inspired exclusive humanism, a Herder-inspired ethics of authenticity, and a Hegel-inspired politics of recognition – are interconnected. The first influence leads to the second, which leads to the third, which in turn leads to the fourth. A scientific rationality which brackets metaphysical claims leads to an exclusive humanism which sees human flourishing as the only true end. An exclusive humanism which sees human flourishing as the only true end leads, in turn, to an ethic of authenticity, an ethic of being true to oneself. Finally, an ethic of authenticity, an ethic of being true to oneself, leads to a politics of recognition, a politics of claiming one’s legitimate rights in the public sphere. There is a striking development here, a ‘metamorphosis’ of sorts, one that has not been properly identified, explained, or understood in education-related studies of Taylor’s writings.

What then, apart from the aforementioned, are Taylor’s contributions to contemporary Philosophy of Education? A number of insights emerge from his education-related writings based on the sequential findings of this dissertation. I have collated these insights into seven major categories: ‘Education and Philosophical Anthropology’, ‘Education and Epistemology’, ‘Education and the Enlightenment’, ‘Education and Modern Societies’, ‘Education and the Importance of Language’, ‘Education and the Secular/Religious Divide’, and ‘Education and Cultural Diversity’. I am arguing here that these categories serve as the theoretical ‘touchstones’ for Taylor’s educational thought, and are interwoven in a rich historical narrative.¹

medieval perspective of faithful belief in a cosmically-ordered hierarchy of divine spirits, imbued in meaningful matter, to the rise of Cartesianism, which plunges humanity into an ‘immanent frame’, where the spiritual connection with God has faded, metaphysical weight has been emptied away, and a more scientific understanding of the whole of reality has been substituted. In the process, the idea of a transcendent hierarchy is flattened, nature is objectified, and the world is disenchanted. The transition from the medieval to the modern mindset is an area of study Taylor is calling all students of history to reassess.

The second of Taylor’s contributions concerns ‘Education and Epistemology’. With Descartes, the central question of philosophy shifts from the divine to the human, from the medieval ontological preoccupation – ‘What is the nature of Being?’ – to the modern epistemological preoccupation – ‘What can I truly know?’ A focus on divine reason is replaced by a concentration on human reason. Taylor proposes that the solution to Cartesian dualism rests in a retrieval of epistemological realism. The relationship between the mental and the physical cannot merely be represented in the mind, it must be experienced in the physical world. For the epistemological realist, interacting with the world is essential for actually knowing the world. According to Taylor, Kant’s ‘correction’ of Cartesian epistemology is itself in need of correction. In as much as it is ‘buffered’ from the possibility of transcendence, it too falls victim to the modern epistemological construal. Taylor asserts that meaning cannot be reduced to what human beings can empirically verify. Naturalism brackets out important aspects of human beings, such as their background conditions, their subjective particularities, their internal motivations, their self-interpretations, their dialogicality, and their respective teleologies. For Taylor then, the epistemological and the moral are intertwined. One’s epistemological view has direct implications upon one’s moral view. An immanent epistemology leads to an immanent morality. The debate in the contemporary academy between the naturalists (those who reduce meaning to empirical verification) and the hermeneuts (those who do not) hinges on differing epistemological perspectives.

The third of Taylor’s contributions concerns ‘Education and the Enlightenment’. In Taylor’s view, one cannot properly understand the modern condition without understanding the 18th Century Enlightenment from which it emerged. For Taylor, the self-generated move to abstraction that Descartes’ cogito (‘I think therefore I am’) represents leads to a pronounced individualism, disengaged from traditional notions of God, nature, and community. The after-effects of Cartesian philosophy open the door to Providential Deism, a major turning point in Western Civilization, from which the roots of modern secularism begin to grow. The scientific revolution of the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution that followed it, had the combined effect of enhancing
human freedom, confidence, and power. 'Meaning' was consequently less understood to be given to human beings (i.e. by God), and more understood to be made by them. In his analysis, then, Taylor is asking his readers to weigh the gains of the Enlightenment against its losses. A culture unduly steeped in science and secularism is, for Taylor, profoundly truncated. In his pedagogical writings, he is asking us not only to be aware of the cultural role the 18th Century Enlightenment has played in the rise of modern secularism, but to be critical of that role, as well.

