

ARTO LAITINEN & NICHOLAS H. SMITH

Introduction

The essays on the work of Charles Taylor that make up this volume are divided into three parts. The essays in part one examine a number of metaphysical themes arising from Taylor's work; in part two Taylor's conception of the self is addressed; and in part three the focus turns to some central issues in Taylor's moral and political theory.¹ The book concludes with an interview with Taylor in which he summarizes his work, indicates the direction of his current research, and comments on some key contemporary issues.

The distinctiveness of Taylor's conception of the tasks and *modus operandi* of philosophy is reflected in the essays by Sami Pihlström, Nicholas Smith and Thomas Wallgren. Pihlström draws attention to the way in which Taylor conceptualizes philosophical discourse as transcendental argumentation, and he investigates the structure such argumentation has according to Taylor's conception. Pihlström then considers the 'culturalistic' philosophical anthropology Taylor establishes by this mode of reasoning. Like Herder, Wittgenstein and the pragmatists before him, Taylor is critical of an excessive naturalism that neglects – or even makes unintelligible – the transcendental role played by habitual action and human embeddedness in culturally inherited and transformed forms of life. However, while for Pihlström transcendental argument as articulated by Taylor is a crucial resource for philosophy, he also warns us against a danger that seems to be inherent in the kind of culturalistic philosophical anthropology favoured by Taylor: what Pihlström calls the 'refactualization' of normativity.

Normativity is also a key theme in Smith's contribution to the volume. Smith notes that Taylor's opposition to 'representationalist' conceptions of the tasks of philosophy – that is, conceptions that construe representations as first in the order of explanation of meaning, truth, and knowledge – is shared by several other philosophical movements, most notably pragmatism and contemporary advocates of Hegelian Idealism strongly influenced by pragmatism. Smith then asks what, if anything, the particular anti-

representationalist strategy adopted by Taylor adds to these other forms of non-representationalism, besides its endorsement of the non-representational basis of normativity. Smith brings out the distinctively hermeneutic character of Taylor's meta-philosophical stance, and the close affinities it shows to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. By examining the relative merits of hermeneutic and pragmatist/neo-Idealist conceptions of anti-representationalism (the latter exemplified, for instance, in the work of Jürgen Habermas, Robert Brandom and Robert Pippin), Smith reassesses the contemporary significance of Taylor's philosophical project.

Thomas Wallgren's chapter situates Taylor's work within the 'dialectics of philosophical enlightenment' that is a central concern to philosophers interested in diagnosing the times. The issue, as Wallgren states it, is this: if the instantiation of reason is the defining characteristic of modern forms of life, and if this reason is also responsible for many of the most intractable problems and conflicts of modernity, then the value of philosophy, insofar as it too is part of the realization of reason, must be brought into question. For far from being an appropriate way of identifying and diagnosing the problems with modernity, philosophy may only exacerbate those problems. This, of course, was one of the central challenges of postmodernism in philosophy, which became a key player in the philosophical scene in the 1980s. While the debate between modernists and postmodernists may now have subsided, this is not, in Wallgren's view, due to the debate being successfully or decisively or productively settled. And one of the great merits of Taylor's work, Wallgren proposes, is that it offers a perspective from which to reassess what was and remains at stake in the debate surrounding the dialectics of philosophical enlightenment. Wallgren then critically reconstructs Taylor's contribution, claiming that there is an unresolved tension in Taylor's conception of and commitment to philosophical reason. Wallgren then offers some suggestions of his own about how to deal with these issues more constructively.

The first three essays thematize Taylor's culturalistic philosophical anthropology, the organizing idea of which is that there are various layers of meaning and normativity inherent in the human relation to the world.² The next three chapters continue the analysis of Taylor's philosophical anthropology through the notions of personhood, the self and the struggle for recognition. Jussi Kotkavirta begins by giving a historical contextualization of Taylor's analysis of the concept of a person. He then draws attention to the various Aristotelian elements in Taylor's conception, which, he points out, are more pervasive than may appear at first sight. While

Kotkavirta has considerable sympathy with Taylor's basic approach, he thinks that a more robust defence of some of its key aspects is needed, for instance its depiction of the role of emotions and the philosophical status of embodiment.

Mikko Yrjönsuuri attends to Taylor's own historical narrative concerning the origin of the notion of the self. While impressed by many features of this narrative, Yrjönsuuri claims that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Taylor's notion of the self is both too individualistic and too ahistorical to carry conviction. At some level, Yrjönsuuri argues, Taylor merely assumes there to be one (and only one) self for each human being. Yrjönsuuri wants to question this 'simple arithmetic': it is possible for a human being to have more than one self or no self at all. The latter possibility also presents a challenge to Taylor's assumption that the notion of the self is an inescapable feature of moral thinking. How can that be so, Yrjönsuuri asks, if there are ethical practices and beliefs that call for a radical transcendence of the self and its needs? In particular Franciscan ethics, Yrjönsuuri argues, strongly resists formulation (or reformulation) in terms of self-fulfillment. It thus seems to escape the Aristotelian framework favored by Taylor. Rather than trying to fit the ethic artificially into Taylor's meta-ethic of self-fulfillment, Yrjönsuuri suggests that we drop that meta-ethic as a universal framework for understanding ethics. In Yrjönsuuri's view, such a move would go some way towards correcting the regrettably ahistorical aspects of Taylor's approach to the self.

Heikki Ikäheimo's paper attempts to bring greater clarity and precision to the philosophical debate about 'recognition' and 'struggles for recognition' that has flourished in recent years – due in no small part to the influence of Taylor's celebrated writings on the subject. Ikäheimo distinguishes three senses of 'recognition' and he analyses Taylor's texts in the light of these. He argues that Taylor's analysis – like those of many other participants in the debate – would benefit from a distinction that can be drawn between three senses of recognition. These are recognition (1) as identification, (2) as acknowledgment, and (3) as relations of recognition or recognitive attitudes like respect, esteem and love. It is the third sense that is crucial for understanding the 'struggles for recognition' thematized in recent philosophical debates. Ikäheimo suggests that while recognitive attitudes are essential for recognition in the latter sense, they are not sufficient for it, since recognition also requires a degree of mutuality. He points out the need to distinguish between recognizee-sensitive, recognizee-centered and recognizee-insensitive conceptions of recognition, and he alerts

us to the need for caution when discussing the issue of the recognition of other 'cultures'.

The chapters by Arto Laitinen, Irma Levomäki and Ruth Abbey discuss the moral, political and social-diagnostic aspects of Taylor's theory. They link Taylor's philosophical anthropology to his culturalist moral theory, his cultural theory of modernity, and his critical appropriation of the liberal tradition respectively.

The chapter by Laitinen challenges the idea that notions like 'constitutive goods' and 'moral sources' are essential to Taylor's moral realism. Laitinen defends a more straightforwardly 'culturalist' moral realism which stresses the relevance of the engaged lifeworldly perspective in our access to values and the role that cultural practices have in the constitution of the values. Taylor's analysis of values, Laitinen shows, is relational in claiming that the objective and subjective poles are both necessary. But this does not make the analysis relativist or merely internalist: the validity of goods in Taylor's account is not limited to any particular cultural context (for example, the cultural or social context in which the goods originated). Taylor's central – and in Laitinen's view correct – point is that while it is true that the evaluative realm is in some sense dependent on historically changing social forms (concepts and practices), the validity of goods is (potentially) universal: goods that are valid in our culture would be valid in other cultures as well and *vice versa*.

Irma Levomäki's paper considers Taylor's contribution to the general debate over modernity. She offers a map of the main themes in this debate and situates Taylor in it accordingly. Levomäki draws attention to the weaknesses Taylor identifies in some popular ways of theorizing modernity, and she reconstructs Taylor's alternative with considerable sympathy. Taylor's contribution is notable for the way it has helped to shape the 'moral turn' in the discourse on modernity, as well the clarity it has brought to conflicts that are really internal to the modern identity. However, Levomäki's admiration for Taylor's project is not unqualified: she argues that Taylor fails to reflect adequately on the relation between the socio-economic and cultural levels of modernity – though Taylor is by no means the only theorist to fall short in this respect. Finally, Levomäki points out that Taylor hasn't paid sufficient attention to some recent social developments, for example the change sometimes designated as 'the triumph of the therapeutic'.

Ruth Abbey's paper argues that a fruitful way of understanding Charles Taylor's political theory is to classify it as 'postliberal'. The appropriateness

of this classification, Abbey argues, arises from the fact that rather than siding with the communitarians as *opposed* to the liberals (or *vice versa*), Taylor achieves a synthesis of certain elements of liberalism and certain elements of communitarianism. Abbey then defines what she terms the 'postliberal debate' as one which considers which aspects of traditional liberalism should be preserved and which ones jettisoned. Abbey suggests that such a conception of postliberalism provides not just a helpful angle on Taylor's work but also a useful way of thinking about the current scene in Anglo-American political theory.

The collection concludes with an interview held with Taylor by Arto Laitinen and Hartmut Rosa. The interview took place in New York less than three months after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Taylor is one of the leading political philosophers and social diagnosticians of our times, and the events in New York provided a natural focus for his reflections. After considering the role of identity and recognition in contemporary political events, the discussion turns to some of the concepts that have been central to Taylor's social criticism, such as equality, alienation, and the 'dialogue society', but which no longer seem to be so prominent. Taylor then reflects on some of the intellectual influences that were formative for his thinking, as well as some other aspects of his biography. The interview also covers a number of themes discussed by other contributors to this volume, such as the nature of transcendental arguments, personhood and moral realism.

Notes

¹ The authors of these papers were able to profit from participation in a colloquium on the work of Charles Taylor organized by the University of Helsinki and University of Jyväskylä in September 2001.

² See Nicholas H. Smith, *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals and Modernity* (Cambridge, Polity, 2002).

Part One

The Practice of Philosophy

SAMI PIHLSTRÖM

1. Linguistic Practices and Transcendental Arguments: Taylor and Wittgenstein

1. Introduction

One of the reasons why Charles Taylor is an interesting figure in the present philosophical situation is, I believe, the fact that he stands at the intersection of several apparently conflicting currents that define the field of philosophical discourse: analytic philosophy vs. Continental philosophy, theoretical philosophy vs. practical philosophy, systematic philosophical problem-solving vs. historical interpretations, naturalism vs. anti-naturalism, pragmatism vs. anti-pragmatism, realism vs. idealism, objectivism vs. relativism, and so forth.¹ In his role as a mediator between these traditional philosophical tensions or oppositions, he resembles other, equally controversial figures like Hilary Putnam, Richard Rorty, Richard Bernstein, Jürgen Habermas, or Joseph Margolis (to name just a few), although of course his views differ significantly from theirs.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate a kind of transcendental argument we may find in Taylor, an argument which closely resembles certain reflections engaged in by the later Wittgenstein and whose historical background can be located in Kant and Herder.² We may, I wish to propose, see something like a “culturalistic” philosophical anthropology as the crucial idea combining the views of thinkers as diverse as Kant, Herder, Wittgenstein, and Taylor (see sections 2 and 3).³ Insofar as human linguistic practices, the ways we habitually use language in accounting for our shared experience of the world surrounding us, are the focus of Taylor’s argument, we may also note a connection with pragmatism. “Im Anfang war die Tat”, as Wittgenstein (1969, § 402) puts it, quoting Goethe’s *Faust*. For Wittgenstein, the pragmatists, and Taylor, it is ultimately our habitual action within our culturally inherited and transformed forms of life that enables us to so much as mean something by the words and symbols we use. My examination of Taylor’s concern with this kind of culturalism and with the criticism

of excessive naturalism, in relation to his emphasis on the practice of language-use and transcendental arguments (as developed in a Wittgensteinian fashion), will, however, finally lead us to a short discussion of what I take to be a threat in virtually all sufficiently culturalistic philosophical anthropologies, the “refactualization” of normativity (see section 4).

As my emphasis on linguistic practices suggests, this investigation is primarily related to the *interpretive* level on which we are “condemned to meaning”, among the several levels of meaning distinguished by Nicholas Smith (see Smith 2002). But the transcendental issues about our being inevitably tied to a shared language in a community of language-users certainly have ethical significance as well. Thus, the kind of transcendental reflection offered below should not simply be classified as an exercise in the philosophy of language and interpretation; it is also, at least implicitly, a metaethical reflection with a kind of moral realism as a result – although this is something that I cannot explicate in the context of the present paper.⁴

2. Taylor’s critique of naturalism

The fact that Taylor engages in transcendental argumentation is relatively undisputed.⁵ As is well known, he argues, in *Sources of the Self* and elsewhere, that there inevitably is, as a context – or as a *transcendental condition* (Taylor 1989, p. 32) – of human life and identity, one or another framework of ethical orientation which presupposes what he calls “strong normative evaluation”. Such a framework is a necessary condition for the possibility of our agency and thus of our self-conception as agents, roughly in the sense in which the forms of intuition (space and time) and the categories of understanding (e.g., causality) are transcendental conditions for the possibility of cognitive experience of objects according to Kant – though in a more relaxed, historicized, socio-culturally contextualized manner. The framework of normative evaluation, moreover, cannot be adequately conceptualized from a purely naturalistic, factual, or scientific perspective. This is one of Taylor’s formulations of his central idea:

[D]oing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us; [...] the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations. Moreover, this is not meant just as a contingently true psychological fact about human beings, which could perhaps turn out one day not to hold for some exceptional individual or new type, some superman of disengaged objectification. Rather the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping

outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood. (*Ibid.*, p. 27.)

