

Charles Taylor's Vision of Modernity

Charles Taylor's Vision of Modernity:
Reconstructions and Interpretations

Edited by

Christopher Garbowski, Jan Hudzik and Jan Kłos

CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

CHRISTOPHER GARBOWSKI, JAN HUDZIK
AND JAN KŁOS

As hardly needs mentioning, Charles Taylor is currently one the most renowned and influential contemporary philosophers. He is also widely quoted and discussed both in the social sciences and humanities. Taylor earns this attention through his remarkable capacity for presenting his conceptions in the broadest possible intellectual and cultural context. His philosophical intuition is fundamentally antinaturalistic, and tends toward developing broad syntheses without a trace of systematizing thinking, or any anarchic postmodernist methodology. His thought unites the past with the present, while culture is treated as a broad mosaic of discourses. Religion, art, science, philosophy, politics and ethics are all fields through which Taylor deftly moves about in his search for their hidden structures and deepest sense.

Taylor's philosophical output is truly prodigious. Recently, as his monumental study *A Secular Age* (2007) indicates, he has been focusing much of his attention on the problem of secularization. Secularization has had a fairly long tradition and is commonly regarded to be an offspring of modernity. As a philosophical idea, it is associated with the epistemological perspective and the birth of the Cartesian *ego cogito*. In this context Taylor comes up with such descriptive terms as “disengaged self,” instrumental reason, and the independent individual. The modern self endeavors to construct its world anew, irrespective of previous knowledge and tradition. Thus, such an experiment was bound to, as it in fact did, question the hitherto time-honored hierarchies and categories, triggering the process of advancing disenchantment, as Taylor calls it after Max Weber. Subsequently, the separation of faith and reason, science and religion followed. The political consequences have been no less profound.

A witness to the seminal nature of Taylor's work is the fact that it is finding resonance in a number of countries beyond the Anglosphere. Pertinent to this volume, his work has reached academic circles in Poland more substantially after the translation of his magisterial *Sources of the*

Self several years ago. And in order to bring his work to the attention of a wider scholarly public in that country, as well as to reflect upon the ramifications of the recent publication of *A Secular Age* mentioned above, a conference was held on Taylor's thought with the intent of reconstructing his presence in twentieth and twenty-first century philosophy and of discovering new perspectives and interpretive horizons for it—likewise in the social sciences and humanities. A number of specialists on the thought of this outstanding Canadian thinker were invited, as well as participants of academic discourses on the topics and issues Taylor has raised, i.e. a broad reflection on the intellectual and spiritual state of contemporary humanity and society. The conference attracted scholars from a wide range of fields: philosophy, social sciences, literary studies, cultural studies, attesting to the interdisciplinary impact of Taylor's work. A couple of scholars from outside of Poland also participated, aiding in broadening the spectrum of the discussion.

The conference, entitled "Charles Taylor's Vision of Modernity: Reconstructions and Interpretations," was held on 15-16 October 2008. The event was hosted by both Maria Curie-Skłodowska University and the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. The selection of contributions in the current volume proffer a penetrating cross section of Taylor's thought. Although some of them are focused on a reconstruction of the philosopher's concepts, most either engage in a polemic with elements of his thought or find inspiration in it for their own reflections. The contributions are grouped in four parts: 1. philosophy and the modern self; 2. the problem of secularization; 3. between liberalism and communitarianism; and 4. language, literature, and culture.

The first part concerning philosophy and the modern self is initiated by Jan P. Hudzik's article in which the author attempts to reconstruct and interpret key threads in Taylor's narration of modernity. Hudzik claims that this overall narration cannot be separated from Taylor's thoughts on particular problems, such as, for instance, his thoughts concerning political or moral philosophy. The concept of narration is here a synonym for discourse, which by its nature always constitutes a certain regulatory proposition in relation to the reality which creates the basis of its reasonability. Thus a narration has something "ideal" within it: a certain overabundance of sense. Hudzik asks what are the elements of this overabundance in the case of Taylor's narration. The next author, Adam Chmielewski, focuses particular attention on the concept of public and moral space in this narrative. In the author's view the category of space, which is strictly aesthetic from the Kantian perspective, plays an essential role in Taylor's understanding of the problem of the self's identity, and

together with it the problem of morality and of politics. Chmielewski develops the Canadian philosopher's intuitions, in which he finds similarities with other thinkers, and claims that the aesthetical is the genuine source of the ethical: aesthetics appears to him as knowledge of human freedom and needs, which makes it a political discipline.

The next participant in our debate, Waldemar Bulira, indicates the development of the Canadian philosopher's thought from a classical hermeneutical perspective critical of the positivist methodology of social sciences toward such an understanding of human and natural sciences in which the differences between them—no longer a “chasm,” but an “ordinary difference”—become softened on the grounds of a moderate social constructivism. Aside from the early writings of the Canadian philosopher from the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, in his later works both these kinds of sciences become discerned as only discourses interacting with so called social imaginaries, through which they lose their alleged ability of direct contact with reality: both of the social as well as of the natural kinds. From the reconstructionist-interpretative character of the first three articles the third article by Mikołaj Rakusa-Suszczewski strikes out in different terrain, conducting as it does a critical analysis Taylor's moral philosophy, exposing its attachment to a speculative, quasi-mystical conception of the modern engaged self. According to Rakusa-Suszczewski Taylor lacks consistency because he understands the engaged self from the perspective of his religious beliefs while simultaneously expressing his critical stance toward narrow moral stances. The author asks whether the modern self can be solely Catholic.