The fourth of Taylor's contributions concerns 'Education and Modern Societies'. As Taylor sees it, the conditions of modernity have rendered the possibility of a shared moral framework increasingly problematic. Modern pluralism has complicated attempts at both subjective and collective understanding, as well as various demands for 'recognition' in the public sphere. With the rise of modern democracy, the authority of the state is now grounded on constitutional rights and is no longer viewed as an expression of a higher moral order. Nationalism is the common glue that holds modern societies in place. It is a glue that often comes undone, however, as disillusioned segments of the population fragment in various directions, furthering their own alienation. According to Taylor, modern democratic societies 'flatten' and 'homogenize' difference. In addition, the demands of a rapidly growing modern society have necessitated a need to provide higher levels of education to larger numbers of people. This need has, in turn, led to the modern bureaucratization and corporatization of mass education, which leaves less room for contact between teacher and student, for spontaneous expression and feeling, for rigorous intellectual debate, and for true community. In response to these changes, Taylor advocates the creation of a 'dialogue society', in which opportunities for citizen-to-citizen communication are enhanced. Educational institutions should strive, as well, for the promotion of such dialogue.

The fifth of Taylor's contributions concerns 'Education and the Importance of Language'. According to Taylor, in the ontological worldview that was dominant in the West until the rise of science in the 18th century, creation was understood as a meaningful expression of the will or logos of the Creator. Things in the world were seen semiologically, that is, as signs of divine communication. The semiological way of seeing things was radically challenged by medieval nominalism - the view that 'universals' are merely abstract names, terms, or words, which do not correspond to metaphysical essences, forms, or realities. The rise of nominalism led to a thoroughly designative (i.e. naturalistic) theory of language and meaning. This naturalization of language was a necessary consequence of a naturalized epistemology. For Taylor, however, language is not merely descriptive; it also expresses a particular consciousness. Language and thought are intimately linked. Each language represents a certain way of being and belonging, a certain way of experiencing the
world. Language creates a common bond of understanding among those who share it, brings cohesion to the society it rests in, and reflects a particular vision of the world. Language is, in effect, the heart and soul of a culture. One needs to immerse oneself within a culture to truly understand its language, and immerse oneself within a language to truly understand its culture. The two are mutually supportive. One cannot properly learn a language or a culture, in an atomistic way, as a detached observer. Nor can one properly understand another human being apart from the language he or she speaks (whether that language is written or verbal, gesticulated, or signed) or apart from the culture to which he/she belongs. Language has the power to create reality. A particular form of life both reflects and shapes a language, which, in turn, clarifies and refines social practices. In Taylor’s mind, linguistic differentiation can, in its lesser light, justify the actual repression and/or marginalization of human beings. A better understanding of the workings of language, then, might help mitigate the potential for one language-based community to dominate another. In an age where considerations of ‘gender’, ‘race’, ‘orientation’, and ‘class’ are present in social (and indeed, educational) discussions, attentiveness to one’s use of language is critically important.

The sixth of Taylor’s contributions concerns ‘Education and the Secular/Religious Divide’. Taylor is well aware that theism has become a fragile position in a secular age. Modern secularism relies upon equality of respect, freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, and state neutrality toward secular and/or religious movements. Modernity allows for a plurality of spiritual positions – theism, deism, agnosticism, atheism, secularism, humanism, etc. Some of these spiritual positions are more open to ‘transcendence’, while some are more open to ‘immanence’. In light of this, Taylor is calling for greater intellectual, emotional, and spiritual sympathy between these positions, none of which is ‘monolithic’. ‘Liberty, equality, and fraternity’ should guide democratic exchanges between different spiritual views in the public sphere so as to leave room for the possibility of an ‘overlapping consensus’. The recognition of a variety of authentic horizons of significance in the context of liberal democracy – both metaphysical and non-metaphysical – should inform any educational philosophy. A ‘porous’ school, college, or university, (open to transcendence), is likely to produce a ‘porous student’, just as a ‘buffered’ school, college, or university, (closed to transcendence), is likely to produce a ‘buffered student’. Academic culture must take the plurality of these spiritual positions into account. Students should have the space to give voice in classroom discussions to their particular spiritual and/or non-spiritual commitments.