Reductive naturalism – the philosophical orthodoxy of our scientific era – is, then, fundamentally misguided in its efforts to reduce human beings to mere quantifiable and objectifiable pieces of matter in motion. As Kant himself also believed, there is something “more” in us as moral, and hence genuinely human, creatures than any purely scientific description of humanity as a part of the empirical world can reveal. This “more” cannot be coherently questioned, as soon as we seriously think about the constitutive conditions of our agency. Taylor is, thus, a severe critic of naturalism. Together with subjectivism and relativism, which also pose a threat to our ethically laden conception of agency, naturalism is, from his viewpoint, one of the most pernicious currents in modern philosophical thought. It seems to me (although Taylor does not discuss this issue in detail) that he would also find the allegedly “non-reductive” variants of naturalism and physicalism busily developed in the fashionable discourse surrounding the notions of supervenience and emergence equally problematic, because these positions share the basically same scientific, materialistic orientation with their more radically reductionist cousins.⁶

Taylor’s argument against naturalism can perhaps be summarized as follows: as humans, we cannot fully reduce (“naturalize”) *ourselves* into mere objects of scientific description and explanation. Even when engaging in scientific investigation, we inevitably need to orientate in the conceptual space of science by employing an irreducibly normative conceptual network, which is needed, e.g., in scientific theory-choice itself. In a quasi-Kantian sense, the possession of a framework of ethical orientation, presupposing strong normative evaluation, is a necessary condition for the possibility of human life, agency and personhood, the life in science included. Even if we could naturalize all *others* into material, scientifically explainable, lawfully behaving objects, we could hardly do this to ourselves as the subjects of such a project of naturalization (and to go on to claim that the resulting naturalized picture is *our* reflected, reasoned, argued, or considered *view, position, or judgment*, let alone a genuine *self-articulation*). No complete conceptual detachment from our prescientific “lifeworld” (to use Edmund Husserl’s famous term), which is also the basis of all scientific inquiry, is possible, according to Taylor. Science is grounded in our human culture, in the expressions of agency, in which normative notions are irreducibly at work. The human world, in brief, is a cultural, normatively structured world.⁷

Thus, Taylorian culturalists may argue that scientific objectification and naturalization – even if they may partly extend to the area of human life – are grounded in normative distinctions that cannot be completely naturalized, or accommodated by the natural-scientific world-view employing causal, physical notions. The normativity inherent in our lives cannot be eliminated by scientific means; on the contrary, science itself presupposes such normativity. Reductive naturalism is, then, incapable of accounting for our normatively oriented subjectivity (both individual and social), which is part and parcel of our (both scientific and non-scientific) understanding of ourselves as agents.

3. Taylor on Wittgenstein

As was remarked above, it is uncontroversial that Taylor employs transcendental arguments in his critique of naturalism. Still, the actual role played by those arguments deserves further discussion. Let us, therefore, take a look at how Taylor finds similar themes in the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein. I shall mostly ignore his Heideggerian influences here, although Heidegger's role in Taylor's culturalism would be at least as central as Wittgenstein's. As Charles Guignon (1990, p. 649) puts it, Taylor sees in Wittgenstein and Heidegger "a new type of inquiry into the conditions for the possibility of intentionality" – indeed, a type of "quasi-transcendental inquiry" (*ibid.*, p. 672).⁸

In any case, Taylor's interpretation of Wittgenstein, with whom he clearly sympathizes, throws some new light on my reading of him (Taylor) as a philosopher engaged in transcendental argumentation. Taylor occasionally refers to Wittgenstein as a support for his culturalist conception of the human normative space as something essentially *shared*: "I can only learn what anger, love, anxiety, the aspiration to wholeness, etc., are through my and others' experience of these being objects for *us*, in some common space. This is the truth behind Wittgenstein's dictum⁹ that agreement in meanings involves agreement in judgements." (Taylor 1989, p. 35.) Confronting or relating our own language to the language of others is, according to Taylor, a "transcendental condition" of our having a grasp on our language – a point quite explicitly made in Wittgenstein's "private language argument" (*ibid.*, p. 38; cf. pp. 132, 491), although, admittedly, the interpretation of Wittgenstein as a transcendental arguer is far from uncontroversial. Taylor offers no detailed reading of Wittgenstein here, but he seems to regard Wittgenstein as an ally in the fight against naturalism, on the

grounds that we have to share a common human system of normative judgments, of strong evaluation, in order to make sense of the language we have to use in any case in structuring the experiences we have and the world we live in.

This position is explored in some more detail, though again with rather broad strokes, in an important paper by Taylor, "Lichtung or Lebensform: Parallels between Heidegger and Wittgenstein" (Taylor 1995, ch. 4).¹⁰ Taylor sees Wittgenstein, like Heidegger, as a philosopher challenging the Enlightenment rationalist picture of human agency and thinking as essentially "disengaged", "atomist-computational", and "monological",¹¹ offering instead a conception of embodied, dialogical, and practice-embedded agency. The culturalistic philosophical anthropology I have attributed to Taylor might easily be defined in his own words, as the Heideggerian-Wittgensteinian recovery of "an understanding of the agent as engaged, as embedded in a culture, a form of life, a 'world' of involvements" (*ibid.*, pp. 61–62). This idea is recovered, as Taylor shows, through an essentially transcendental argument invoking the conditions of intelligibility of our agency, including the agency of the one who believes, in a self-refuting way, in the disengagement picture. The pioneer of such arguments, Taylor reminds us, was Kant, who was able to demonstrate the unintelligibility of the atomistic conception of experience assumed in the classical empiricist tradition (*ibid.*, pp. 71–72). Taylor, correctly in my view, thus joins those who see Wittgenstein (and even Heidegger) through Kantian spectacles.¹² The *Philosophical Investigations*, and even *Sein und Zeit*, provides us with an almost inexhaustible source of transcendental insights into the conditions of intelligibility of human life with language as we know it.

Following Kant's line of argument in a modern context, we may note that the experience of engaged agency can only be made intelligible "by being placed in the context of the kind of agency it is" (*ibid.*, p. 68), by referring to what Taylor calls the "background" that renders our experience, embodied and embedded as it is, intelligible to us. This background is the Wittgensteinian "what we always knew already", something that has always been in front of our eyes so inextricably that we have difficulties in noticing it. It can also be compared to Heidegger's hermeneutical notion of "pre-understanding". Taylor (1990, p. 270) refers to pre-understanding as the framework against which "I frame all my representations" and in virtue of which I know my representations are true or false because of "the way things are". Thus, pre-understanding does not as such represent the way things are in

the world but is a condition for the possibility of representation – analogously, we might speculate, in Heidegger and Wittgenstein.¹³

This basic framework, or background, is thus “the context of intelligibility of experience” for an engaged agent (Taylor 1995, p. 69). It is, in short, the culture or form of life where a meaningful language is already in use and in which the world the agent inhabits is structured in terms of language.¹⁴ Wittgenstein “does for an atomism of meaning what Kant did for an atomism of information input”, attacking the “Augustinian” picture of linguistic disengagement and arguing that, insofar as we *can* engage in meaningful language-use at all (which we *de facto* do), we already have to be able to put the words we use into a context in which they have a meaning (cf. *ibid.*, p. 74). This is the context of our form of life, our engagement in a shared world with other human beings. That context of intelligibility is needed to make knowledge, thought and meaning possible; it is Wittgenstein’s version of the background Taylor regards as essential in transcendental arguments aimed against the illusion of disengagement (cf. *ibid.*, p. 75).¹⁵

Since modern reductionist naturalism is one of the principal forms of the ontology of disengagement in our days, it can easily be seen that Taylor’s above-discussed transcendental argument against such naturalism is vital to his critique of disengagement in general. On both fronts, he follows culturalistic, transcendentially oriented thinkers like Wittgenstein. While I am unable to turn to these issues in any more detail here, let me just note that I believe such thinkers are essentially right. Transcendental arguments of the kind Taylor employs, and sees Wittgenstein as employing, have a legitimate use in philosophy, even in non-reductively naturalistic philosophy such as pragmatism (cf. Pihlström 1998, 2000, 2001), and Taylor’s appeal to the context or background of social practices of language-use, as the condition of intelligibility of experience, touches a most important theme still insufficiently explored in recent philosophy of mind and language, even though the topic of embodiment, for instance, appears to become more and more popular.¹⁶

Even so, Taylor remains entangled with some of the traditional problems of Kantian transcendental philosophy, especially *transcendental idealism*. Taylor (1990) himself sees problems like this as unfortunate products of the “epistemological tradition” emphasizing the representational function of language. Yet, it has been argued that Wittgenstein – as well as, at least potentially, anyone attacking the assumptions of this tradition on a transcendental basis – is committed to a quasi-Kantian idealistic picture according to which our human habits and practices of speaking about the

world in a sense constitute the way(s) the world is. Language-games are transcendental in relation to the reality language is about; the linguistic community engaging in meaningful language-use is analogous to the Kantian transcendental subject constituting the empirical world. One might suggest, similarly, that our being involved in the normative framework of ethical orientation is, in Taylor's theory, constitutive not only of our agency but of the world in which we act as well. There is no ready-made, ontologically independent world out there waiting to be categorized by human languages. Rather, our normatively oriented language-use itself partly determines the structure of the world insofar as it is a world for us, a world which we experience and in which we live and act.

In other words, I am tempted to question Taylor's (1990, 1995) refusal to draw ontological implications from epistemological arguments (see, again, Pihlström 1998, 2000). We cannot just detach ourselves from ontological issues and commitments by saying that we do so or by stating that ontology belongs to the epistemological tradition (or to the project of disengagement) which ought to be given up. In a word, ontology need not be disengaged; the kind of moral ontology Taylor offers is an ontology, too. Transcendental arguments establishing the preconditions of the agency we find actual in our lives do have, *for us*, ontological significance – simply because ontologizing is a human attempt to describe the categorial structure of reality, human reality included.

4. The threat of refactualization

What we have reached, through our Wittgensteinian-Taylorian transcendental argument against excessive naturalization, is a picture of the ineliminable, irreducible normativity belonging to our human forms of life and linguistic practices. Without committing ourselves to such normativity, we cannot make sense of our lives as the kind of agents we consider ourselves to be. But, as unavoidable as this view is for us, a problem still haunts us.¹⁷ The view of linguistic meanings as rooted in the actual practices of language-use tends to lead to *cultural relativism* (or *ethnocentrism*, if you prefer),¹⁸ according to which different practices or forms of life, employing different normative criteria for correct usage (or for the adequacy of factual representations, for moral approval and disapproval, or what not), are incommensurable and perhaps even untranslatable. Cultural relativism, in turn, threatens to *refactualize* the normative order of human life that culturalism transcendently defends (as we saw) against the naturalistic

temptation to factualize our existence into pieces of matter in motion: the normative order within which our actions are experienced as meaningful seems to be reduced to culturally local and factual social structures, to mere facts about how people within particular societies or forms of life actually live and use language. It is a mystery, both in Wittgenstein and in Taylor, how normativity emerges from its factual basis, from our everyday practices of language-use.

This threat of refactualization and the resulting eliminative reduction of normativity do not even specifically depend on a pluralistic interpretation of the Wittgensteinian notion of a form of life. Even if there were one universal form of life to be distinguished from the life-forms of animals (and from those of other non-human creatures, like aliens or intelligent computers),¹⁹ we might still end up with a factualization of the normative distinctions that (if the arguments presented above are correct) render our lives intelligible and meaningful to us. This will happen if we take seriously the idea that our norms are based on, or arise out of, the factualities of our socio-culturally and historically contingent life, especially linguistic practices, whether universal and global or culturally relative and local. The disappearance of normativity may thus be a problem in culturalist philosophical anthropologies quite independently of the issue of relativism, even though that issue certainly highlights the difficulty. Hence, it seems that *no* philosophical-anthropological theory can avoid the problem of explaining how normativity is possible – as soon as we have lost our faith in classical answers postulating a universal normative essence of human beings, such as Platonism or Aristotelianism.

What I am here calling the problem of refactualization is in some ways close to Christine Korsgaard's (1996) "problem of normativity" – a problem that, according to Mark Okrent (1999, especially pp. 63–65), cannot be solved in Korsgaard's Kantian terms emphasizing the reflective nature of human agents, since no appeal to our "nature" can determine what kind of "practical identities" we should adopt. Okrent points out, in his sharp analysis of Korsgaard's recently much-discussed work, that Korsgaard (or, presumably, any Kantian philosopher emphasizing the reflectivity of human beings' practical identities *qua* agents) is led to extreme existentialism, because there are no final reasons for accepting oneself as any particular kind of being (*ibid.*, pp. 64–65). From this threatening existentialism, Okrent argues, only Heidegger can, ironically, save us, showing that "we intend things in a normatively oriented world which depends upon our already having been committed to some practical identity or other" (*ibid.*, p. 71).

There are no reasons for or against any particular practical identity that are not already rooted in some “ultimately unjustifiable practical identity” (*ibid.*, p. 73).