Regarding the section of texts on the problem of secularization, among others, Christopher J. Knight analyses the secularizing and de-secularizing trends, as they are observed by Taylor. Citing Taylor, Knight says that to a certain extent secularization is providential, for it makes religion concentrate on individual testimonies rather than official enactment. On the one hand faith can become original and authentic, but on the other—in deference to modern cultural trends—Taylor, who confesses his private faith, while philosophizing himself practices apophaticism, i.e. a method of indirection. Members of the intellectual elites feel embarrassed in the modern epoch to express their faiths and bear witness to them when confronted by peers. In his article “In Search of the Lost God of Supermarkets” Roman Kubicki focuses on the practical outcome of secularizing processes and on the changing ethos of previously traditionally Christian societies that have become secularized. What surprises the author is the fact that this shift toward the secular seems to surprise no one. Global secularization manifests itself as a love of this

world. Agnieszka Kaczmarek's text entitled "Between the Narrative of Secularization and the Narrative of Authenticity" elucidates various tendencies of secularization, starting with Nietzsche's provocative announcement of God's death. She subsequently proceeds to show Taylor's antidotes for secularization. One of these antidotes is an authenticity that is not a mere emancipation of individuals. Another antidote is the fact that humans have transcendental structures, that they are directed to transcendence. Jan Klos proposes to interpret Taylor along the category of a journey in which individuals strive to find their whereabouts by way of what the Canadian philosopher called "creative redescriptions." The modern self has been named distanced and buffered, but it also shows its porous structure, a structure typical of the pre-modern period. Klos finds this porosity in the experience of guilt, which is a personal trauma and, following Taylor's suggestions, he finds the categories at our disposal as crossing the boundaries of time and place.

In the third part, which examines the debate between liberalism and communitarianism, the first essay by Brian Rosebury undertakes a subtle analysis of Taylor's arguments against atomism. Rosebury comes to the conclusion that in the philosopher's gripe with liberal neutralism instead of insisting on "objective goods" it would be better if Taylor invoked the existence of common social "understandings." Andrzej Szahaj is also critical of the typical for communitarianism conviction of the existence of such goods. Szahaj argues for accepting freedom as a value in and of itself, which is connected with an element of risk and unpredictability, which Taylor wishes to avoid, since he feels freedom primarily serves to realize high goals. Leszek Koczanowicz follows a similar line of argumentation likewise invoking Taylor's communitarian philosophy. The author assays it for the possibility of support for a critical community, i.e. whether the members of a given community can oppose its discourses of self-understanding, which define its identity. Once again in the philosophical political debate with Taylor a voice of concern for the individual comes to the fore. The communitarian ethos likewise resonates in Dorota Dralus's essay, which focuses on Taylor's concept of the self and the problem of patriotism. The author presents the problem in the context of the contemporary debate on patriotism, in which voices from thinkers such as Martha C. Nussbaum or Alisdair MacIntyre come to the fore. Dralus interprets Taylor's position as an attempt to negotiate a middle way between moral universalism and liberal instrumentalism.

The essays of the final section of the book deal less directly with Taylor's thought than with its implications for essential concerns in the problem of language, literature and popular culture in philosophical and

methodological fields. Andrzej Pawelec argues that Taylor's theory of language is part and parcel of his struggle against reductive accounts of the human condition widespread in academia and beyond. Pawelec recounts that for the Canadian philosopher language is understood in "two grand types of theory": enframing and constitutive. Enframing theories focus on the instrumental use of language; constitutive ones can be understood as expressive. Taylor critiques enframing theories and develops a Romantic constitutive approach. Pawelec feels this theoretical framework can be additionally extended through an emphasis of the role of metaphor that takes into account the "individual/social dialectic" of the social institutions that Taylor emphasizes in his constitutive approach.

Finally, in the humanities Taylor's thought has figured significantly, among others, in the so called ethical turn in literary theory, especially in the seminal works of David Parker. In his article Jakub Lichański tackles the axiological problems connected with literary research. While both sides of the equation (the "object," or work of art, and the "subject," i.e. the researcher) are discussed, Lichański concentrates on the ethical decisions of researchers. The author feels that although it would be appealing to propose, after Taylor's suggestion regarding the ethical life, that researchers direct their judgements toward the good, he concedes that "given, e.g. the postmodernists' renunciation of any type of normativism" the issue "is nothing more than a philosopher's postulate and can be treated as a proposal only, one of many proposals." Christopher Garbowski notes that while researchers have been resorting to the findings of virtue ethics for the study of popular culture, especially popular film, Taylor's work has curiously been overlooked. The concept of the social imaginary seems particularly fruitful for research into popular culture. After giving some examples of the results of earlier research utilizing virtue ethics, Garbowski provides a brief demonstration of how Taylor's seminal social imaginary, the unarticulated ethics of authenticity prevalent in much of contemporary society, can be detected in works of popular culture.