The seventh of Taylor’s contributions concerns ‘Education and Cultural Diversity’. Taylor is convinced that liberalism cannot be blind or neutral to difference. Differences matter. A commitment to ‘deep diversity’ in a multicultural society presupposes a respect not only for
diversity as such, but also for a variety of approaches toward it. 'Deep diversity' involves an appreciation for different ways of belonging.\(^3\) A 'politics of recognition' respects both similarity and difference as well as a proper balance between these considerations. The capacity to truly understand the complex identities of one's fellow citizens in a liberal democracy depends, in part, on one's capacity to mutually recognize, (and navigate), the fused horizons of modern pluralism. The dynamic of recognition involves at least three moves: that one make an effort to understand the other; that one make an effort to understand how one is understood from the other's perspective; and that one make an effort to understand the relationship between these two perspectives. The accommodation of diversity is an important (though not unlimited) goal for a liberal democracy. Common projects can serve to harmonize a pluralist society. This is no less true for education. The way in which an institution responds to the question of human identity affects every aspect of its educational mission. The locus of the 'recognition' debate in higher education is found within the Humanities, where demands are made by various academic stakeholders to re-evaluate, adjust, and/or expand 'the canon' of curricular literature. The claim is that a more global, multicultural curriculum will be better placed to properly address constituencies that have been historically marginalized. With societies in the West and in the East becoming increasingly multicultural, there is a pressing need to train young minds in the art of multicultural deliberation. If cross-cultural understanding is much needed in modern pluralist societies, the logical implication is that it is much needed in modern education, as well. School board policies, teacher training, curriculum guidelines, and student engagement ought to reflect, both in theory and in practice, a just balance of educational rights and duties in an increasingly diverse society. Colleges and universities, and their related mission statements, policy documents, codes of conduct, administrative processes, faculty and staff meetings, course offerings, daily lectures, assigned texts, classroom discussions, student life programs, extra-curricular activities, etc., should strive, both in word and in deed, for the widest possible recognition among persons. While such recognition need not dilute the institutional assertion of a particular academic identity, it should nonetheless heighten the sensitivity toward diversity on campus. In the context of a modern liberal democracy, the public expectation for schools, colleges, and universities to shape their educational offerings in accordance with the politics of recognition cannot be overlooked.

\(^3\) Further study on the educational implications (and limitations) of 'deep diversity' is needed. Philosophers of Education can certainly play a role here. As levels of immigration in multicultural societies continue to increase, an appreciation for 'deep diversity' will be ever more vital to educational institutions. As far as Charles Taylor is concerned, what is required by teachers, students, and administrators, is a 'civic ethic' that is responsive to the challenges of pluralism. The question of how persons ought to comport themselves in the face of 'deep diversity', is a question future schools, colleges, and universities cannot evade.
Conclusion: Taylor’s Educational Contributions

How do the aforementioned seven categories in Taylor’s educational writings relate to each other? When we look more closely at these categories, with a view to deeper reflection, new patterns emerge. If we further collate our seven categories, we see that these categories can in turn be captured under three encompassing conditions: ‘The Historical Condition’, ‘The Human Condition’, and ‘The Epistemological Condition’. Categories one, three, and four – (i.e. ‘Education and Philosophical Anthropology’, ‘Education and the Enlightenment’, and ‘Education and Modern Societies’) – deal largely with the question of history. Categories five, six, and seven – (i.e. ‘Education and the Importance of Language’, ‘Education and the Secular/Religious Divide’, and ‘Education and Cultural Diversity’) – deal largely with the question of humanity. The remaining category, category two – (i.e. ‘Education and Epistemology’) – deals largely with the question of knowledge. We are left, then, with three conditions: ‘History’, ‘Humanity’, and ‘Epistemology’. Yet what are we to make of this? How are these conditions inter-related?

A brief review is in order here.

In collation a) – ‘The Historical Condition’ – we learned that the transition from the medieval to the modern mindset has substituted the traditional connection between immanence and transcendence with a wholly immanence-based perspective; that the scientific revolution of the 18th Century Enlightenment played a defining role in the rise of modern secularism; and that the modern western condition is defined by pluralism, democracy, capitalism, and nationalism. In collation a), then, the history that Taylor is challenging us to identify, understand, and critique, is contemporary history, that is, the historical context in which we now find ourselves.

In collation b) – ‘The Human Condition’ – we learned that in an age where human considerations of ‘gender’, ‘race’, ‘orientation’, and ‘class’ are present in social and educational discourse, attentiveness to language is critically important; that academic culture must take the various spiritual positions of human beings into account; and that there is a public expectation in diverse societies for schools, colleges, and universities to shape their educational offerings in accordance with human recognition. In collation b), then, Taylor is pointing to the need for a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater practical consideration of human difference in contemporary educational settings.

In collation c) – ‘The Epistemological Condition’ – we learned that the epistemological and the moral are intertwined; that one’s epistemological view has direct implications upon one’s moral view; that an immanent epistemology leads to an immanent morality (just as a transcendent epistemology leads to a transcendent morality); and that the debate in the contemporary academy between the naturalists (those who reduce meaning to empirical verifications), and the hermeneuts
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...hinges on differing epistemological perspectives. In collation c), then, Taylor is calling our attention to three variables: to the knowledge claims we pursue, to the knowledge claims we neglect, and to the relation of these claims to the moral positions we hold.

