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

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Taylor's great body of work is essentially concerned with the modern condition but two major works stand out as providing a powerful depiction of the modern tension between meaning and agency. *Sources of the Self* relates the making of the modern identity in all its complexity and *A Secular Age* describes the making of modern secularism. These two aspects of modernity are complementary since the gradual turn to secularism signified the end of the hegemonic character of the transcendent in defining identity. This shift in the nature of belief consequently involves a change in the source and the character of morality. Both *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age* define the rise of the human agent who determines his or her own identity and morals without external authority. They also highlight the loss of meaning that ensues when the good – and any position towards the good – becomes an option, a choice that can be reassessed at any time.

This loss of meaning takes root in the modern negation of a cosmological source of order in favour of one predicated on the here and now, which resulted in the end of the favoured position of the transcendent as the undisputed source of meaning. The locus of meaning thus ceased to be exogenous and transcendent and became inner and immanent. As a result, in a modern, secular world, the transcendent no longer holds the position of the exclusive identity-defining authority.

This paper will argue that, whereas belief in the transcendent and its espousal as a source of meaning and moral structure once gave it the reach and significance of a framework – a reference point to orient individuals in moral space and from which springs all other goods and moral valuations –, now the transcendent is posited as a constitutive good: it can be optional and its importance in one's existence entirely depends on individual choice. As such, the transcendent still exists in modernity, but its significance is not as strong and unchallengeable as it used to be since human self-determination has become the final word. However, as a believer Taylor does not hold that the place of the transcendent as a constitutive good is its proper place. Rather, the modern position of the transcendent comes as a result of its modern secular articulation which causes the 'Enframing' – to use a Heideggerian term – of the true place of the transcendent into a moral space that is manageable for the secular framework. It will be argued that Taylor considers that such distortion, in redefining the transcendent as lifestyle, leads to a poorer and unsatisfactory way of seeing the world.

The modern tension between living a meaningful and purposeful life versus a life as an autonomous and willful agent is one that fully comes about with the demotion of the transcendent in the moral structure from the ultimate locus of morality and identity to merely being one of many. To focus solely on agency weakens meaning and this is what Taylor understands as a poorer view of the world. Instead, one needs to see the transcendent for its all-encompassing character in order to fully experience a deeply meaningful world that does not risk supersession predicated on individual preference. Taylor's definition of secularism essentially aims to highlight how the transcendent is still very present and influential in modernity. While he acknowledges that not everyone actively seeks or needs the transcendent, he however claims that those who do not seek it are misled: they live within its guidelines but are not conscious of it (Taylor "Secular" 768).

The stance held by Taylor that a life informed by the transcendent is markedly richer however raises a few questions. Such a statement makes the claim that those who are not open to spirituality have a poorer and misguided existence, as a result of their exclusive trust in the power of human agency, in comparison with those who are open to the transcendent. This gives rise to questions about Taylor's argument for pluralism. In his lecture entitled *A Catholic*

Modernity? Taylor makes the claim that pluralism is necessary to experience the wholeness of God's essence in human lives. Diverse complementarity is necessary. Therefore, to aim to convert other individuals to one's own faith is to go against a plurality needed to fully experience God's work (Taylor "Catholic" 14). Conversely, in *A Secular Age*, Taylor's attempt to define the transcendent and to cast non-believers as misguided aims to find ways to enlighten those who reject the theist conclusion. His 1999 lecture however argues for a more passive approach, where differences are not only acceptable but are in fact desirable. In light of the two works, it is unclear what Taylor intends to achieve with a re-articulation of the transcendent: is he merely trying to provide a language that will allow the theists to communicate with others within the prevalent, albeit misled immanent framework? Or is he rather trying to formulate the theistic position in a way that will eventually change the minds of the non-believers?

This paper will begin with an account of the transcendent in Taylor's moral structure as described in *Sources*. This contextualization will establish that the modern articulation of the transcendent can only take the place of a constitutive good, as opposed to its former definition as an inescapable framework. Furthermore, it will outline the consequences such a demotion has, not only on belief but also on meaning and identity. Finally, it will attempt to highlight the significance of Taylor's apparent contradiction with regards to his own faith and his articulation of the current secular context.