PART I

PHILOSOPHY AND THE MODERN SELF

CHAPTER ONE

THE POETICS OF NARRATING MODERNITY

JAN P. HUDZIK

Poetics in the oldest, Aristotelian, sense of the word is a theory that deals with the rules of statement formation. In the case of narrative they are the plot, story, and the structured sequence of events. Charles Taylor does not spin such a narrative about modernity—he writes about it in the language of scientific discourse. Yet it is difficult to resist the impression that what he does is also a mode of narrative, fascinating and otherwise extraordinary: we could ask whether we can show some rules concerning it, whether we can reconstruct some metalanguage, or the ways of the author's intervention that reveal his narrative?

The concept of narrative changes its traditional meaning in this question. I believe I use it, following the intention of the author himself, as synonymous with discourse. There is no purely argumentative (objective-truth-oriented) discourse about historical reality—each discourse is a narrative one. It is some regulatory proposal for this reality, and forms the basis of its sense. Consequently, reality cannot be defined as entirely non-linguistic and non-textual. Therefore, narrative has something *idealistic* in it, a certain excess of sense, which arises from an each-time unique synthesis of the general, i.e. the objective qualities of things, grasped by the intellect by means of concepts, and of the particular given in experience/notion and the accompanying judgment—always subjective—determined by context and the standpoint. In narrative thus defined lies the secret of understanding the world of human affairs: rich in particular contexts that can nevertheless be generalized. In other words, the narrative opens us to everyday life, politics, history, art, ideology, economy or to the

systems composed of historical facts, artifacts, and behaviors. It thereby becomes their component, and makes them important to us.

I am therefore interested whether it is possible to define this *idealistic* component in Taylor's narrative about modernity? This is the question about the composition of this narrative, about the relations that hold its basic elements together, or about the elements that make up its major structures of meaning. I distinguish and present six of them, which I think are the most important: 1. the self and hermeneutical self-creation; 2. justice; 3. anti-essentialism and constructivism; 4. event ontology; 5. mutation composition; 6. reality and truth.

The Self and Hermeneutical Self-Creation

The metalanguage of Taylor's narrative about modernity comes from hermeneutics, which has acquired the achievements of philosophy practiced after the so-called interpretative and linguistic turns. It assumes that scientific reason does not significantly differ from the reason of social practices because reason itself in a way co-constitutes them, therefore it also speaks about itself; the object of its reference acquires, in a way, its (reason's) own organization. Consequently, hermeneutical reason must be an instrument of communication despite being far from precise. It does not function on the basis of the criteria of argumentative rationality but on the basis of acceptance, never fully realized, of values which allow it to grasp itself and the world around in its meanings. This type of reflection, one might add: post-Heideggerian, appears at the end of the twentieth century. It identifies culture as a primarily heterogeneous reality and concludes that if it (reflection) is to be adequate for culture, then it cannot be theory. That is why the concepts of *narrative*, *social imagination*, and *social imaginary* have become cultural buzzwords.

Hermeneutics in this version is a certain proposal for an answer to the modern accidentality of being. It must therefore be some kind of social practice itself and, as we shall see, it indeed involves a pragmatist attitude. It assumes that it is reflective practices that are in modernity the basis for defining human capabilities, or in other words, that modern identity has a "reflective form" of narrating itself. And this means that modernity is self-reflective, it has the structure of self-reference, which both Hegel and Taylor call the "self." The basic difference between the two lies, however, in that they understand differently how the "I think" cognizes itself.

Hegel's reflective philosophy is that of the identical: it is concerned with the subject, which recognizes itself in every object and wants absolute transparency for itself. Taylor's reflective philosophy, on the other hand, treats of the subject, whose understanding of itself and the world is based not so much on consciousness as on sensitivity=intuitive thinking (it is traditionally associated with the perception of individual things). Intuitive reason is the common starting point both for theory and practice (the categories of the theoretical and the practical are groundless here, as I have said), both for life and for narrating about it. Under such circumstances we cannot thus conduct studies either by establishing *hard data* or according to some *formal reasoning*. That is why we expect the investigator to have some sensitivity, in his deliberations he has to demonstrate special perseverance and effort so that he could refrain from accepting ideas only on the grounds that they are believed to constitute the absolute, objective and natural descriptions of the world. He has to be able to overcome a certain barrier, or in fact, as Taylor puts it, a gap in intuitions. The gap, a distance between narrative and lived experience is, he maintains, the other side, as it were, of the hermeneutical circle.¹ Paul Ricoeur claims that it results from the fact that life is lived and history is told.² Taylor, however, combines the two elements and states that "the life to be lived has also to be *told*."³

A philosopher who lives in an individualist culture and investigates moral ideals and conceptions of the subject himself highly values autonomy and personal engagement. Taylor supports "a claim about how we use 'self' today, about which I feel dogmatic and militant (but that may just hide my even greater inner uncertainties)."⁴ The *dogmatic and militant* attitude meets the requirements that intuitionism makes on reflective philosophy, which is not the philosophy of identity and it does not serve to justify the existing state of things, or to prove that what is, is good. This is a fundamental correction which Taylor makes in Hegel's philosophy, and in like manner becomes otherwise greatly indebted to it. The correction will prove particularly significant for his political thought, which we shall see when discussing the subject of justice. This indebtedness will in turn influence the *mutation composition* of his narrative of modernity—the narrative focused on the identity of the phenomenon, to which the subject-narrator himself cannot be neutral. For it is an axiological construct: it has specific *spiritual power*, it does not only want to be recognized, but in order to exist it must also be desired: it must be followed

and—most probably (it is after all associated with some conception of the good: its model is constantly *convincing/inspiring/moving*⁵)—be taken responsibility for. The proper manner of interpreting this reality—a rational way of behaving in it—is thus neither ethical positivism and its accompanying conservative attitude, which justifies as good everything that is inherited and currently existent, nor liberal neutrality, the attitude that characterizes the enlightened reason, which in turn treats everything as an object of investigation, and challenges and tests all beliefs regarded as true and sacred. The values that govern modernity have, according to Taylor, ultimately the power of another, third kind; the power that restricts itself, and has an encoded, as it were, inherent immune system. That is why he does not speak about dialectics but about *mutation* as the development principle of modern culture. The former is devastating for tradition. The latter is not. Modern enlightenment does not create *radically new qualities* through it. I shall return to this question again.