This reflection clearly resembles Taylor’s transcendental argument to the effect that a background of shared normative orientation is always already presupposed in any human activities that are capable of manifesting our self-understanding as agents. But if this “always already”, this background of prior commitment to a normative practical identity is (in Heidegger’s view or in Taylor’s) *just a fact*, we are back with the very same problem of normativity, or the problem of refactualization, that we started from. Somehow, and it seems to be utterly mysterious how, our ability to orientate in a normative space of reasons arises out of the facts of our practical identities, including the facts of our linguistic practices.

Instead of attempting any “solution” to the ineliminable problem of the factual basis of our normative life-structures, I shall conclude simply by stating what to me at least appears as a promising approach. This dialectical situation, in my view, invites some pragmatistic rethinking.²⁰ What we may have to do in order to live with the irremovable difficulty of accounting for the normativity we experience as constraining our lives, especially language-use, is to rethink its status not as opposed to but as a part of nature. This is, to some extent at least, to compromise Taylor’s opposition to naturalism: the transcendental critique of reductive naturalism he provides need not commit us to any similar critique of naturalism *tout court* (cf. Pihlström 2001). The suggestion, then, is to reconceptualize normativity as something that is there right from the beginning, as a part of our natural (form of) life that should not and cannot be called into question in the first place – should never have been. The fact that our life(world) is normatively ordered is a fact of our “nature” as the kind of beings we *are*.²¹ Pragmatism, I have suggested elsewhere (cf. Pihlström 1998, 1999, 2002), may help us in this project of rethinking, partly because it gives up the sharp distinction between facts and values, or factuality and normativity, that the problem of refactualization seems to require. This suggestion presupposes – in an unashamedly circular manner – that we are, as reflective agents, capable of normative evaluation. This is what pragmatists will have to presuppose roughly in the sense in which Kantian transcendental arguers must presuppose the “given” (e.g., cognitive experience or meaningful language) whose necessary conditions of possibility (however contextualized) their arguments set out to establish.

Even if the proposed pragmatist rethinking secures normativity in a quasi-transcendental manner, and thus gives us a good reason for classifying Taylor as a pragmatist (or at least as a figure standing in the margins of the pragmatist tradition), it can hardly remove the disturbing possibility of cultural relativism for good – or, for that matter, the possibility of transcendental idealism (see section 3 above), which is in many ways parallel to cultural relativism.²² Our social practices, whose normativity ought to be seen as entirely natural and unproblematic for us, may manifest and depend on different, conflicting, and perhaps incommensurable normative structures; and even if they don't, we may simply be unable to reach any structured reality (either factually or normatively structured) independently of our normative, evaluative activities. The relativization of transcendental idealism to our contingent "human nature" leaves us with a certain degree of instability. Taylor's realistic assumptions are as problematic and as much in need of clarification as his total, insufficiently argued opposition to all kinds of naturalism.

It should be clear that I do not think that Taylor's (or Wittgenstein's) philosophical anthropology leads us out of these difficulties with the concept of normativity. On the other hand, I cannot see what it would be like to live without such difficulties. Learning to live with them is what pragmatically relevant philosophy, as I see it, is all about. Although I see some hope in the repudiation of the fact/value distinction, having to live with what I have labeled the problem of refactualization may be the price we have to pay for adopting the otherwise highly promising pragmatist picture of human beings as genuinely reflective, normatively oriented agents, as purposive, habitual creatures involved in actually doing various things in the practice-laden and linguistically shaped world they inhabit – a picture endorsed by Taylor and, in their different but interestingly analogous ways, by transcendental (and to some extent idealist) philosophers like Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and (among classical pragmatists) Peirce and Dewey.²³

Notes

¹ Another interesting distinction which Taylor's work can be seen as problematizing is the one between the conceptions of language as a "universal medium" and as a reinterpretable "calculus", recently discussed by Jaakko Hintikka in several publications (cf. Hintikka 1997). I am indebted here to a fine recent master's thesis (in Finnish, unpublished) on Taylor's relation to this distinction, by Tuomas Naakka ("Charles Taylor ja käsitys kielestä universaalina ilmaisumuotona" [Charles Taylor

and the Conception of Language as a Universal Medium], Department of Philosophy, University of Helsinki, 2001).

² For a more general discussion of Taylor's relation to transcendental argumentation, especially in relation to his critique of naturalism, see Pihlström (2001). These issues are typically not much discussed in relation to Taylor's philosophy, e.g., in otherwise highly helpful works like Tully (1994). See, however, Baker (2000). For a critical examination of the need for transcendental arguments and their allegedly indubitable conclusions in Taylor's overall project, see Thomas Wallgren's contribution to this volume.

³ Taylor has, as is well known, been one of the few central contemporary thinkers emphasizing the importance of philosophical anthropology. Cf. Pihlström (1998) and (2003). For his own reasons for appreciating Herder's role in the philosophy of language and philosophical anthropology, see Taylor (1995), ch. 5.

⁴ On Taylorian moral realism, see Arto Laitinen's contribution to this volume. Baker (2000) has recently analyzed Taylor's argumentation (in *Sources of the Self*) as transcendental, purporting to show that the fact that we are subjects presupposes, as its condition of possibility, a morally realistic conception of strong normative evaluation and commitment to what Taylor calls "hypergoods". Baker's wider concern is to show that this general transcendental argument requires a more specific one according to which theism (including a notion of grace) is a presupposition of the kind of moral orientation that Taylor argues to be presuppositionally necessary for our being subjects. Baker sees a problem here, partly because of the circularity of transcendental arguments: in one way or another, these arguments seem to presuppose what they intend to demonstrate. I think such circularity is inevitable in transcendental argumentation, though not necessarily vicious (cf. Pihlström 2001), but I do agree with Baker that God's existence (or moral realism) cannot be "proved" by means of a transcendental argument. Generally I believe that both transcendental arguments and theism play a role in Taylor's philosophy, but here I have to leave undecided what their relation to each other exactly is. On Taylor's relation to religious thought, and on the links between religion and morality, cf. also Morgan (1994), as well as Taylor's (1994) reply to Morgan in Tully (1994); see further Taylor (2002).

⁵ This section is largely based on Pihlström (2001).

⁶ For a critical survey of the on-going emergence debate, see Pihlström (2002). Putnam's (1999) recent criticisms of naturalism, including the notion of supervenience, might also be compared to Taylor's position. I wonder why no such comparisons have usually been made between these two leading critics of naturalism.

⁷ I am, in these formulations, indebted to Heikki Kannisto's arguments (presented in some of his Finnish writings) against naturalism on a culturalist basis (cf. Pihlström 2003). For similar arguments, see, e.g., several essays in Keil & Schnädelbach (2000). Recently, Olafson (2001), drawing on Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology in a manner not very different from Taylor's, has also argued transcendently (though without using this expression) against scientific naturalism. According to Olafson, human beings *have* a world and are *in* the world *with* other entities in a way that cannot be reduced to the causal interactions of physical objects (*ibid.*, p. 23). Thus, "patterns of normativity" do not find a place within "the objectivistic theory of the world that naturalism represents" (*ibid.*, p. 60). For Olafson's explicit statements to the effect that the scientific inquirer cannot natu-

realize her- or himself all the way down into an object of scientific inquiry but must manifest an “unreduced humanity” as a capacity of having a world, see *ibid.*, pp. 50, 72, 81. Olafson’s historical thesis (see *ibid.*, p. 16 and *passim*) that naturalism cannot really succeed in detaching itself from a dualistic world-picture (or from what Taylor would call the ontology of disengagement) is also clearly Taylorian in spirit, although he gives no references to Taylor’s work. In a related manner, Putnam (1999) has attacked what he sees as the Cartesian tendencies of recent physicalistic philosophy of mind and cognitive science; Will (1997, ch. 1) also points out that it makes little difference whether the detached subject allegedly existing (and thinking) independently of worldly objects is a “Cartesian soul” or a “Hobbesian brain”. I would expect Taylor to share these philosophers’ views to some extent, even though important differences will surely remain.

⁸ Guignon’s paper is highly useful as a critical comparison of Taylor’s and Rorty’s manners of employing Wittgenstein’s and Heidegger’s ideas. *Contra* Rorty’s way of seeing Wittgenstein and Heidegger as deconstructing the epistemology-centered philosophical tradition, Taylor sees their “phenomenology of everydayness” as providing us with “an alternative way of understanding who we are”, i.e., “self-interpreting animals” (Guignon 1990, p. 671). Accordingly, Taylor “correctly criticizes Rorty’s view that all language-games are optional and up for grabs”, since our self-descriptions are, though ungrounded and revisable, nevertheless “constitutive of who we are”; there is no vantage point available for Rortyan “global irony”, because “as agents, we are always enmeshed in a concrete cultural context” (*ibid.*). This transcendental argument is a valuable addition to the kind of critique of Rorty’s deconstructive trivializing of the problem of human existence that can be offered from within his own basic philosophical framework, pragmatism (see Pihlström 1998).

⁹ Taylor’s reference is to Wittgenstein (1953), I, § 242.

¹⁰ Other chapters in the same book also touch Wittgensteinian themes, such as the understanding of other cultures and rule-following (see Taylor 1995, especially chs. 8 and 9).

¹¹ Both Cartesian dualism and materialistic, mechanistic monism are ontologies of disengagement in this sense, manifestations of the same tendency to treat human thought and agency atomistically (Taylor 1995, pp. 66–67). For a similar view, cf. also the references to Olafson (2001) and Will (1997) in note 7 above.

¹² On the problem of interpreting Wittgenstein as a Kantian transcendental thinker, see, e.g., the brief discussion in Pihlström (2003) and the references there. On Heidegger’s critique of the transcendental tradition, and on the possibility of interpreting his notion of *Dasein* as a version of the transcendental subject, cf. Carr (1999); see also Pihlström (2000).

¹³ Taylor (1995, pp. 77–78), however, notes a divergence between Heidegger and Wittgenstein in the former’s anti-humanism as opposed to what may be regarded as the latter’s humanism. But both, he says, can be seen as sources for a humanism that would challenge “the hegemony of bureaucratic-technical reason in our lives”, i.e., the hegemony of the disengaged conception of agency and thought (*ibid.*, p. 78).

¹⁴ This position can be seen as a version of what Hintikka (1997) calls the “universal medium” view of language. But as Tuomas Naakka argues in his thesis cited above in note 1, the view is not as hopeless as Hintikka thinks it is. Taylor can be regarded as one of its most important defenders in contemporary philosophy. The basic tran-

scendental idea here is that the descriptive, factual language of science is possible only against the background of our “universal”, expressive, self-articulating, normative language. The latter is, in a Wittgensteinian and Heideggerian sense, “mysterious” to some extent; at least it is not a possible object of scientific theorizing. We might recall that, according to Wittgenstein, the existence of language itself can be seen as a mystery as deep as the existence of the world itself (cf. Wittgenstein 1965). (At this point, it is tempting to ask, however, in which language Taylor himself formulates his conception of the normative, expressive language as the universal presupposition of scientific descriptions – not, I suppose, in this normative language itself? At the moment I can see no clear solution to this self-reflective issue. Furthermore, it must be noted that the notion of expressiveness as it is used here should not be confused with the term “expressivism”, which contemporary meta-ethicists typically use to refer to forms of moral anti-realism, such as emotivism, according to which moral statements do not refer to facts or describe the world but merely express subjective feelings and other attitudes.)

¹⁵ The background metaphor has in fact been relatively popular in recent philosophy. According to Lars Hertzberg, observations of particular instances of language-use can convey the meaning of a given linguistic expression only to those who already share the “background” provided by that language or a similar one. In the absence of a shared language functioning as such a frame of reference, there is no context for attributing any specific meaning to particular linguistic expressions. Thus, in a Wittgensteinian fashion, an essentially private use of language cannot constitute a normative standard for the correctness of language-use, and in the (imagined) situation of privacy there can be no other standard. Accordingly, a private language is impossible in the Wittgensteinian sense. (See Hertzberg 1994, especially pp. 19–20, and Hertzberg 2002.) Analogously, according to Frederick Will, some social practices necessarily have to be already there, engaged in by beings who can count as individuals employing reason. *Contra* both traditional empiricism and rationalism, individual use of reason requires “a background of social practice that extends through time and is accessible to individuals through tradition” (Will 1997, p. 112). Rational activities cannot possibly be engaged in by individuals only employing their innate rational capacities. In spite of several undeniable differences, Taylor might see Wittgensteinian thinkers like Hertzberg and pragmatists like Will as allies in his argument invoking the background against disengaged conceptions of subjectivity.

¹⁶ Cf., e.g., Todes (2001). As in Taylor, one of the historical sources Todes employs is Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body. See also Olafson (2001).

¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the problem taken up in this section, see Pihlström (2003). My discussion is, again, crucially indebted to Heikki Kannisto’s treatment of this issue in some of his Finnish writings.

¹⁸ Rorty famously distinguishes between relativism and ethnocentrism, subscribing only to the latter. This is not the right place to discuss these notions in any detail.

¹⁹ For this discussion, see the essays in Lütterfelds & Roser (1999).

²⁰ My views may not in the end be very far from Okrent’s, given his tendency to interpret Heidegger as a certain kind of pragmatist (cf. Okrent 1988). The notion of “rethinking” is adapted to the present context from McDowell (1996).

²¹ See also McDowell (1996). I deal with analogous problems in relation to McDowell’s notion of “second nature” in Pihlström (1999).