Identity, from Cosmos to Immanence

The movement towards modernity, individualism and immanence has led to a new definition of meaning and has discredited or diminished the importance of former definitions. The cosmological order defined the world as a whole and implied a notion of meaning that was hierarchical, with eternity and God at its apex. Such understanding of the world situated the individual in a universal moral space where God was undeniable and omnipresent ("Secular" 25). The immanent order is by contrast the idea of a universe, which has its order in science and natural laws, is non-hierarchical, follows secular time (60) and is essentially based on human agency, both collective and individual. As such, the modern conception of the transcendent is no longer an all-encompassing source of meaning. Rather, meaning becomes heterogeneous as a result of its earthly source, which consequently leads to many possible options that are just as valid as any other (15). Thus, the immanent order comes to challenge the transcendent, making meaning open to interpretation and always questionable.

"The unchallengeable status that belief enjoyed in earlier centuries has been lost" (530) and it is now possible to oscillate between belief and non-belief, to choose one or the other or from a broad range of choices in between. In modernity, not only has believing in God become a mere option, but it has become an option that is difficult to maintain (3).

Without the cosmological order, the individual is not part of the order of things anymore but he becomes its center. The understanding of the world as object upon which the human agent exerts its will has led to a dramatic change in the way one understands and defines the good. Where the world and its direction used to be unchallengeable and where identity was informed by this hegemonic order of the world, the hegemonic measure is now the self, i.e., identity, human choices and individual responses to one's surroundings.

An important characteristic of the modern identity is the detachment with which one can approach the world when the center of everything is the individual. The "buffered self" is

distanced from everything outside the mind. It allows the possibility of detachment without precluding a wholehearted engagement, whereas the "porous" individual did not have such a choice. The buffered self "can give its own autonomous order to its life" and thus it defines its inwardness and its detached rapport with the world (38). In contrast, the porous self is more readily affected by the world and its forces: the boundary between the self and the world being indeed permeable and fluctuating.

Yet, this individual autonomy is not the sole aspect of the modern self: Taylor defines that self as dialogical. "[O]ne cannot be a self on one's own," rather one is in relation to interlocutors that contribute to defining one's self. The individual is in dialogue with her world and therefore, not only her "stand on moral and spiritual dimensions but also some reference to a defining community" is central to the shaping of her identity ("Sources" 36). However, when the predominant idea in one society precludes another, it becomes difficult to make the latter intelligible to that society. Taylor's moral structure is intimately linked to identity. It provides a context within which people "can determine where they stand on questions of what is good, or worthwhile, or admirable or of value" (27). Individuals choose what provides them with the best account for meaning in their lives but it requires that this account speak to the individual. Thus the goods that are significant in one's life cannot change without a change in identity and in one's view of one's own position in the world.

However, while a moral standard based on the cosmological order may still be central to someone's life and identity, its reach is nevertheless limited within a modern, secular society. Moreover, its articulation in immanent terms will be difficult since such an attempt will fail to be understood as it was intended: using words such as 'duty' or 'obedience' that are either no longer intelligible or that have acquired a pejorative meaning. Therefore, "[a] human being can always be original, can step beyond the limits of thought and vision of contemporaries, can even be quite misunderstood by them," but this attempt will be lost if it is not done in some way within a language understood by others (37). To speak of a set of morals that has been largely rejected – or defined as untenable – by the majority is to use a language that is either in decline or no longer spoken. Therefore, a moral structure is not only necessary to define one's identity but it must also constitute the ground within which dialogues can take place, making that identity intelligible to others.

It is essential to be thorough and explicit in articulating the sources of identity in order not only to be able to communicate it to others but also to be aware of the very essence of one's background. That context influences aspects of our identity whether we are aware of it explicitly or not. "Our past is sedimented in our present, and we are doomed to misidentify ourselves, as long as we can't do justice to where we come from" ("Secular" 29). Thus, the trajectory that the self has taken must be acknowledged and described, which is one of Taylor's objectives in both *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age* viz., to make explicit what has been overlooked or misunderstood in the human narrative, viz., the root of identity and morals. Consequently, morals and the standard from which they arise must be fully grasped and clearly articulated in a society, using a language that is intelligible, in order to maintain its intended meaning across world views. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor provides a moral structure to account for the context from which is shaped our identity: frameworks, hypergoods, constitutive goods and life goods. Each good provides a dimension of morals, stands and choices that shapes the way one views the world and oneself.