Engagement, seriousness, faithfulness and responsibility are the values that characterize the presented style of hermeneutical studies. The style is inherently unique, closely connected with Taylor's personality, his sensitivity, the scale and range of associations that he has, and the awareness of his internal and external conditions and limitations. The stake here is understanding interpreted as personal activity (not only intellectual), the condition of people conscious of the imperfection of their own knowledge; a predisposition of the mind, which, without the intentional "I want" is, paradoxically, open and ready for dialog, to verify its own assumptions. That is why Taylor assures his readers that what he does is dictated by a *less ambitious question* and is merely a *contribution* to the historical explanation of concepts, an undertaking, which, he believes, *he is unable to encompass*.⁶ Someone who understands himself in this way equally treats and appreciates in life the importance of his reflective actions, i.e. those whose reasons he knows, and unreflective ones, which he reconstructs in the course of everyday activities concordant with social conventions/practices. He knows that they depend on each other, that our discursive consciousness (which we can articulate) is entangled with practical consciousness accompanying our routine behaviors, i.e. those that we do not make the object of separate consideration and to which we have no direct access. Furthermore, he also knows that the two forms of consciousness are additionally regulated and driven by two sets of opposing notions and their corresponding configurations of actions of

modern people. These are also two different and overlapping points of view: two types of the organization of narrative contents. One of them concerns scientific/technological thinking and its related category of engineering, calculating cognition. It corresponds to the investigation of diachronic causal connections between historical events. The other set are relations that connect these events within meaningful orders, it applies to historical thinking oriented towards values and meanings that refer to the category of understanding and interpretation. Taylor argues that the two sets of notions are inextricably linked with each other, the second being the condition for the first.

It follows from the foregoing that each of us, the modern ones, has thus always some discursive knowledge of what s/he does but it is never absolute nor gives us certainty, it does not protect us against the accidental, against the unexpected results of our actions. Therefore, each of us is also an experienced hermeneutist: hermeneuticity is a property of our situation in the world, a way of coping with historically accidental circumstances and products of human activity, and making incessant attempts to discursively domesticate/naturalize them.

The hermeneutist does not show optimistic visions of the development of culture, especially those in the Hegelian spirit. He does not believe or feel pleased that history is purportedly only about one thing: the liberation of reason, and with such a noble purpose none of our individual whims would matter. The life of the uncertain is neither boring nor tragic, but dramatic and risky. *Seriousness and engagement*—the equivalents of the dogmatic and militant attitude of Taylor, who is in opposition to frivolity and boredom, about which we can read in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in the description of the birth of modernity (I shall return to the topic later), are something that only those can afford who can pit themselves courageously and responsibly against the fact that after the collapse of the so-called world of ontic logos, they are left only to themselves and are themselves responsible for what they are. They no longer determine the difference between “is” and “ought to be” regardless of what they would like to/can be. They do not establish in advance which behaviors are morally important and which are not. The secret of their (those persons’) nature is no longer hidden in the telos, the true purpose which they are expected to realize, following the imperatives recommended by various virtues. Now the secret consists in what they will do with themselves. By reproducing certain practices, they themselves create the conditions that

make a given action possible and allow these practices to exist. For that reason, one cannot apply to their knowledge and behaviors strictly essentialist distinctions between the theoretical and the practical, the contemplative and the poetical. This is also true for the practice itself of philosophizing: the pursuit of philosophy is morally determined, based on our mode of existence as beings that talk and cooperate with others. The philosophizing subject is accompanied by the intention of self-construction and/or self-treatment—Taylor will even speak of the never-ending struggle (“the struggle goes on—in fact, forever”) “trying to raise our practice,” “for a *richer mode of existence*.”⁷

Self-control as a condition for the perfecting our existence is a means of articulating our cultural coding rather than a tool serving to refrain from the sensuous. Hermeneutic reflection, which deals with this mechanism of self-creation, fights against *hubris*, characteristic of enlightenment philosophy, both ancient and modern. It does not promote ascetic practices of controlling passions, i.e. sensuous impulses, in order to attain the perfection of our nature, the fullness derived from orientation of the mind towards the absolute being. Nevertheless, in executing this task, hermeneutical reflection is also still faithful to an interpretation of classical philosophy, according to which theoretical reason cannot be entirely separated from its practical applications. For the pursuit of philosophy cannot, as Aristotle holds, be reduced merely to “verbal deliberations.”