The conclusions of collations a), b), and c), are worth repeating: first, the history Taylor is challenging us to identify, understand, and critique, is contemporary history, that is, the historical context in which we now find ourselves; second, Taylor is pointing to the need for a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater practical consideration of human difference in contemporary educational settings; and third, Taylor is calling our attention to three variables: to the knowledge claims we pursue, to the knowledge claims we neglect, and to the relation of these claims to the moral positions we hold. Taylor is thus preoccupied with three conditions in contemporary education - the historical, the human, and the epistemological. These conditions serve as the main pillars in the tripartite framework of his unique educational edifice.

Why is this framework significant? It is significant, in my view, because education worthy of the name cannot be had without a proper understanding of past, present, and future; a proper understanding of who we are both as individuals and as communities; and a proper understanding of what we value as knowledge. The historical, the human, and the epistemological are interwoven. Good education affirms this inter-relationship. Bad education rejects it. There is something very Platonic at work in Taylor’s educational framework. I am thinking here of Plato’s dialogues where the capacity for the soul to ‘recollect’ plays an important part in the teacher-student relationship (Meno), and where the teacher’s task is to facilitate such ‘recollection’ in the student by acting as a ‘midwife’ in giving birth to self-discovery (Theaetetus). Self-understanding is essential for Plato. So too for Taylor. It is only in coming to understand our history, our humanity, and the knowledge we seek, that we are truly engaged as learners. The reverse is also true, of course. If we are more inclined to forgetfulness, more inclined to a partial understanding (of history, of ourselves, and of knowledge itself), we cannot claim to be fully educated.

It is important to recognize here, in assessing Taylor’s educational contributions, that the ‘end’ of his narrative about the genesis of the modern condition is ‘cultural diversity’. Cultural diversity is indeed a challenge for both modern citizens and societies, and no less a challenge for educators. As we have seen, much of Taylor’s work, educational and otherwise, is committed not only to the recognition of such diversity, but to its positive contribution to holistic human understanding. “I think what we badly need,” writes Taylor, “is a conversation between a host of different positions, religious, nonreligious, antireligious, humanistic, antihumanistic, and so on, in which we eschew...
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As a student of Isaiah Berlin, Taylor claims that intellectual sympathy is much needed in diverse modern societies. In short, Taylor’s insights bear witness to the fact that his contributions to educational thought are indeed significant. The question as to why these contributions have not been given sufficient attention in Philosophy of Education textbooks needs to be addressed. It is a question only Philosophers of Education can answer.\(^5\)

Has the discipline of Philosophy of Education neglected the spiritual dimensions of the educational journey, dimensions explored throughout Charles Taylor’s philosophical writings? If it has, it is not alone. As Taylor observes in his Templeton Prize address:

“[W]e have somehow to break down the barriers between our contemporary culture of science and disciplined academic study on the one hand, and the domain of spirit, on the other. This has been one of the driving goals of my own intellectual work ... The deafness of many philosophers, social scientists, and historians to the spiritual dimension can be remarkable. And this is the more damaging in that it affects the culture of the media and of educated public opinion in general.”\(^6\)

Taylor’s educational thought can thus be seen as an effort to retrieve both a balance and a connection between the perspectives of immanence and transcendence, between the synchronic and the diachronic. This can only occur, from within education and from without, if there is due recognition and respect between persons holding such perspectives, and if such perspectives are understood in a larger democratic framework of cultural diversity. In short, a retrieval of a balance and of a connection between the perspectives of immanence and transcendence, is more likely to occur in the face of dialogical relations between persons of diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, an education for culturally diverse minds and hearts, anchored in human, historical, and epistemological recognition, and democratically open to both immanence and transcendence, is the true calling of Charles Taylor’s educational thought.

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\(^4\) Charles Taylor, ‘Afterword: Apologia pro Libro suo’, in Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age, ed. Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). [This statement is fundamental to a proper understanding of Taylor’s intellectual project. Taylor has been criticized, however, for not practicing what he preaches, that is, for shunning difficult interlocutors. He has, for example, refused to engage any of the ‘new atheists’ in public debate. He himself has criticized the British scientist Richard Dawkins for “intellectually shoddy” research and “facile contempt” for religion. According to his adversaries, such remarks are far from the spirit of the very democratic dialogue Taylor seeks to promote.]


Bibliography