The Background: Frameworks

> "My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand" ("Sources" 27).

In order to situate oneself in the world and to take a position towards what one understands as good, one needs to base these choices on an understanding of what is most significant to oneself. What Taylor defines as strong evaluations are what organize one's moral landscape by establishing a hierarchy of goods that helps determine the choices one makes. At the same time, they distinguish between which choices require one to take a moral stance in line with that hierarchy and which choices do not. For instance, using common transportation in order to reduce one's carbon footprint demonstrates a behaviour defined by a moral stance. In contrast, using common transportation because one's car is at the garage for maintenance is not a moral choice but merely a logistical decision. Qualitative distinctions determine whether choices have moral implications and the ground of such differentiations depend on what orients the individual in moral space, viz. the basic orientation that is the framework (30).

Thus it seems impossible to live without a framework because it gives the standard from which qualitative distinctions are defined. Also, a framework not only provides one with an orientation in moral space but also with a common space of interlocution with others: it involves "some reference to a defining community" (36). In contrast, someone without a framework would not be able to determine what was important from what was trivial; there would be no bearings upon which to stand on issues of importance or to be able to answer for one on those issues (31). Therefore, the absence of a framework in a person's life means experiencing an identity crisis and standing outside of any space of interlocution: the individual would not be intelligible to her surroundings. This suggests that frameworks are largely dialogical in that they need to provide a common ground upon which to articulate goods.

However, frameworks do not solely apply to the community. The individual aspect of the framework provides the background for qualitative distinctions, the ordering of which depends on what makes sense to one. While they are essential to provide intelligibility within the community, frameworks are also essential to define the way one will position oneself in moral space: they require self-determination in that it belongs to "human agency to exist in a space of questions about strongly valued goods, prior to all choice or adventitious cultural change" (31). The individual is called to take a stand on what she considers meaningful and important and frameworks provide the context to make that stand significant. Such decisions further define identity by giving human nature a narrative dimension in that one's choices reflect one's notion of the good, one's position toward it and what contributes to reaching it.

However frameworks, by changing and not being uniformly accepted, demonstrate that "we are dealing not with something grounded in the nature of being, but rather with changeable human interpretations" (26). By contributing to define identity, frameworks can take different forms. For instance, one's way of acting might be seen as purer, some way of living as fuller or more admirable than others (20). This explains why, in modernity, frameworks cannot be shared by everyone. Taylor contrasts our modern relation to frameworks to that of Luther who could not separate the meaning of his life from the unquestionable framework within which he lived (18), whereas the modern individual's quest for meaning is strongly tied to finding it within a plausible framework. The modern predicament, therefore, is a search for meaning that comes

with a broadening of human agency; the individual being the one who defines which framework provides the best explanation for one's life (52). Whereas in Luther's time, the framework – which can still be the framework of some people today – could not be challenged, the modern framework can be altered, chosen, replaced until it provides the best account for one's life. As a result, there can be more than one framework present in one society. However, a diversity of frameworks does not necessarily mean incomprehension among them based on their differences. On the contrary, all frameworks make sense of intuitive responses which are intrinsic in humans and which Taylor defines as moral intuitions. These intuitions – benevolence, or respect for others, ordinary life, or what we understand makes one's life full, and dignity (15) –, present in all frameworks, are expressed in different proportions, which explains why it is still possible to find potential for intelligibility within frameworks.

Articulating the transcendent as a framework such as it was in Martin Luther's time is, in the modern immanent frameworks, almost nonsensical. Luther's framework was predicated on the transcendent but today "the cosmos theories are no longer believed; they are even no longer intelligible" ("Secular" 324). Furthermore, Taylor argues that the current lack of credibility of the transcendent is that it is essentially the result of a view towards religion that borders on the more radical yet equally pervasive attitude that is usually present after a revolution. "A post-revolutionary climate is extremely sensitive to anything that smacks of the *ancien régime* and sees backsliding even in relatively innocent concessions to generalized human preferences." ("Catholic" 24). Therefore "it is by virtue of its post-revolutionary climate that western modernity is very inhospitable to the transcendent" (25). For this reason, the transcendent can no longer be credibly articulated nor established as a collective moral source such as a framework.