But most people do not do these things, but take refuge in theory—this is also inseparably linked with the acquisition of spiritual virtues (“made well in soul by such a course of philosophy”).⁸ Taylor does not seem to have any doubts about this when, in connection with his profession, he explicitly writes: “Thus, in the sciences of man in so far as they are hermeneutical there can be a valid response to ‘I don’t understand’ which takes the form, not only ‘develop your intuitions,’ but more radically ‘change yourself.’”⁹

Justice

Hermeneutical sciences are, therefore, not the product of distrustful and suspicious reason, nor are they concerned with emancipation of the subject from the constraining structures of power equals knowledge. Consequently, they do not present any pessimistic scenarios for the development of culture or seek to expose the falsity of that which is

generally regarded as objective and logical in it, and which serves as the foundations of social order. The hermeneutical social theory presented here focuses, however, on developing a model of praxis that makes the human ability to experience suffering and injustice an inalienable facet of the constitution of social life. The discursively expressed knowledge of actors appearing on the social stage recedes into the background. It is only in this context that we can understand the communitarian stance espoused by Taylor, who charges liberal rationalism, together with deliberative theories of democracy that use abstract concepts in their arguments, with “difference-blindness.” He claims that modern universal identity/liberal neutrality is discriminative because it contributes, for example, to creating, consolidating and reinforcing the negative image of minority groups, to deprecating women, etc. He speaks of the “politics of difference” and “the politics of recognition”¹⁰, which, although it still refers to the universal concept of human dignity, nevertheless assumes that the consequent equality requires that the humiliated and vulnerable be treated in a different way so that their self-respect could be strengthened. The experience of injustice makes us open to another person. This is the fundamental sense of communitarianism.

From the communitarian viewpoint, the political is defined in contrast to what enlightenment reason offers in this respect, both in its liberal-individualist facet, seeking some form of a rational consensus, and in the critical-emancipatory aspect. Politics is therefore no longer about the impartial functioning of institutions that would equally reflect the interests of all citizens, or about the realistic and concrete identification of forces that would destroy the individual. The political is not composed here of any specific values, actions, or decisions. Its criterion is formal. The logic of politics is based on a desire for more and more justice, which is therefore sometimes termed dynamic. If its goal is still emancipation, then this concept acquires here the sense of liberation from inequalities by strengthening the position of individuals and/or the vulnerable groups, through undermining, to this end, the existing institutionalized order (“just”—in the static sense of the word), which legitimizes these inequalities. In its criticism of liberalism, communitarianism is not anti-modern, nor does it oppose individual freedoms. It is in fact only a certain mutation (this concept needs to be discussed separately) of both liberalism and Christianity. For my reconstruction of Taylor’s narrative about modernity an important conclusion follows therefrom: the political stance

is not something external to this narrative, it is even an important chapter of it. I shall return to this issue when discussing the subject of the narrative mutation composition.. At this point it is enough to say that the communitarian narrative is set in the world where suffering and injustice are no longer something obvious and normal. This situation is entirely exceptional in history. Odo Marquardt explains that now for the first time it seems that one can essentially control misery, spare pain, overcome illness, eliminate evil, and overcome the helplessness of man caused by his finiteness.¹¹

Suffering refers to an unspeakable reality, i.e. a reality that cannot be expressed in the form of definite concepts. Any articulation of it is incomplete. Connected with unjust social practices, suffering, however, demands articulation regardless of its imperfection. Injustice, to put it vividly, cries for vengeance. No one asks for justice, justice is demanded! The problem is only that the demand itself must not turn into a hatred towards the perpetrators of injustices, the hatred of the strong for the weak. For Taylor, the only restraint against such an absurd and dangerous scenario of events is to go beyond the ideas of exclusive (as he calls it) humanism and to adopt the stance of faith in and the love of God. It is in this that he sees the power of safeguarding the noble humanist ideals against being sullied in practical realization. In Taylor's view then, the two perspectives: religious and humanistic, to put it briefly, do not exclude but, on the contrary, they complement and determine each other. Taylor's social, i.e. communitarian, sensitivity is therefore just as deeply rooted in Christianity as in liberalism. Hence his natural conviction that without appealing to universal ethical values it is not possible at all to put forward demands in contesting the social status quo—these values are the models for the criticism of contemporary views and practices connected, for example, with gender, to undermine the “patriarchal” forms of life, or in general, with totalizing communities, like for example fundamentalist religious groups. The demand for justice concerns primarily those suffering or the social group (the prophets included the widows, the orphans and the poor in it)¹², to which the norms of kindness and assistance apply. Their situation changes rapidly and dramatically, and they will regard yesterday's justice as today's injustice. Demands have a chance of being institutionalized in the legislative system, which in turn has a chance of changing existing practices and then of being challenged in light of new ones. And so on.

Antiessentialism and Constructivism

Hermeneutical pragmatism appears to be also a mutation of its source version. Like the latter, it rejects abstract rationalism and intellectualism, and with it any philosophy that claims that there are forms of the world independent of our thinking, to which we should yield. John Dewey maintains that the process of thinking does not follow some universal rules because it is always the result of our adjustment to the environment and consists in solving problems caused by the environment. "The origin of thinking," according to the classic of American philosophy, "is some perplexity, confusion, or doubt."¹³ As such, it accompanies action required to attain a specific purpose, or to solve a given problem. In this sense Dewey regards even truth as a variety of good. With the changing organization of the environment, our ways of thinking and action also change, and consequently, also our ways of understanding the good. Hence, pragmatist indeterminism means our essentially unlimited freedom. However, from the standpoint of hermeneutics, the situation looks somewhat different.