²² In both doctrines, only loosely characterized in this paper, the world is in a way or another (transcendentally) constituted through human thought and/or socio-cultural action. Something like transcendental idealism appears to be reintroduced even into allegedly purely realistic positions such as McDowell's (cf. again Pihlström 1999); more generally, it is unclear whether transcendental arguments can really get going in the absence of a more or less Kantian idealism (see Carr 1999, Pihlström 2000).

²³ I am grateful to all those who commented upon my paper when it was presented in the international colloquium, *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Charles Taylor*, at the University of Helsinki, on September 22, 2001, especially to Heikki Ikäheimo, Arto Laitinen, and Thomas Wallgren. I also thank Irma Levomäki for several useful conversations on Taylor.

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NICHOLAS H. SMITH

2. Overcoming Representationalism

One of the great achievements of recent work in the pragmatist and Idealist traditions has been to lay out in detail the rationale and structure of a thoroughgoing non-representationalist paradigm for philosophy. In brief, the representationalist paradigm the pragmatists and Idealists aim to dismantle takes the representational relation – say between thought and object, word and thing, language and the world – as primitive, so that representations figure as first in the order of explanation of what we are able to think, know, and say. Without doubt, most contemporary philosophers and theorists of ‘the mind’ work within this paradigm, and the sheer ubiquity of it, as Robert Brandom remarks, makes it hard to think of ‘alternatives of similar generality and promise’ (Brandom 2001, p. 7). Brandom notes that alternatives have been suggested, or gestured at, by previous anti-representationalist philosophers such as Dewey, the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, and the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations*. But for Brandom, as for many of the new wave of Idealists, it is only by being integrated into something like Hegel’s inferentialist framework that the insights of these other anti-representationalists can contribute towards the overcoming of the dominant representationalist paradigm. Hegelian inferentialism has a ‘staying power’ – to borrow Habermas’s expression – that other kinds of anti-representationalism cannot match (see Habermas 2000, p. 322).

In a recent essay on Gadamer, Robert Pippin expresses a similar view about philosophical hermeneutics (see Pippin 2002a). There are, as Pippin remarks, ‘strands of deep solidarity’ between Gadamer and Hegel, which are nowhere more evident than in their shared rejection of the representational model of the mind (*ibid.*, p. 218). Just as, for idealism, we are conscious ‘self-consciously’ – and so not just in virtue of some representational machinery – so for Gadamer we exist ‘understandingly’ or interpretively: whatever representational content there may be to experience arises only *through* this reflexive structure of self-consciousness or understanding. But Pippin agrees with Brandom that in the end it is Hegelianism, rather than

Gadamer's Heidegger-inspired hermeneutics, that is really able to deliver on this insight, or deliver it in a manner that can really carry conviction today. Like pragmatism, Hegelian Idealism can do this by construing the distinctiveness of human experience in terms of its 'responsiveness to reasons' or, as Pippin says borrowing another formulation from Sellars, in terms of experience being 'fraught with ought', as normative through and through (*ibid.*, p. 234).

I want to make a small contribution to this emerging debate between philosophical hermeneutics and Idealism by considering it through the lens of Taylor's own version of non-representationalism. Taylor's critique of the representationalist model of 'mindedness' has drawn on many sources over the years, as is evident from his very first published philosophical work on Merleau-Ponty in the late 1950s (see Taylor and Kullman 1958), his work on Hegel in the 1970s (see Taylor 1972, 1975), and his interpretations of Herder, Heidegger and Wittgenstein published in the 1990s (see Taylor 1995). But the alternative conception he endorses owes much more to hermeneutics and existential phenomenology than it does to Hegelian inferentialism or pragmatism. Taylor's work thus provides a useful vantage point from which to reflect critically on the claim implicitly expressed by Brandom and Pippin above: that the Hegelian-pragmatist paradigm of non-representationalism can incorporate *all that is worth preserving* in the hermeneutic-existential challenge to representationalism. Drawing on Taylor's and Gadamer's formulation of this challenge, I shall suggest (though by no means demonstrate) that anti-representationalists can get something from hermeneutics that they may not be able to get – or get as well, or as powerfully – from Idealism or pragmatism.

1. Taylor's anti-representationalism

Let me first briefly rehearse some of the key points of Taylor's anti-representationalism. Its purpose is not so much to present a theory of 'the mind', but to loosen the hold that a 'picture' has on us, one that makes a certain kind of theory seem necessary. According to Taylor, the picture that hermeneutic reflection seeks to release us from manifests itself in theories that take human knowledge and language to be essentially a matter of representation. Release from the imprisoning conception of ourselves involves a kind of purifying reflection on the nature of human knowledge and language, in particular on the origins of our undoubted representational capacities. Such

emancipatory, therapeutic insight is the goal of much of Taylor's work in epistemology and philosophy of language.

I can only hope to trace the outlines of Taylor's reflections here. Regarding knowledge, Taylor retreads paths previously explored by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (and indeed Hegel) to dispose of the classical doctrine that perceptual knowledge has its basis in discrete, self-contained mental items or representations. Such representations are self-contained in the sense that they are only contingently related to the world. As is now widely acknowledged, this account is quite unsatisfactory as a phenomenology of mind: the units of awareness posited by the classical Cartesian and empiricist theories are static, reified entities that bear little resemblance to lived experience. By reminding us of the complexity and richness of the perceptual field, hermeneutic reflection can correct the phenomenological crudity of traditional representationalism.¹ But the therapy also requires an account of why we are tempted by the representationalist phenomenology in the first place. Why do we *still* need to be reminded of its manifest shortcomings? The answer favoured by hermeneutic philosophers is that under pressure to think objectively *about* experience, we unwittingly introduce elements of objectification *into* experience. As Taylor puts it, the distortion arises from the 'ontologisation of rational procedure' (Taylor 1995, p. 61): the method of analysing a complex phenomenon into simple components, treating them as neutral bits of information, and rationally re-ordering them, is projected onto the very being of the knowing subject, which then appears as if it were constituted by this procedure of objective or rational representation.²

At this point it could be objected that the classical Cartesian and empiricist phenomenology is an adventitious addition to representationalism, since the latter can take on board a more nuanced description of experience while still insisting that representations are first in the order of explanation of what we know. Taylor's response to this move is to question the idea that representation is ever sufficient for knowledge, which presumably it must be if it is really to be first in the order of explanation (and so not dependent on anything else). If the claim that representations are first in the order of explanation for knowledge amounts to the claim that human knowledge can in principle be built up from such representations, it seems to exclude something that is required to make objective, representational knowledge intelligible at all. This is the relation of dependence that holds between representation *of* the world and a 'background' involvement *with* the world. Without going into the details of Taylor's Heidegger- and Merleau-Ponty-inspired argument, this 'background' of engagement provides the ultimate,

non-transcendable and *non-representable* context for even the most abstract, objective, and unambiguously representational knowledge claims. It provides a condition of their intelligibility *as* knowledge claims. As such, the background eludes empirical representation, yet without it empirical representations would be impossible. Invoked at this 'transcendental' level of reflection, the background serves as a reminder of the non-self-sufficiency of objective representational cognition, and more generally, of the inescapable finitude of human knowledge. This insight suggests that there is something philosophically incoherent, as well as phenomenologically implausible, about the idea of a totally objectified world.

Taylor is of course just as anti-representationalist about language as he is about perception, as one can tell from the contrast he draws between his own 'expressivist' approach to language and orthodox 'designative' theories of meaning (see Taylor 1985, pp. 215–292, 1995, pp. 61–126). Designative theories resemble expressivist ones to the extent that both maintain that language is normative: for both theories, there is a qualitative difference between getting something right in language and participating in some causal chain. But the normativity recognised in designative theories has just one source: truth as the correspondence between a representation or literal description and its object. It is the norm of designation, the ability of a word or sentence to designate or represent an object or state of affairs, that enables words or sentences *to mean* something. Designation or representation is thus first in the order of explanation for meaning according to such theories, and 'getting things right' in language is essentially a matter of having the designative or representational linguistic function in order.

Taylor is convinced that this is a much too narrow conception of the normativity of language. We are able to 'get things right' in language in a host of ways – for instance by articulating a feeling properly, by evoking the right mood, or by establishing an appropriate inter-personal relation – many of which are not at all a matter of designating or representing things. Furthermore, unlike the designative use of language, these forms of language use are not 'about' something that stands independently of the articulation itself. Taylor is impressed by the fact that an articulation can help *constitute* the emotion, mood, or social relation it expresses. Consequently, *new* kinds of feeling and sociality can be brought into being through language. But this does not prevent such modes of articulation from being right (when they are right). In other words, there are forms of language use that are constitutive and productive of their objects, and productive in a way that is 'true to' or 'right' for them. Inevitably, Taylor points out, such forms

of articulation get screened off within the designative, representational paradigm. This paradigm thus screens off a crucial dimension of distinctively human experience.

Creatures whose feelings, actions, and social relations are constituted by the ways they are articulated in language are in a clear sense 'self-interpreting animals': what they are as animals – the quality of their experience, the ways they act, and how they behave together – is inseparable from how they interpret themselves. For Taylor, this is the core truth of philosophical hermeneutics. In order to be able to articulate this truth, hermeneutics must obviously have access to a more expansive theory of meaning than the designative one. But Taylor, in line with other hermeneutic theorists, does not simply claim that the expressive/constitutive capacity of language sits alongside the designative capacity. The claim is that the power of expression – the power of disclosing and constituting a human 'world' – is fundamental and originary. The capacity of language to designate things is one amongst a series of possibilities immanent to the power of expression itself. Theories that put designation first in the order of explanation, in Taylor's view, suffer from a parallel flaw to the representationalist epistemology we considered a bit earlier. For just as the rational, objective processing of neutral informational input at the level of perception has its genesis and intelligibility-condition in agent-knowledge, so neutral talk about objects, or true descriptions of objective states of affairs, draws on a prior, more fundamental capacity for expression, which is 'always already' in place whenever we describe literally, neutrally and accurately. According to Taylor's hermeneutic theory of meaning, representational language domesticates, without ever eliminating, primordial expressive powers. Representation is but one of the many potentialities of expression.

2. Taylor and Gadamer

While Taylor is persuaded by the merits of anti-representationalism in the philosophy of language, he does not situate himself in the pragmatist tradition of anti-representationalism. Contemporary pragmatists such as Brandom and Habermas seek to steer a way out of the representationalist paradigm by developing a systematic theory of the formal pragmatics of speech. Taylor's anti-representationalism, by contrast, is motivated more by the kind of considerations that drove the later Heidegger and Gadamer in their reflections on language. Like Gadamer, Taylor is impressed above all by the power of language *to connect*: to connect us to the past, to other

speakers, and to hitherto unknown dimensions of our inner selves. Also like Gadamer, Taylor is alert to the ways in which our thinking *about* language can strengthen or weaken these linguistically constituted connections. In a context where those connections are imperilled, or in danger of being forgotten, it matters that philosophical reflection remind us of them. Such reminding or 'recovery' is in an important sense a *re-awakening* of our connectedness as language beings, and this essentially *practical* aim gives the anti-representationalism shared by Gadamer and Taylor a different shape to that of pragmatism and contemporary Absolute Idealism.

While both Gadamer and Taylor seek to recover a proper sense of the historicity (connectedness to the past), dialogicality (connectedness with other speakers), and finitude of human existence in their reflections on language, Taylor is more explicit than Gadamer about the anthropological provenance of this task. That is to say, for Taylor representationalist theories of meaning typically presuppose and reinforce a certain philosophical anthropology, or conception of human nature, which the hermeneutic philosophy of language is 'strategic' in correcting (Taylor 1985, p. 216). Taylor admits that such theories often have the surface appearance of neutrality on the topic of human nature. The hermeneutical task, according to Taylor, is therefore first to reveal the anthropology or 'ontology of the human' hiding beneath the surface of such theories, and then in a second move to expose the shortcomings of that anthropology (see Taylor 1985, pp. 1–12).

Taylor argues that, at least in the case of the classical Cartesian, Hobbesian, and empiricist designative theories, a powerful ideal of self-transparency and instrumental freedom is in play. That is to say, such theories present language as a tool or resource which human beings potentially have the freedom to do with as they will. On this account, humans are not only capable of manipulating and reshaping language according to their own designs and purposes; they have a responsibility to achieve such mastery and control, for otherwise they are led into error and illusion about the world and themselves. The classical designative theories depict non-designative elements as sources of such error and bewitchment, and thus as hindrances to the subject's self-defining instrumental freedom. An ideal of disengaged freedom – or as Taylor puts it an 'anthropology of disengagement' – thus lies behind the classical designative theories of meaning, and although Taylor does not consider contemporary representationalism in the same detail, the hypothesis is that a similar anthropology is at work in them too.

Taylor then contrasts this view with expressivist theories of meaning. According to these theories, the fact that human beings are language animals means that they can never achieve full self-possession. The thinking and acting subject is always already situated in what Taylor calls the 'linguistic dimension' – in which the 'rightness' of articulations is an issue – and so is subject to norms that are in some sense 'given'. The linguistic dimension is, in principle, independent of the will and must escape objectification by the will. This also militates against the ideal of absolute cognitive self-possession. For if there are experiences, feelings and social relations that are constituted by the way we express or interpret them, and these things help define who we are, our self-understanding can never be complete. These features of human existence are not objects waiting to be represented by the right kind of designative language. There is no final, 'self-authenticating' vocabulary for them. In addition, the language of self-interpretation is beyond the individual's control because language has an inherently intersubjective character. The language 'I' speak, if it is to say anything, is always the language of a 'we'. Behind the expressivist theory, then, lies a non-voluntarist ontology of human finitude that reawakens us to our connectedness with history, others, and potentialities for experience by way of contrast with the anthropology of disengagement.