As a pragmatist, Taylor also opposes rationalism and claims that there is no universal narrative about the social world. Our activities adapt to its organization, which does not compel us to fundamentally change our way of thinking because it itself is, as it were, contained in us. What meaning things have for us is a part of how we understand ourselves. The basic relation towards them is therefore not a cognitive relation defined according to the subject-object pattern. It would be characterized better by the concept of attunement, which describes our mode of existence in the world: feeling at home with it, loving it, etc.¹⁴ To act rationally means, in other words, to attune oneself to the currently binding conventions/social practices that determine competent behaviors under different circumstances of social life. Codes, common systems of meanings, serve to realize individual motivations, desires, and goals. That is why we are always somehow conscious of what we are doing, although we are not necessarily fully aware of what we are driven by, of all the determinants and consequences of our acts. They are always entangled in the structure of social practices. Knowing our behaviors as hard, measurable and objective facts is therefore entirely inadequate: this will tell us how we act but not why we acted the way we did, nor will it show all the effects of this conduct.

To put it differently, a thought that correctly=competently interprets meaning, i.e. stories told by things, is not a product of some non-thinking goal, to attain which it is needed. It is always already moulded also by some mental reality, by the symbolic legacy of the subject, which Taylor recently calls the social imaginary. It is to this concept that we owe the fact that our views on good are not free, therefore it is also inappropriate to accuse them of moral relativism. We cannot possibly speak of relativism when we recognize that we cannot do whatever we like because, like it or not, we always function—act and formulate evaluative judgments—within specific conceptual frames. When we acknowledge that these frames give meaning to our moral responses, tell us what is good or valuable to us, and what is bad or valueless. That this knowledge—moral orientation—also belongs therefore to the knowledge of who we are ourselves, and it is connected with our identity.

The concept of attunement used to describe the rationality of our thoughts and actions shows their deep-rootedness in the prediscursive, intuitive contact with the world. Both the theoretical standpoints in the area of humanities/social sciences and the fundamental living options with social ideologies expressing them are merely different ways/attempts to discursively make this contact familiar. Both therefore depend on data that cannot be entirely conceptualized or articulated. In developing his conception of the interrelation between theory and practice or speaking and action, Taylor, when it comes to the question of language, continues the thought of Herder and his supporters who, contrary to the nature of the Enlightenment, believe that linguistic consciousness has its matrix in unreflective experience, which can never be fully explained.¹⁵ Hence comes his antinaturalism, or a belief that we never have direct access to truth—the thing in itself. This conviction goes hand in hand with anti-essentialism, or the stance that challenges the existence of an absolute point of departure in philosophy and the ultimate unity of being as well. It is the effect of identification of the sign (i.e. narrative) nature of the human world. We do not know its “nature,” only our versions/representations of it.

Instead of essentialism Taylor offers the stance of social constructivism, which, however, avoids extreme standpoints and does not perceive the society exclusively as a plastic product of subjects. Of fundamental significance for his social theory is the trend towards linguistics, the findings of which show that our statements constitute, in most general terms, inseparable blends of narrative and structure. From

this point of view, language determines our experience and the frameworks/forms of the world around us but it never does so on the anything-goes basis. Taylor does not think (as, for example, Thomas Kuhn does with the change of paradigms) that the change of social imaginaries—the transition from the premodern to the modern—makes their constituent contents incommensurable. This would mean *inter alia* that it would not be possible to include them in the framework of one discourse or apply the rules serving to evaluate the contents articulated within one social imaginary for assessment and understanding of the contents articulated within another. Taylor indeed states, “Gains and losses do not tell the whole story. There are also elements of incomparability. The reality of history is mixed and messy.” However, he does not believe it to be a good enough reason to treat the reality of history—as Michel Foucault does—as a system of the hermetically closed, monolithic orders of truth. “Monolithism and relativism are two sides of the same coin,” he concludes.¹⁶

To sum up: theoretical modes of presenting the world belong to the narrative level: they make the metalanguage of the narrative. Taylor believes that language opens up to the world in which the narrative is used. This is a constructivist claim. The philosophical narrative about modernity constitutes a component of other systems, such as social or ideological ones, whose constituents are historical facts and cultural practices. There is, however, no clear-cut boundary between narrative and structure; consequently, between facts/practices and narratives/discourses. The latter do not show the world or imitate it because they are not confined to themselves, they do not close in the rules of their immanence, they surpass their own narrative contents and forms and go beyond them towards the world, constituting an organizing proposal for it and imposing a certain logic upon it. In other words, that which is happening in the narrative is not without significance for the reality, which uses it because it takes part in “logicizing” it (=reality). Narrative, grounded in the thinking and action of its receivers, becomes one of the possible modes of their speaking about and expressing themselves.

Event Ontology

Theoretical narratives also penetrate social life and mould it but not in the way presented by structuralism or functionalism, since these

conceptions explain human behaviors by means of phenomena unknown to people. They in fact kill the subjects, claiming that the reasons by which they are guided—their knowledge and conscious choices based on it—are not at all important for their lives.

Taylor does not agree with this. He does not think that theories reach the underlying truth about the human world and discover the absolute laws that govern it. At this point theories commit the aforementioned naturalistic fallacy. In order to avoid it, he argues, we should examine the relation between theory and practice in a way analogous to the relation between Kant's *a priori* forms and phenomena. This relation is therefore not of a determinist nature because the world of human affairs is not a domain of conceptual cognition, which, in the metaphysical tradition, or, more broadly, in naturalist standpoints, is regarded as full-blooded cognition, so to say—cognition in the hard sense of the word. If abstract notions, in Kant's reasoning, are of an entirely different kind than phenomenon, then they have no corresponding reference in objects perceived through the senses. In order that they could be applied to them, they have to be mediated by some third thing—by imagination and its products: transcendental patterns. Taylor believes that the function of such patterns in relation to theories—"glossed"¹⁷ from the characteristics of the empirical world to which they apply—is performed by common social practices. They, too, have to have imaginative substance so that they could change the social imaginary and give sense to human actions. On the schematism of our intellect in its application to phenomena, *The Critique of Pure Reason* says that it "is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul"¹⁸, whereas *Sources of the Self* says of ideas that they are attempts "to bring to some conscious expression the underlying rationale of"¹⁹ practices as certain patterns of our behaviors. The scientific concepts that seek to explain society, a kind of social self-descriptions, become the context that confer a meaning and a new understanding, on the heretofore unknown practices. The new practice can become a base for the modification of theory, which in turn can change practice, etc.

The topic of schematism refers us to one of the most fundamental problems of metaphysics, which is the relationship between the generality of ideas and the particularity of things. According to the classical, Platonic version of cognition, this relation is a property of ontic thinking—which is cognition in the hard sense of the word—seeking in diversity (of that which is given) similarities to (*a priori*) originals. The point is to grasp the

similarity between the thing and idea because the idea expresses constitutive relations and proportions of the internal essence of things. Hard cognition in the social domain is expressed in a language that speaks of the existence of ideal State or perfect society (such a language is used by nationalist ideologies), or, in another variant, of autonomous individuals independent of institutions (neoliberal ideology). The author of *Sources of the Self* is one of the political thinkers who—in their dispute with liberalism (I refer to social justice)—recognize that narratives about such beings tend to dominate the public language in order to achieve in it an exclusive position to articulate the truth about the reality, which they distort as a result. They establish laws for it, which have the authority of *the natural* and *the logical*. The laws are less dangerous when, instead of ideas, they use patterns, “something extremely vague and general” as the *Sources* says.²⁰ It is at that point—to use the Kantian language—that they lose their constitutive power and assume merely regulative functions. Social practices precisely regulate our behaviors in the mode of postulates—political, moral, religious, etc.—therefore they give them meaning, which is to be (always only partially) verified and can be translated (always only partially) into the languages of other practices.

Taylor’s post-metaphysical philosophy thus seeks the riddle of cognition in reason itself, which asks the question about meaning. This is the question that is insolvable within the scientific concept of truth, yet without it, i.e. without the thinking that seeks meaning, our *attunement* to the world of phenomena would not be possible. In other words, this reason is an *a priori* condition for the cognitive search for truth (“intuitive perception, *Anschauung*” for Kant). For Taylor, rationality is the property of meanings that are revealed not through *being* directly given to the universal, objective subject, but through *events* in the historical, everyday world. That is why events and their meanings are not the object of (“hard”) cognition but of *narrative*, which is also cognition but in a less defined, “soft” meaning of the word.

Narrative has the nature of successive moves closer to and away from the object, and of repeated presentations of it; consequently, it assumes that there are listeners/receivers, their questions and answers, and responses to the answers. That is why it actually has neither a beginning nor an end. To express its dynamics we can use the metaphor of the *play* between the particular and the general. The former keeps eluding the latter, flickers in and breaks through it, it has the nature of a source: it

demands being expressed in language. Who I am, the integrity and separateness of my existence, and of the world around me with it, does not, then, depend only on temporally permanent psycho-physical components (biological identity, customs, etc.) but also on the language that I consider appropriate to relate this. In everyday experience this is a narrative constructed according to the available, genologically heterogeneous (scientific, religious, political etc.) narrative models. It speaks of events, in which particularities—both myself and the objects around me—take part and through which they acquire meaning. The identity of their meaning can therefore be only established, negotiated, interpreted but never known: its constitutive discursive and non-discursive elements are inextricably connected, forming opaque wholes.

The inevitable consequence of event ontology discussed above is the aforementioned pragmatic stance, according to which it is easier to identify such wholes and be at home with them, guided by common practices—the accepted modes/patterns of dealing with things and telling about them—rather than by their intellectual expressions that theories use. Thus Taylor, like Kant, views the particular as something that can be expressed in a model form by means of the accepted modes of presenting this something, or telling and formulating judgments about it. Strictly speaking, we do not recognize the particular, we only judge it, thereby entering into a dialog, an interaction with others who also have contact with it. Moreover, we cannot prove to anyone that these judgments are true because with individuals truth is not at issue, the force of the argument does not count, what matters at best is our power of persuasion and engagement in conversation. “A self”—Taylor says at this point—“exists only within what I call ‘webs of interlocation.’”²¹ These webs produce a community—it forms around the difference which is most noticeable precisely with the products of human expression, which, in the most general of terms, are social practices. Practices and human behaviors that make them up demand being understood rather than known. For they establish a certain order of the world not so much in accordance with the “truth” about it as in accordance with its more or less right, reliable or better conceptions than the ones offered by rival theories. For us they have the nature and force of proposals for specific ways of thinking and acting rather than theorems about them.