Turning now to Gadamer's hermeneutics, we still find a critique of representationalism prosecuted by way of ontological self-clarification. But in Gadamer's case, the focus is on the experience of 'understanding' – or understanding as constitutive of our being in the world – and the ways in which this experience is foreshortened, distorted and truncated in representationalist models of the human sciences. To the extent to which these models hold sway, Gadamer argues, we need to recover the *experience* (in the proper sense) of understanding through philosophical re-articulation. In *Truth and Method*, of course, Gadamer identifies two cases where the need for such retrieval is most palpable: the encounter with art and the encounter with history. Let me very briefly consider each in turn.

In the case of art, Gadamer is concerned by the way in which representationalist assumptions can blind us to the world-disclosive capacities of an artwork. Such assumptions, Gadamer believes, inform the 'aesthetic' approach to art, that is, the way of encountering and conceptualizing artworks as loci of pure 'aesthetic value'. To encounter or conceptualize an artwork as a possible site of pure aesthetic merit, Gadamer argues, is to be alienated from the specific truth-claim of the work. Rather than the claim presenting itself to an 'aesthetic consciousness', it becomes manifest through

a kind of self-transformative experience with an 'other' – an '*Erfahrung*' rather than '*Erlebnis*' experience – which is at once a form of understanding (see Gadamer 1993, p. 100). So long as we think of an artwork as an object eliciting a representation in the mind of a subject, the very possibility of such a cognitively and affectively significant encounter will elude us. Gadamer reminds us that experiencing a work of art is not a matter of possessing certain mental representations: at its best it involves *understanding* that arises from a mutually transformative fusing of the horizons of subject and work. A singular event takes place that exceeds the contents of any particular consciousness, but which by no means exhausts the meaning of the work. The importance of Gadamer's reminder lies not just in correcting what he takes to be a subjectivistically foreshortened phenomenology of art, but also in pointing to a phenomenologically enriched account of what it is to *understand*.

In Gadamer's view, the predicament of the historian also points to the need for a more expansive, non-representationalist notion of human understanding. Gadamer distinguishes two ways in which the historian can orient herself in relation to her subject matter. On the one hand, she can regard it as containing a meaning that is already there in its fullness. She can then gear her interpretive activity towards the reconstruction of the antecedently given meaning. Gadamer rehearses many of the problems that beset this approach, but his main point is that it confounds a fundamental structure of human understanding: its finitude. For Gadamer, the finitude of human understanding, and the non-recuperability of temporal distance, can be acknowledged if we can think of the historian's task not as the reconstruction of self-contained totalities of past meaning but as a kind of integration of the past and present. To think of the historian's relation to her subject matter in this way – to think of it, as Gadamer writes, as 'thoughtful mediation with contemporary life' (Gadamer 1993, p. 169) – is to transform a merely external relation to the past into an internal relation of involvement and participation: we move from mere *consciousness* or *representation* of something from the past to an historical *experience* (*Erfahrung*) of our emplacement in *tradition*. This is the crux of Gadamer's key notion of 'historically effected consciousness'. Historically effected consciousness overcomes the alienation or abstraction, in Gadamer's words, 'between history and the knowledge of it' (*ibid.*, p. 282); or as we might say, between the representer and the represented. In drawing attention to this point, philosophical hermeneutics is not so much prescribing a particular method for discovering truths

about history as attempting to reclaim or retrieve the *historicity* of historical truth itself.

Gadamer's reflections on aesthetic consciousness and historicism, which make up the bulk of parts one and two of *Truth and Method*, are, according to the interpretation I've just sketched, motivated by the need to overcome forms of alienation generated by representationalist construals of experience. In response to the distortion and truncation of experience generated by the representationalist paradigm, hermeneutic reflection undertakes a kind of philosophical retrieval or recovery. In the third part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer turns to the linguisticity of understanding, and the sense in which language constitutes humans as the distinctive kind of being they are. Here Gadamer draws attention to many of the features of language discussed by Taylor: the origins of language in expression, the role language plays in articulating distinctively human modes of experience, in opening up a shared world, and in establishing properly social relations. Far from being accidental, derivative, or secondary features of language – as representationalism has it – and so features that can in principle be absent from language, for Gadamer they capture the essence of language; to absent them is to plunge ourselves into a kind of philosophical self-oblivion. Here again, hermeneutic reflection aims at something like retrieval or self-recovery.

3. Hermeneutics vs Idealism?

It is clear that Taylor and Gadamer reject the central thesis of representationalism, namely that representations come first in the order of explanation of human thought, knowledge and language. I noted at the beginning that this minimal anti-representationalist position is common to philosophical hermeneutics, pragmatism and Absolute Idealism. However, pragmatists and Idealists doubt that hermeneutics has the requisite staying power to usher in a paradigm shift away from representationalism, and they distance themselves from key aspects of the hermeneutic anti-representationalist agenda. Robert Pippin, one of the leading exponents of Idealist/pragmatist anti-representationalism, has recently expressed such reservations about Gadamer's hermeneutics.³ While Pippin finds much that is congenial in Gadamer's thought, it is his critique of Gadamer, and the reasons he gives for favouring an Idealist/pragmatic over a hermeneutic conception of the tasks of an anti-representationalist philosophy, that I now want briefly to examine.

Pippin begins by expressing his sense of the obsolescence of the hermeneutic paradigm. He writes: ‘we stand now in some sense on the other side of the early debates with relativists and positivists and neo-Kantian, “scientistic” naturalists about the very legitimacy of the category of meaning and the relation between understanding (*Verstehen*) and explanation (*Erklären*)’ (Pippin 2002a, p. 230). If this is supposed to mean that the legitimacy of the category of meaning has now been secured, so that philosophical argument is no longer necessary to redeem the category, the view looks curiously complacent: after all, orthodox representationalism is still geared towards either the complete elimination of meaning or its reduction to non-meaning. Pippin’s main point, though (if I’ve understood it correctly), is that the category of meaning does not need to be secured for the *reasons* Heidegger and Gadamer thought it did. Ontological hermeneutics, according to Pippin’s reading, offered a way out of an impasse generated by psychologistic naturalism on the one hand and Husserlian meaning-Platonism on the other. But now that we are no longer *asking* ourselves how to *avoid* these options – because we are no longer even drawn towards them, and because more plausible theories have taken their place – philosophical hermeneutics has also lost its point. Since the debate that provided the initial impetus for Gadamer’s hermeneutics has played itself out, hermeneutics is something we no longer need.

Of course, it is wholly within the spirit of hermeneutics to read a text as if it were in dialogue with the present, and if, despite our best efforts, *Truth and Method* sounds irremediably wooden, better to leave it behind. But if, as I have suggested, we read Gadamer through the lens of Taylor’s hermeneutics, and if we take Gadamer to be doing the kind of thing Taylor does when trying to overcome representationalism, his hermeneutics starts to look more promising. According to the reconstruction just sketched, the primary issue on which philosophical hermeneutics takes its stance is not the relation between understanding and explanation, or the question of method in the human sciences, or how to steer a path between the Scylla of psychologism and the Charybdis of Platonism.⁴ The crucial issue for hermeneutics is rather *phenomenological* and *ontological* rather than epistemological. That is to say, it is the representationalist foreshortening and distortion of *experience*, and so of what it is like *to be* human, rather than the merits of knowledge claims *about* the human, that prompts the anti-representationalist agenda and indeed practice of hermeneutic reflection. By issuing reminders of how representationalist models of mind can render unintelligible, and blind us to, experienced connectedness – to the past,

others and our inner selves – hermeneutics performs a crucial therapeutic function. The need for such therapy is unlikely to diminish so long as representationalism, and its attendant atomist ontology of the human, continues to hold sway.

Pippin gives insufficient weight to the therapeutic or practical function of hermeneutic reflection. But his argument with hermeneutics is not just that it is an answer to a question no one now asks. He also claims that on the issues that *do* matter – the questions that philosophers have been asking themselves over the past twenty-five years or so – Hegelianism rather than philosophical hermeneutics has taken the lead. Pippin mentions two such issues (or sets of issues). First, there is normativity: what is it in virtue of which thought and action is subject to standards of correctness? Second, there is a set of social and political issues that Hegelianism rather than hermeneutics has helped to define.

Pippin suggests that Gadamer's hermeneutics suffers from a fundamental obscurity, or lack of articulacy, on the issue of normativity. This is allegedly evident in Gadamer's reliance upon various metaphors – such as 'fusion of horizons' and 'transmission-event' – to convey the unformalizability of human linguistic practices, and the impossibility of recuperating such practices rationally at the level of reflection. Now, however satisfactory one finds Gadamer's metaphors, his mere recourse to them is surely not *itself* tantamount to a failure to make normativity intelligible. At best, that objection would *presuppose* the truth of Hegelian rationalism read a certain way, namely the doctrine that metaphors give impure, but purifiable, expression to strict conceptual content. We need a further argument to show that hermeneutics must leave normativity shrouded in mystery, especially when one considers that, beyond the metaphors, Gadamer explicitly invokes tradition as a source of the standards of correctness to which human thought and action is subject.

At this point Pippin concedes to Gadamer that traditions have a rational, self-correcting character. Even so, tradition cannot account for normativity, Pippin argues, since 'without Hegel's argument for the relevance of criteria of genuine success' – without, that is, the 'Absolute viewpoint' – we have only *matter of fact* corrections, successes, agreements, and so forth (Pippin 2002a, p. 232). We need the idea of the Absolute viewpoint, in other words, to keep us from floundering in a sea of contingent 'happenings' and 'events'. Only in this way can we do something more than report narratively on the norms and standards that have come to prevail in our or any other form of life. Pippin cannot imagine anything by way of *philosophical* insight issuing

from such descriptions. Bereft of the 'normative animus' the Absolute standpoint makes possible, philosophical hermeneutics becomes mere (armchair) 'historical anthropology' (*ibid.*).

But do we really need the Absolute standpoint to make sense of the idea of criteria of genuine success in the evolution or self-correction of a tradition? Gadamer has at least got more to offer on this issue, as have, in more or less related ways, MacIntyre and Taylor himself.⁵ It is also unclear why narratives need the backing of an Absolute standpoint to retain a normative animus. The suggestion that they do seems to re-introduce a distinction that is notoriously difficult to sustain between philosophical knowledge and historical understanding, as if only the former were robust enough to provide a framework for critical reflection, and as if the latter marked some kind of *retreat* from normativity. Not only is this strategy in danger of placing the bar for philosophical discourse too high, it also endangers the specific dignity of the human sciences. The irony here is that by attributing to philosophical hermeneutics an irresistible tendency to degenerate into mere descriptive 'historical anthropology', we end up resurrecting the hoary issue of a norm-free social science – just the kind of 'hermeneutical' theme that we supposedly have no more interest in discussing.⁶

Admittedly, we should not let ourselves be thrown off course by the expression 'Absolute standpoint', which works, to be sure, at the epistemic rather than metaphysical level. But the very fact that it does operate epistemically rather than metaphysically or ontologically raises another danger, one that threatens to re-instate elements of the representationalist paradigm. Pippin's fundamental claim is that 'the source of the deepest disagreement between the Idealist and the Heidegger-influenced hermeneutical project' is 'the idea of meaning or intelligibility in general as a result of normatively constrained or bound human practices' (Pippin 2002a, p. 233). For Idealism – *contra* hermeneutics – 'tradition', or 'the way we go on', or for that matter 'the world' or 'nature', cannot ultimately count as sources of normativity, that is, as the source of reasons we are responsive to in our practices.⁷ This of course is a huge issue but two quick points are worth making. First, it is surely open to Gadamer and other Heidegger-influenced hermeneuticists to reply that reason-giving and participating in tradition, or being answerable to other subjects and being answerable to the world, are not from the hermeneutic point of view rival conceptions, alternatives we have to choose between.⁸ And second, the idea that we can stipulate *a priori*, on epistemological grounds alone, what the ultimate source of normativity is; the notion that we can say without recourse to the

possibilities of lived experience what the measure of that experience must be; looks suspiciously like a restoration of the 'subjectivistic' truncation of experience that – according to the reconstruction above – enduringly motivates the post-Heideggerian hermeneutic project.