Another consequence of this ontology is the general controversiality of essentialist categories, *inter alia* such as the theoretical and the practical as

well as the philosophical and the literary. *Event ontology* is here a type of reflection comprehending the world, which occurs in the mode of expression, i.e. manifestation of itself, but never in the whole truth about itself, in all its essence. This ontology has its justification in the modern idea of nature as source, from which idea the Romantic concept of epiphanic art developed, based on the belief that it is art that is the “paradigm medium in which we express, hence define, hence realize ourselves.”²² Consequently, philosophy does not offer any exceptional viewpoint/access to truth—to any complete presence, to a transcendent, objective being or to the omniscient narrative or narrator. Taylor calls standpoints that claim that such access is possible *naturalist* and criticizes them. He thus undermines the foundations of enlightenment philosophy, both in its ancient and modern versions. He deprives it of the aforementioned *hubris*, the good mood, which accompanies either the belief that there is something like a true epistemic situation in reference to God (by challenging it, he otherwise opens the way to the negative/apophatic philosophy of God, according to which any comprehension of God is a kind of limitation) or the conviction that it is eminent philosophers who change the fate of culture. The latter, Taylor maintains, merely articulate phenomena that already function in culture, they help to give them direction and form. And that is all.

Languages, both literary and theoretical, articulate reality, transform it—our perception of and behavior within it—and in this sense they are established in it, they decide what is real and what is not. They never create it literally, from beginning to end. Rather, they change—or, as we shall see, *mutate*, properly speaking,—the meanings of the existing physical and cultural realities. They thereby blur the difference between cognition and creation, they make up the language/discourse, which is both an instrument of cognition (theory) and action (practice). From this point of view, modernity is therefore not so much and not only a certain historical era but above all the object of special presentation of the world in general, not connected with any definite place—geographical area—or time. As such it is then an ahistorical structure, which can be concretized in a unique way in any culture.

Mutation Composition

I already suggested in the first part that the stance of *seriousness and engagement* of the narrator of Taylor's narrative allows interpretation as a polemical answer to Hegel's analogous narrative about the birth of modernity. It is contained in the introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and reads as follows:

Besides, it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labor of its own transformation. Spirit is indeed never in rest but always engaged in moving forward. But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth—there is a qualitative leap, and the child is born—so likewise the Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted by isolated symptoms. The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world.²³

The modern, as we see, appears thus in the formal structure of the process: a certain property of a phenomenon (in which the process is going on) not *is* but only *becomes* or *vanishes* in it, or, in fact, in relation to Hegel's theory, we should say *becomes and vanishes at the same time*. For at the stage of becoming we never know what will become, we cannot therefore state whether this has become or not yet, whether what we see is still the old or the new. Two-valued logic fails in the face of phenomenon, which owes its identity to development dynamics fuelled by internal contradiction. The processes of being born and dying occur in it simultaneously: the spirit gradually dismantles, piece by piece, the edifice of its former world, it does so in a discreet rather than ostentatious way. It does not tell us from which element of the structure it will start and with which it will end. One thing is nevertheless known for sure: everything that is at the stage of vagueness and concealment should come to light some day. Conceptual clarity will ultimately win. But this is only a wish (wishful thinking, I could say). For what actually follows from Hegel's description of the birth of modernity is that we are never able to

experience *radical novelties*—to express them in the aforementioned excerpt, he used the metaphors of *sunburst* [Aufgang] and *flash* [Blitz]—we are always given only the metamorphoses or mutations of the existing pictures of the world. This does not change the fact that when anticipating—expecting—their coming, we also experience the dialectical end of history, exhaustion of its creative potential, the symptoms of which are frivolity and boredom. The end of history is usually the beginning of its new, different, more perfect form, whose manifestations will in turn be seriousness and engagement (by negation, as we may assume). And Taylor confirms this course of events.

The main motifs and themes of his narrative are also joined together through *mutation*—Latin *mutatio* means “change, transformation” but also “reciprocity.” Mutation as the mechanism of development of ideas is thus based on the assumption that between the structure of being and the structure of language there is a relationship of correspondence=reciprocity. We already know that Taylor defines it with the term *attunement*, whose pragmatist connotations allow him to feel at home with ideas that delineate the ways in which we tend to understand ourselves. In theory and in life, to “understand” means the same as to explain to oneself some phenomenon by identifying its fragments and their arrangement in a whole. This verb does not so much mean cognition as inspection, intuition, a sense of something. Understanding is therefore a certain mode of thinking and existence at the same time. It runs along the circle, tends towards the object and returns to itself. This is also the case with the subject of the operation of understanding modern identity, who seeks in the past the human notions/fictions/narratives that also co-organize his own experiences of the present and condition the possibility of understanding himself. To that end, he moves between premodern and modern imaginaries, and lays bridges between them so that he could then build his own systematic thought upon them. It seems therefore entirely unjustified to treat this thought in isolation from Taylor’s historical work. This is evidenced, for example, by the political theory (which I adduced earlier to confirm this thesis), in which Taylor combines liberal and communitarian ideas quite safely, claiming that procedural liberalism can be holistic²⁴; that individualism does not rule out responsibility, that “at its best authenticity allows a richer mode of existence”²⁵; that “the freedom of independence is hard to combine with that of self-rule.”²⁶ Although he uses the term “radical secularity”²⁷ when defining the public sphere, he