As I mentioned, Pippin cites normativity as one key issue on which Hegelian Idealism, rather than post-Heideggerian hermeneutics, has proved an enduring source of insight. The second area in which Idealism seems to have left hermeneutics in its wake is social and political philosophy. Insofar as social and political philosophy attempts a diagnosis of the times, Hegelianism rather than hermeneutics has helped to provide its bearings. Pippin writes: 'If the language of identity and alienation is as indispensable as the language of rights or the language of finitude in understanding the modern social and political world, then the Hegelian language of subjectivity, reflection and Geist's "reconciliation with *itself*" will also be ultimately indispensable' (Pippin 2002a, p. 231). This is surely right. But does it follow that the post-Heideggerian hermeneutic language of anti-subjectivism, world-disclosure and responsibility to something other than 'Geist' has no role to play in understanding the modern age? It is interesting here that Pippin notes the publication of Taylor's book *Hegel* (1975) as an important stage in the development of a self-confident, increasingly influential Hegelian framework for social philosophy. For without wanting to question the continuing relevance of that framework, the conclusion of Taylor's 1975 study was precisely that the hermeneutic expressivism explored by the likes of Herder, Hölderlin, and later Heidegger contrasts favourably with Hegelianism as a way of articulating the pervasive modern aspiration to connect with a larger order of meaning. If we think of the rise of ecological consciousness over the past twenty five years or so as an expression of this aspiration, it is not hard to understand why there has been a revival of interest in post-Heideggerian hermeneutics amongst social and political theorists alongside the Hegel renaissance.⁹

4. Conclusion

There is of course a complex, fascinating debate between Hegelians, hermeneuticists and others about how best to understand the 'spiritual' situation of the age. Taylor is one of the key contributors to this debate, and the issue goes to the heart of his own philosophical project. Indeed, for Taylor the question of overcoming representationalism, and of delineating the tasks of a non-representationalist philosophy, is just one part – albeit a

crucial one – of this larger diagnostic project. As I have tried to bring out in this chapter, Taylor’s critique of representationalism is primarily directed at an ontology of the human that severs the connections between self, world, and others. As these connections are in part constituted by the way we think about them, we can lose the potential for connectedness – and indeed for experience (*Erfahrung*) – by the way we interpret ourselves. But of course the way we think about ourselves is only partly a matter of philosophical preference. It is much more powerfully shaped by prevailing social practices. And so long as those practices continue to make representationalism seem obvious and natural, we will need something like Taylor’s and Gadamer’s version of anti-representationalism to help put us right.

Notes

¹ I take hermeneutic reflection to be continuous with phenomenological description, just as I take philosophical hermeneutics and existential phenomenology to be engaged in the same fundamental enterprise. For a now classical account of the common orientation of phenomenology and hermeneutics, see Paul Ricoeur (1991).

² This is in fact a reworking of Merleau-Ponty’s diagnosis of the problem (see Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1963).

³ See Pippin (2002a). See also the related defence of Hegel’s version of anti-representationalism – or ‘anti-Cartesianism’ – vis à vis Heidegger’s in Pippin (1997).

⁴ This is not to dismiss the significance of such issues, but to signal their subordination to other matters.

⁵ For an attempt to marry MacIntyre, Taylor and Gadamer on this issue, see Smith (1997).

⁶ I suspect Pippin has Habermas’s distinction between the natural sciences, the interpretive sciences, and critical theory in the background here. If I had the space, I would argue that this distinction is too heavily invested in the contrast between the transcendental and the empirical to be able to deliver an adequate conception of the possibilities for well-grounded or rational self-critique.

⁷ In “Leaving Nature Behind: Or Two Cheers for ‘Subjectivism’” (Pippin 2002b), Pippin uses the same strategy to show what he thinks is wrong with McDowell’s (overly Gadamerian, in Pippin’s view) work.

⁸ For an argument like this, see McDowell (2002).

⁹ For further consideration of Taylor’s reading of Hegel and his reasons for ultimately favouring a non-Hegelian expressivism, see Smith (2002, chapter 3). I have drawn on Taylor’s reading of Heidegger to show the relevance of hermeneutics for ecological politics in Smith (1997, chapter 7).

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THOMAS WALLGREN

3. Weak Philosophy, Great Hope: Charles Taylor's inconclusive journey to 'post-epistemology'

1. A key topic, some would say *the* key topic, in the philosophical discourse of modernity is the dialectics of enlightenment. Applied to philosophy itself the dialectical problem can be formulated as follows: If the realisation of reason is constitutive of modernity, if it is also responsible for many of the deepest problems in modernity, and if the development of philosophy is itself an important aspect of the realisation of reason, is it justifiable to believe that a philosophical study of modernity has a positive value or must we accept that it can only worsen the problems due to the dialectics of the realisation of reason? We can call this the question of the dialectics of philosophical enlightenment.

I shall discuss how Charles Taylor deals with it. My main contention is that an unresolved tension between doubt about and trust in the power of argument lies at the heart of Taylor's contribution to the philosophy of modernity. Identifying precisely the nature of Taylor's dilemma helps bring to the foreground self-reflective problems about enlightenment optimism, which, in one form or other, are inherent in all philosophy.

In my view that task is pressing. Only twenty years ago fundamental philosophical issues concerning the dialectics of enlightenment stood at the centre of the debate between 'modernists and postmodernists'. Now they have faded. This is, I believe, due to fatigue and resignation rather than to the achievement of any lasting results. If we wish to understand this disappointing development, we need to understand its philosophical sources. Taylor's work is of great interest in this regard. First, in how he arrives at the problem of the dialectics of philosophical enlightenment. (Sections 2 and 3.) Second, in how he tries to come to terms with it. (Section 4.) Third, in how he abandons it. (Sections 5 and 6.) An investigation of these topics helps identify some of the deepest philosophical issues that haunt Taylor's thought, and perhaps most philosophy since Kant. I shall conclude with

some suggestions concerning how we might be able to deal constructively with these issues. (Section 7.)

2. Charles Taylor understands his entire *oeuvre*, and especially his main work so far, *Sources of the Self* (SS), as a contribution to the philosophical discourse of modernity.¹ A clarification of what this means will set the stage for my further explorations.

An important aspect of SS is the 'picture' (p. ix) of our times that Taylor presents early in the book. In this picture the following claims are prominent. (1) In the modern age we live under moral conditions which are in some important respects peculiar to it and which philosophers need to understand if they wish to contribute to the moral self-understanding of the times. (SS, pp. ix and 11.) (2) Modernity should neither be described as an age of great accomplishment nor as one of decline, but as a unique combination of success and loss, 'greatness and danger, *grandeur et misère*. (SS, p. 4.) (3) Indifference, meaninglessness or a crisis or loss of meaning 'perhaps defines our age' and the pathologies unique to it. (SS, pp. 7–19.) (4) Autonomy, the avoidance of suffering and the affirmation of 'ordinary life' (defined as 'the life of production and the family', SS, p. 13) are among 'the most powerful ideas in modern civilization' (SS, p. 14). (5) 'Inwardness', 'an affirmation of ordinary life' and 'the expressivist notion of nature as an inner moral source' are major facets of the modern moral identity. (SS, p. x.) (6) Our unique moral conditions are pathological, or at least conducive to the formation of pathological identities endemic to our times. (SS, esp. pp. 8 and 19.) (7) There are internal connections between certain philosophical tendencies of the modern age and its moral ideals as well as its pathologies. Among these 'naturalism' (SS, p. 5), 'representational epistemology' (SS, p. ix), certain views about 'practical reasoning' (SS, p. 4) and about what is central to moral philosophy (SS, p. 3) as well as certain views in the philosophy of language (SS, p. x, PA, p. xii) are prominent.²

(1) is a necessary presupposition for Taylor's subsequent claims. It explains why the dialectics of enlightenment is a philosophical issue for Taylor and involves two assumptions about the responsibility of philosophy towards its times. One is the rather uncontroversial Socratic notion that philosophy is a moral endeavour in the sense of being a reflection on who we are.³ The other is the controversial supposition that this reflection cannot, at least not exclusively, take the form of a deliberation on eternal and immutable matters, but rather, necessitates consideration of changes that characterize the times in which the philosopher lives. (2) defines Taylor's

intimate and yet critical relation to two main currents in the philosophical discourse of modernity: the apologetic and the hostile. (3) explains the main motive to Taylor's work: meaninglessness, this phantom peculiar to modernity, threatens to ruin our lives. The sense of danger and existential vulnerability that comes together with the threat of loss of meaning is the driving force behind all of Taylor's philosophy.

All further claims have more specific functions. They outline the exact agenda of Taylor's work and explain *how* Taylor hopes to get at what motivates him. One of their functions is to define the standard towards which a philosophy of modernity is *descriptively* accountable. If a philosophy of modernity does not articulate and shed light on *these* features of modernity (as well as on the indifference-thesis), it misses the target; it is not a discourse of what is important in modernity and it may not be a discourse of modernity at all. Taylor's picture of our times is also a picture of risks, dangers and even 'pathologies'. These are normative notions that imply that Taylor's description of the times serves a diagnostic purpose. They give rise to questions about the sources of the disease and how can it be cured. Given (7) we need, in particular, to pose self-critical questions about what role philosophy can play in this work of diagnosis and therapy. These are the questions that I shall focus on, looking first at the matter of diagnosis.

3. Taylor gives prominence to a rather pessimistic view of the role played by much, or most, of contemporary philosophy in relation to the emergence of the pathologies of our times. Look at the confidence of the following assertions:

modern identity ... is much richer in moral sources than its condemners allow, but this richness is rendered invisible by the impoverished philosophical language of its most zealous defenders. (SS, p. x f.)

Much contemporary moral philosophy ... has tended to focus on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be ... This philosophy has accredited a cramped and truncated view of morality ... and this not only among professional philosophers, but with a wider public. (SS, p. 3.)

Some basic themes ... have been bothering me for decades ... The oldest theme in this sense is the one I deal with head on in the very first essay, "Overcoming Epistemology". I say 'head on' because I attempt a direct attack on the Hydra whose serpentine heads wreak havoc throughout the intellectual culture of modernity - in science, in criticism, in ethics, in political thinking, almost anywhere you look. (PA, p. vii, cf. SS, p. 78.)

My exploration runs against the grain of much modern thought and culture, in particular of scientific culture and its associated epistemology. This in turn has moulded our contemporary sense of self. (PA, p. 168.)

These statements express three intertwined convictions. First, philosophical theories can have an important and negative impact on central features of moral life, including our sense of self and our political thinking. Second, much of contemporary moral philosophy has had a narrow, false or irrelevant focus or has had a poor grip on its subject matters. Third, these and other shortcomings in philosophy contribute to the moral pathologies of our times. The badness of philosophy is, then, not only the badness of bad argument, but above all, the badness of bad effects. This conviction gives Taylor his philosophical mission and explain the sense of urgency characteristic of his work.⁴

Taylor writes that 'modernity urgently needs to be saved' (SS, p. xi). But given his overall pessimism concerning philosophy in our times the issue how a philosophy might be constructed that would be part of the cure rather than the malady seems acute. To understand how Taylor deals with it we need to investigate two issues. First is the question of *how* to build a benign philosophy that can help save us from the pathologies due to objectionable philosophy? What philosophical means can we trust in our search for ways out of the negative dialectics of much modern philosophy? These questions centre on the theoretical powers of philosophy. The second issue is what we can say about the legitimacy, hopes, risks and limits of the redeeming philosophy we seek? This discussion centres on the practical powers of philosophy.

On my view the first kind of concern plays an organizing role in Taylor's philosophical work and explains crucial facets of the development of his philosophical self-understanding. His struggle with it involves what I propose to call a theoretical anxiety, which at different junctures he has responded to in very different ways without so far managing to resolve it. The latter issue very rarely becomes the focus of attention for Taylor. But I shall argue that, once it arises, the context is dramatic and comes together with what I shall call a practical anxiety with a conceptual structure similar to that of the theoretical anxiety.

4. The task of Taylor's programmatic article from the late 1970s, "Transcendental Arguments", is to define the theoretical powers of philosophy at its strongest. Taylor places himself squarely within the Kantian tradition according to which 'regressive' arguments concerning the conditions which

must be fulfilled in order for 'some feature of our experience', which we cannot doubt to be possible, provide a unique degree of certainty concerning the conclusions. (TA, pp. 20 and 25.) Taylor defends the strong position that the conclusions of transcendental arguments are 'apodictic' (TA, p. 32) and 'indubitable' (TA, p. 33). By pursuing such arguments we can satisfy the most rigorous standards of justification to which philosophy can conceivably be made answerable.

Curiously, however, in the 1995 Preface we find Taylor endorsing a position which appears to be quite at odds with the view arrived at in TA. Taylor now writes that the notion that in philosophy we should first solve questions concerning the nature of knowledge, such as 'what it is to make a defensible claim' is a 'terrible and fateful illusion'. (PA, p.vii.)

How we can understand the relationship between the early strong claims concerning the powers of transcendental arguments and the later, sceptical notion that questions the legitimacy of any such epistemological claims? There appears to be considerable tension and perhaps outright conflict between the two views.

Taylor presumably understands his 1987 article "Overcoming Epistemology" (OE) as responding to this concern. There are two interesting proposals and a remaining problem. First, Taylor distinguishes between two versions of 'epistemology'. The first, I shall call it e1, he terms foundationalism, defined as the view that 'what epistemology would ultimately make clear [are] just what made knowledge claims valid, and what ultimate degree of validity they could lay claim to' (OE, p. 2). The second he calls the 'wider conception of the epistemological tradition' (*ibid.*). (I shall call it e2.) Central to e2 is the idea that 'knowledge is to be seen as correct representation of an independent reality' (OE, p. 3). Taylor's discussion focuses on how, on his view, e2 has been overcome thanks to the contributions by Hegel, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein (*ibid.*, esp. pp. 10 f.). Moreover, and this is the second interesting proposition, Taylor also maintains that the arguments against e2 imply an overcoming of e1. As part of his conclusion concerning what we can learn from the arguments against e2 Taylor writes: 'Obviously foundationalism [i.e., e1] goes, since our representations of things ... are grounded in the way we deal with those things. These dealings are largely inarticulate, and the project of articulating them fully is an essentially incoherent one, just because any articulative project would itself rely on a background or horizon of nonexplicit engagement with the world.' (*ibid.*, p. 11.)

At this point we might wish to investigate the arguments Taylor raises against e2 more closely and proceed from there to assess the conclusions he presents concerning e1. But I shall take another route. Let us assume that Taylor overcomes both e1 and e2 by actually proving them 'mistaken' (*ibid.*, p.12). Moreover, let us say that this assumption defines Taylor's explicit position in OE. The remaining problem is revealed in the following:

Important examples of arguments ... are Hegel's in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, against the position he defines as 'sensible certainty', where he shows both the indispensability of language and its holistic character; and Wittgenstein's famous demonstrations of the uselessness of 'ostensive definitions', where he makes plain the crucial role played by language in identifying the object and the impossibility of a purely private language. Both are, I believe, excellent examples of arguments that explore the conditions of intentionality and show their conclusions to be inescapable. (*Ibid.*, p. 13.)

There is considerable tension between the last sentence and Taylor's explicit position which involves the claim to have overcome e1: Taylor is claiming here, exactly as he did in TA, that he has access to an argument that is epistemological (because it is about conditions of the epistemological category 'intention') and that is foundational (because it produces inescapable conclusions). To get quickly to my main concern I shall assume that some of the tension can be overcome by describing the problems defined by the concepts 'object', 'language' and 'intention' in a way that escapes empiricist and rationalist epistemic categories such as 'representation', 'mind' and 'world'. Even then the key difficulty remains. Taylor wishes to distance himself from the 'ridiculously overstated' foundational philosophical ambitions of Husserl and others (OE, p. 14). Doing so he arrives at the 'explicit position' according to which 'the whole epistemological construal' (*ibid.*, p. 12) according to which we can make clear 'just what made knowledge claims valid, and what ultimate degree of validity they could lay claim to' is 'mistaken'. Nevertheless, the view implied by the quoted passage is that we *can* say about certain arguments that they bring 'inescapable conclusions', thereby answering (impossibly) the question concerning their 'ultimate degree of validity'. Hence, the views Taylor advances in OE seem incoherent.⁵

We shall see that in OE (and TA) Taylor has still some more conceptual resources available to respond to my criticism. Before I turn to them I want to examine how the issues I have discussed show up in SS.

The book has two main elements. Part I presents the case for a particular picture 'of the relation between self and morals', which the author announces that he will 'draw on' in the rest of the book. (SS, p. x.) In parts II to

He seeks to 'define the modern identity in describing its genesis'. In these parts the argument is 'a combination of the analytical and chronological'. (*Ibid.*) This raises the question of the relation between the two elements.

According to views made explicit early in the book, which I therefore refer to as Taylor's 'official position', part I stands in a grounding or foundational relation to the rest of the book. It develops something that is not only a 'phenomenological account' but an account of the 'transcendental conditions' of 'the limits of the conceivable in human life' (SS, p. 32, see also pp. 39f.) These arguments purportedly have the power to establish 'the fact that we have to place ourselves in a space which is defined by ... qualitative distinctions'. This fact 'cannot but mean that where we stand in relation to them must matter to us.' (SS, p. 42.) Taylor's arguments define 'inescapable structural requirements of human agency' (SS, p. 52). Their modern formation becomes the topic of the latter parts of the book. This idea of the structure of Taylor's book, according to which it first presents transcendental arguments that provide the foundations for further study and builds from there, corresponds to the 1970s position of TA (and to the implicit aspects of OE which I have recorded.)

However, the 'official position', which dominates Taylor's presentation in SS, is curiously unstable. It stands uneasily with Taylor's statement that: 'No argument can take someone from a neutral stance towards the world ... to insight into moral ontology.' (SS, p. 8.) This claim tallies, however, with the explicit position in OE, and with Taylor's sceptical position regarding the power of transcendental arguments and the utility of epistemological investigations generally expressed in the 1995 Preface. Moreover, there are features in *Sources of the Self* itself that have an uneasy relationship to the official position explicated in the first part of the book. One such feature is the large role that discussions that are not 'regressive' arguments of a transcendental kind but that can be characterized as articulation, description, map, portrait and picture play in the book. (SS, pp. ix, 10, 18 and many other places.) The presentation of such arguments Taylor understands as an exercise in 'retrieval' (SS, pp. x and 520.) The path to articulations which have the power to retrieve 'has to be a historical one'. (SS, p. 104.) The quotes given show that articulation along genealogical paths appears to have a different form and a different function in SS as compared to that of the transcendental arguments the book also employs. That the former arguments are not answerable to epistemological considerations, but to considerations of (assumedly) some entirely different kind which have to do with 'making sense' of how we live, is emphasized in a key passage:

The result of [a] search for clairvoyance yields the best account we can give at any time [of what it means to ‘make sense’ of our lives], and no epistemological or metaphysical considerations of a more general kind about science or nature can justify setting this aside. The best account we can give is trumps. Let me call this the BA principle. ... If we live our lives like this [inescapably using terms whose logic cannot be understood in terms of a radical fact-value distinction], what other considerations can overrule this verdict? (SS, p. 58.)

We find, then, in SS alongside Taylor’s ‘official position’ another ‘underground view’ according to which something that is not (and perhaps must not be) a transcendental argument is central to it. On this view part I of the book becomes curiously superfluous or even adverse to the latter parts. This situation of SS mirrors the situation we found in OE: there is a tension, or even an outright contradiction, between Taylor’s official doctrine concerning the powers of philosophical argument and other claims he makes concerning that same subject.

Here is a further argument in Taylor’s defence. In discussion of the theoretical power of philosophy we need to distinguish carefully between issues concerning epistemology and others concerning transcendental arguments. I have not done so above and therefore I have failed to see that, according to Taylor, transcendental arguments about our condition as embodied and morally engaged agents bring inescapable insight (concerning, say, ontology, philosophical anthropology or ethics). There is no contradiction between maintaining that and saying that representationalist epistemology is fundamentally flawed.⁶

While I accept this argument I fail to see how it could help resolve the tension I have described. The decisive issue here is not representationalism but the powers of transcendental arguments, whether as pursued in ontology, epistemology, or anywhere in philosophy. For many post-Kantian philosophers including Taylor that issue is pivotal to their inquiry into the theoretical power of philosophy. I do not see that Taylor’s views on it are altered by the terminological decision to reserve the word epistemology for issues concerning representation and to use a different name (e.g. ‘foundation theory’) for the discussion of what transcendental arguments can do. Even after changing the terminology the contradiction in Taylor’s view is preserved between his notion that we can rely in our philosophy of the times on arguments that give us access to ‘inescapable truths’ and his other notion that all such philosophical guarantees are spurious.

How can we explain the tensions in both SS and OE between the explicit doctrine and the underground or implied view? Confusing the issues of foundationalism and representationalism may be part of the picture, as well

as Taylor's desire to distance himself from 'the neo-Nietzscheans'.⁷ But in order to understand fully why Taylor finds his problems concerning the theoretical power of philosophy difficult to surmount we need to investigate their sources more thoroughly. I now turn to this issue.

5. The development of Taylor's views on the role of epistemological considerations in philosophy have a chronology and a logic. In the 1970s he propagates a Kantian notion of transcendental arguments as a first or foundational form of philosophy. In the 1980s his official position is in line with the 1970s view. It is now challenged by the underground view, but the tension between the official and the underground position is left unresolved. In the 1990s the underground view is developed into a programmatic, explicit opposition against the Kantianism of the 1970s.

To understand the inner sources of this development we need to note that my stylized picture of it overlooks a crucial aspect of Taylor's views that emerges in TA and reoccurs in both SS and OE. This is the element of ambivalence and uncertainty, which comes out in slightly different ways in all three works. In the 1970s the idea that transcendental arguments are apodictic is linked to the notion that their conclusions are nevertheless 'open to endless debate' (TA, pp. 32 and 33). Likewise, in TA the claim that a 'valid transcendental argument is indubitable' is qualified by the notion that 'it is hard to know when you have one ...' (PA, p. 33). Taylor's effort to modify his claims exemplifies a main tendency in contemporary philosophy: to give up first or foundational ambitions in philosophy and to replace these ambitions with something weaker of a similar kind. Fallibilism, historicism, contextualism, internal realism and weak transcendentalism are some of the concepts that typically occur when philosophers try to carve out positions 'between' foundationalism and relativism. In Taylor's case the crucial assumption at work in his effort to establish a position that is not over-ambitious is that something can be *really* or *essentially* apodictic and indubitable and, hence, not really open to rational doubt, even though *we* may happen to have doubts. The assumption surreptitiously draws on the notion of a God's-eye view (Putnam) or a 'view from nowhere' (Nagel) on arguments and reason, which is conclusive and definitive and different from the merely human view in which disagreement and inconclusiveness may never be overcome.

A similar assumption is made explicit in *Sources of the Self* when Taylor distinguishes between two levels of argument in moral philosophy: At the first level we can show 'what people already implicitly but unproblematically

cally acknowledge'. At another level of argument we arrive at 'what our commitments really amount to'. The latter kind of argument, Taylor claims, is 'even more difficult than the previous one', which is (only) concerned with what 'they [our commitments] already are'. (SS, p. 10.⁸) This means that Taylor, even at the time of his 'official' optimism concerning the power of argument, thinks *also* that the greatest certainty and deepest truth 'we humans' can get through argument is always a second best as compared with something else which we thus must fail to attain, i.e. ideal certainty or metaphysical insight. Now, consider one more passage in OE:

For all its radical break with the tradition, this kind of philosophy would in one respect be in continuity with it. It would be carrying further the demand for self-clarity about our nature as knowing agents, by adopting a better and more critically defensible notion of what this entails. Instead of searching for an impossible foundational justification of knowledge or hoping to achieve total reflexive clarity about the bases of our beliefs, we would now conceive this self-understanding as awareness about the limits and conditions of our knowing, an awareness that would help us to overcome the illusions of disengagement and atomic individuality that are constantly being generated by a civilization founded on mobility and instrumental reason. (OE, p. 14.)

Again Taylor juxtaposes two notions. One is called a 'foundational justification of knowledge' and the other an 'awareness about the limits and conditions of our knowing'. Obviously, the former notion identifies the kind of fruits of argument that it would be mistaken to search for, according to the explicit view of OE. But we are invited, it seems, to accept as legitimate a search for the latter kind of result. What exactly are we invited to accept as legitimate? The answer Taylor gives is partly in terms of the object of knowledge or 'awareness'. But, again, the problem I focus on is not one concerning what kind(s) of things philosophical reasoning can bring awareness of. Our overriding problem is the epistemic status, or 'theoretical power', of the best results philosophy can bring. How strong are the justifications that Taylor claims that philosophy can, at best, provide, concerning those things which it brings awareness of? The answer was given in our earlier discussion of OE: according to the explicit doctrine philosophy cannot bring foundational justification but according to other passages it can.

However, an important change occurs in Taylor's conceptual landscape as he moves on from TA and SS to OE. In his earlier works he allows himself appeal to the concept of the more than human insight or knowledge, which is lacking in OE. Thanks to that concept the earlier works contain a resource for describing the inner sources of the tension concerning foundationalism

in them. The tension appears to be rooted in the anxiety that there is something that philosophy is geared towards but cannot achieve. In OE the concept of something higher or deeper that philosophy is impossibly getting at has been abandoned. But Taylor pays a high price for his new conceptual austerity: While the position he endorses contains the same intrinsic tension as we find in TA and SS, he now lacks the concepts to explain why such a tension occurs.

In the Preface to PA Taylor follows the line of thought developed in OE to its logical conclusion: he now turns against two ideas that he relied on in TA and in SS. As in OE he relinquishes the notion of a comparison between the results of the strongest possible arguments and the certainty provided by some higher source. He also drops the idea, which continued to play a role in OE, that in philosophy we need to consider what standards of justification we are answerable to.

Interestingly, there is in Taylor's work no argument that brings him from his struggle, in TA, SS and OE, to define the theoretical power of his philosophical arguments on the terms inspired by Kant's critical philosophy to his new 'post-epistemological' stance. The closest we come to such arguments is in OE. Assumedly, Taylor thinks of this article as explaining how he overcomes his 'theoretical anxiety'. What I have argued, however, is that Taylor in OE defines an internally inconsistent position. If this is right, Taylor's shift from the earlier theoretical anxiety to the later celebration of 'post-epistemology' is based on false consciousness. Taylor does not really overcome epistemology but gives up on it, just as Foucault did according to Taylor's own criticism.⁹

6. How is this finding relevant to Taylor's views on the dialectics of philosophical enlightenment? I proposed earlier a distinction between a theoretical and a practical anxiety characteristic of Taylor's views on the power of reason. I have so far discussed only the theoretical strand. The purpose of this section is to show that the void in Taylor's philosophy – the lack of an argument to take him from his earlier epistemological bad consciousness to his late post-epistemology with its false consciousness – can be filled in by looking at his practical anxiety.

Taylor mostly writes as if he does not think that there is a problem with the optimistic assumption that if a new philosophy can be developed that does not involve the mistakes of the philosophy he is attacking it will have benign effects. But on rare occasions the optimistic supposition becomes the subject of self-reflective scrutiny. The crucial occasion is the last pages of

Sources of the Self. Taylor explains that his intention has been to 'bring air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit' through a rearticulation of buried sources of meaning. (SS, p. 520.) But he raises some concerns about this endeavour. Paramount among them is the potential tension between high ideals and human powers: If his philosophy is successful it will bring high moral standards and aspirations to life. But will such success also bring about 'moral means ... powerful enough to sustain these standards'? (SS, p. 517.) If not, is Taylor's pursuit of high moral aspirations not irresponsible, because

if the highest ideals are the potentially most destructive, then maybe the prudent path is the safest, and we shouldn't unconditionally rejoice at the indiscriminate retrieval of empowering goods. ... The prudent strategy makes sense on the assumption that the dilemma is inescapable, that the highest spiritual aspirations must lead to mutilation or destruction. But if I may make one last unsupported assertion, I want to say that I don't accept this as our inevitable lot. The dilemma of mutilation is in a sense our greatest spiritual challenge, not an iron fate.

How can one demonstrate this? I can't do it here (or, to be honest, anywhere at this point). There is a large element of hope. 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.

But to explain this properly would take another book. My aim in this Conclusion has only been to show how my picture of the modern identity can shape our view of the moral predicament of our time. (SS, p. 520f.)

This passage stands at the very end of *Sources of the Self* as its final credo. Three things are important for me in this. First, that Taylor, by asking whether he can be accused of irresponsibility, expresses explicitly his concern about the dialectics of philosophical enlightenment defined earlier. So, here we meet Taylor's 'practical anxiety' about the power of reason. My second and third observations provide the material I need to clarify the relation between it and his theoretical anxiety. The second is that Taylor envisages 'another book', which would 'explain properly' something which at the conclusion of the present book he is nowhere close to being able to explain, namely why and how the 'dilemma of mutilation' is a great spiritual challenge and not an iron fate. The third is that Taylor refers to 'a large element of hope', which he describes as the hope implicit in the 'promise of a divine affirmation of the human'. It is not clear of what kind the other book would be that Taylor envisages. But this we know: he thinks that the book would essentially be a kind of 'demonstration', albeit very different from what we find in *Sources of the Self*.

How is this notion related to my third observation? There is, above all, a rift. Taylor's second point involves the idea that the book he has written does not suffice to meet the charge of irresponsibility and the idea that the charge could only be met by a book with more powerful resources of demonstration than those available to the author of *Sources of the Self*. The third point is no longer made within the context of a Kantian type of reflection on the power and limits of reason. The conceptual terrain is entirely different. The key concepts – hope, the divine – are derived from religious language. They give us a clue to why Taylor is so seldom preoccupied with the practical anxiety: The religious hope he mentions is, perhaps, his own. It is the hope that his effort to pump air into the spirit will be affirmed divinely and totally.

But if this were all there is to Taylor's practical anxiety one might wonder why there is a theoretical anxiety at all? Why, given hope, even envisage something that would be 'very different', and assumedly much more powerful, than the book Taylor has written? And why even ask whether *Sources of the Self* is an irresponsible book?

To answer the last question I shall draw attention to a further aspect of the relation between the second and the third of our observations. To this end, I want to return to the notion in TA and in the 'official position' of SS, that even the best arguments we can get are at best always a second best; that there is a power they aspire to but necessarily fail to muster. My suggestion is that the bridge over the rift between hope and argument – between the world of theoretical aspiration and the world of practical endeavour – in Taylor's philosophy is the bridge built by the idea that there is something that theory aspires to bring, and that it therefore always already has some contact with (even if negative), though it will never attain it. This idea is a twin to the idea of the hope of a kind of affirmation (also called by Taylor 'divine affirmation') which is total and (therefore) not attainable by humans. The ideas are twins in the following sense: Taylor has a theoretical anxiety and he has an idea of something not attainable by human means that will resolve this anxiety. He also has a practical anxiety and it, too, comes together with the notion that it is not within the capacity of human powers alone to resolve it. Hence, the conceptual structure of Taylor's theoretical and practical anxiety is the same: both are defined through a conceptual juxtaposition between what we can get and what we cannot get (at least not unaided). This structure leads to problems that remain unsurmountable in principle within argumentative philosophy. Hope may or may not then be brought in to fill the lacuna. Whether it will

is external to philosophical argument. As long as the model remains unchallenged there is not much Taylor, or anyone, can do. Either you preserve the paradox or you abandon the problem. Taylor seems to me to have chosen, first, to follow the earlier path only to abandon it later in favour of the latter. But the shift does not rest on argument. So, why does it happen? I think its occurrence is motivated by Taylor's desire to escape anxiety.

In the concluding paragraph of *SS*, the theoretical and the practical anxiety are both present. The practical anxiety is present in the fear that perhaps 'the highest spiritual aspirations must lead to mutilation or destruction'. The theoretical anxiety is present in the concern that Taylor can not at this point, or anywhere near it, 'demonstrate' that the practical anxiety can be dissolved. Taylor responds to this double anxiety by envisaging 'another book' which would 'explain properly': (i) how one can, perhaps, demonstrate what he has so far not been able to demonstrate; (ii) how in this demonstration a large element of hope is present and (iii) how this element of hope is implicit in Judaeo-Christian theism.

Taylor has not produced this other book and it is unclear from what he has written so far what form it could take. In the meantime, however, Taylor has taken another route that liberates him from the responsibility of writing the book he envisaged at the end of *SS*. This is the route to the post-epistemology announced in his 1995 Preface.

To conclude, my suggestion is that we understand Taylor's post-epistemology as a double move away from anxiety. Taylor moves away from theoretical anxiety by dropping the self-reflective question about powers and limits of justification. And he moves away from the practical anxiety by accepting that philosophical work is based on hope.¹⁰ The latter shift can be seen as providing an extraneous justification for the former. If in moral life we can build on the hope of divine affirmation why persist in the theoretical anxiety? Why not provide whatever philosophical reminders and arguments one comes across in the unabashed hope that they will break the spell of the negative dialectics of much of modern philosophy?¹¹

7. I now want to connect the Taylor exegesis above to some wider philosophical debates.

As Taylor's views on epistemology develop from the early optimism of *TA* to the late pessimism of the 1995 Preface they preserve a deep conceptual continuity. This is due to the paramount but obscure role assigned to the notion of the absolute in philosophy. The earlier, philosophically ambitious Taylor defines his task as one of producing arguments that are similar to

absolutely valid arguments, only weaker in kind. The later Taylor rejects this task. Admittedly, he is in good company (with Rorty, Putnam, Habermas, Foucault, Derrida and many more) when he suggests that we turn away from something that we cannot get, let us call that 'absolute foundations', and set others goals for ourselves in philosophy. Nevertheless, this entire mainstream in post-Kantian philosophy may be misguided. Its search is defined in opposition to 'foundationalism' (or 'metaphysics'). Hence, it depends for its intelligibility on the intelligibility of foundationalism. I think that this dependency is its weak core. A very different approach to foundationalism can be achieved if we replace the questions (i) of how close to absolute foundations we can come in philosophy and (ii) of whether the search for absolute foundations, or something similar but perhaps weaker in kind leads philosophers into the dark with the question (iii) of what content, or meaning, we can in different contexts give to such notions as absolute foundation, ultimate justification and other contested philosophical notions. This replacement will not provide easy access to philosophical insight, but it might help us get rid of the prevalent idea that philosophers today need to become less ambitious – less 'metaphysical' perhaps – in their commitment to reason and argument than philosophers have been from Plato to Kant.¹²

My proposal is not completely alien to Taylor's views. At one point Taylor raises, with reference to Derrida, the following question: 'Can you even satisfy yourself that it ('Presence') is a useful term, without a more careful examination of how we actually think, judge, or feel?' (PA, p. viii). Taylor's question suggests the kind of turn from questions concerning the truth, possibility and utility of foundationalism, which dominate his philosophy, to questions concerning the meaning of the concepts which the controversies over foundationalism centrally involve, which I advocate. But I think Taylor has not succeeded in reformulating his philosophical commitments along such lines. If he did, he would have to start by thoroughly rewriting his 1987 article "Overcoming Epistemology". The title of the new essay might be: "Reconsidering Epistemology: Farewell Rorty, Welcome Later Wittgenstein". That essay might serve as a prelude to the book Taylor talks about in the closing paragraphs of *Sources of the Self*, one where the work of articulation and description of our actual conceptual predicament would no longer be seen as a second best to justifying and demonstrating by way of argument.

My final comment concerns enlightenment optimism. Taylor shares with most writers of the left-Hegelian tradition a commitment to the idea that the ultimate criterion of success in philosophy is that it can contribute to

emancipatory practice, or at least lessen the hold of ideas which contribute to the pathologies of the times. This is the 'interventionist' idea of philosophy. Others find it problematic and advocate instead contemplative notions of philosophy.¹³ But what if debates over contemplative vs. interventionist notions of philosophy involve confusions similar to those that, arguably, give rise to much contemporary confusion about foundationalism in epistemology, i.e. confusions due to the mistaken idea that we understand what it would mean to choose between enlightenment optimism of the contemplative kind and enlightenment optimism of the interventionist kind? Such confusion might be overcome if we replace the question 'which is right?' with questions of the form 'what do these seemingly competing conceptions involve?' and 'what sense can we make of them?' This form of questioning leads, I believe, to an overcoming of the notion that the distinction between philosophy as contemplation and as intervention is a useful one.¹⁴ It appears to me to have proved its value in some of the Wittgensteinian tradition and it might prove fruitful in the philosophy of modernity, too. In Taylor's case, the shift of perspective could come about if Taylor would be more willing than he has been so far to see his work as, primarily, 'work on himself, on how he sees things', rather than as work on something alien to himself called 'the modern age'.¹⁵

Notes

¹ I shall draw substantially also on Taylor's 1978–79 article "Transcendental Arguments" (TA), on his 1987 article "Overcoming Epistemology" (OE) and on the Preface to his 1995 collection of articles *Philosophical Arguments* (PA). Page numbers refer to the reprint in PA.

² The list is not meant to be exhaustive. I shall not discuss the fact that the notion 'the affirmation of ordinary life' occurs in both (4) and (5). Readers of SS will recognize (5) as the key to the explicit structure of the work. In SS Taylor relies on the views he has developed in his earlier work. See his *Philosophical Papers* 1 and 2.

³ The *locus classicus* for this understanding of philosophy is Plato's *Apology*. The range of the 'we' is of course a classic issue of controversy.

⁴ Taylor's conviction is similar to that of Socrates and the Athenians who sentenced him to death. It is the conviction that philosophy may corrupt the young and be a lethal threat to the things we cherish and value most (cf. *Ap.* 19e–20a). It seems to me that many philosophers who are less explicit than Socrates and Taylor about their motives share the conviction that philosophy matters in this way. But what speaks in favour of this idea? What if people in Athens and in our times were and are drawn to the moral relativism that is propagated by some sophists, naturalists and postmodern philosophers quite independently of them and only turn to these philosophers for encouragement? Consider the case of 'animal rights': Does the fact that Peter Singer is widely read explain the prevalence in our times of a certain way

of thinking about animals or is Peter Singer widely read because of the satisfaction people already find, quite independently of his work, in thinking along the lines Singer articulates and advocates? This question cannot be discussed further here. But I believe it would deserve more philosophical attention than it usually gets.

⁵ Taylor actually admits the inconclusive nature of his argument in OE in the last paragraph of it. His difficulties stem, I believe, from running together his criticism of representationalist epistemology with the criticism of foundationalism. More on this below.

⁶ I am indebted to the editors for raising this point, and for patient and constructive criticism concerning other issues as well.

⁷ Taylor contends that there are two main suggestions for how to overcome epistemology, the 'neo-Nietzschean' and that pursued by 'defenders of critical reason' and he stipulates that the dispute 'has to be fought out on the terrain of the latter' (OE, p. 17). This suggests that Taylor might prefer tension or paradox in his views on the theoretical power of philosophy to radical scepticism.

⁸ Taylor's distinction turns on his emphatic use of the word 'really'. Hence, the decisive distinction is between what our commitments 'already are' and what they 'really amount to'.

⁹ See "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" in Taylor (1985b).

¹⁰ Taylor's shift to 'postepistemology' may have been occasioned by Rorty. (See the references to Rorty in OE and the 1995 Preface.) Arguably, when Rorty gives the category of hope pride of place in his later philosophy he is at the receiving end in the Taylor–Rorty exchange. See esp. Rorty (1999).

¹¹ Karl-Otto Apel is an example of someone who prefers persisting in theoretical anxiety. But at the end of the day, Apel's view that strong '*letztbegründung*' is attainable may also build on hope, maybe in a way which draws on Kant's late notion of what we may rightly hope for ('was wir hoffen dürfen').

¹² Raimond Gaita (1991) provides one model for how we may investigate the meaning of absolute notions without forcing the straitjacket of a need to choose between weak and strong, metaphysical and postmetaphysical, views on the investigation.

¹³ See for example D. Z. Phillips (1999).

¹⁴ Cf. my *Transformative Philosophy*.

¹⁵ Cf. Wittgenstein (1998, p. 24).

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