In addition, since frameworks are strongly linked to identity, providing a narrative for one's moral position and making sense of one's life, it is difficult to envision the framework as being similar for each individual, especially when Taylor defines them as what informs and completes one's identity ("Secular" 27, 47). On the other hand, since frameworks must also be intelligible and provide guidelines towards moral questions posed in society, then frameworks cannot be tremendously diverse at the social level in order to maintain cohesiveness and intelligibility within society. Consequently, the transcendent cannot hold a believable role as a framework in modernity, if a framework is understood as a collective notion which provides a general understanding of one's moral space, identity and place within the community. Since not everyone shares this attachment to the transcendent as a background to one's morality, and since the framework in a community must have basic uniting traits that define that community, the transcendent can no longer be intelligible as a framework. Instead, the transcendent needs to be a private choice without it being prescriptive, such as it is as a constitutive good.

Collective Hypergoods

The framework provides the context from which one can make qualitative distinctions and establish one's strongly valued goods. There is nonetheless a hierarchy that is established within what one considers as goods and it follows that one of those goods will have a place above all the others as the most significant. Taylor defines these goods as hypergoods, i.e., "goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about ("Sources" 63)." These goods define the 'moral', what has importance and that through which we judge others (63). While it could

be argued that Taylor posits the transcendent as a hypergood, the nature of hypergoods however does not make it plausible.

In her book on Taylor, Ruth Abbey has identified some vagueness in his definition of hypergoods: "Taylor seems to vacillate about whether hypergoods feature in all moral frameworks or only some (Abbey 36)." She indicates some passages that argue for the former and for the latter. As argued above, frameworks are understood collectively to provide webs of interlocution as the background for identity that will allow for a common language. However, as such they still have individual importance in that one's identity and one's position within the framework will define one's strongly valued goods through qualitative distinctions. Taylor first defines hypergoods as individual in positing that the recognition of a hypergood in one's life means that a disconnection from such good would be devastating, its presence being essential to one's identity (Taylor "Sources" 63). Hypergoods are also defining of one's identity in that one accepts a hypergood as the moral standard in one's life by being moved by it (73). Taylor does mention, however that, while not everybody would have such a hegemonic moral standard in their life, everyone is capable of distinguishing and recognizing higher goods (63). Further into the section, Taylor suggests that hypergoods are rather a notion with a collective reach: they have the potential to be superseded by others over time and have an error-reducing character (64). Taylor gives the example of the modern "notion of universal justice and/or benevolence, in which all humans are to be treated equally with respect" which replaced, 'through a number of hard-fought and painfully won stages" (64), the origins of other goods such as Platonism and Judaeo-Christian revelations which themselves were a supersession of the Homeric-inspired warrior ethic (65).

In light of these apparent contradictions in the nature of hypergoods, Abbey chooses to argue that they are personal and that "only some people's moral frameworks include a hypergood" (Abbey 37). Her reasons are that if hypergoods were widely adopted, the questions and issues about pluralism would not be of much concern and such widespread embrace of hypergoods would however not provide a convincing account for the many people who do not live a life strongly defined by such goods (37). Hypergoods for Abbey are therefore contingent. However, as such they fail to provide an account of what determines an individual to have or not to have a hypergood in their life.

Abbey thus defines the hypergood as a largely individual moral standard – and what is more, as optional – which may appear to carry a possible place for the transcendent as an individual hypergood, especially since the hypergood understood in this sense would feed into one's individual narrative of one's journey towards that good (Taylor "Sources" 47). However, to define the hypergood as an exclusively individual good is to disregard its error-reducing character and as such hypergoods cannot account for the supersession of collectively held goods in time. If this error-reducing aspect is however taken into consideration, it leads one to the conclusion that hypergoods can only be collective.

Also, to view the hypergood as a private good likens it to a Kierkegaardian life-defining, unconditional commitment, where the moral ideal becomes a commitment that overpowers all others (Kierkegaard 29), a moral duty that becomes the sole guide and judge of one's position in a moral landscape and the only measure through which one evaluates the world. Abbey gives the example of a political activist willing to sacrifice his freedom in going to prison to follow his moral ideal (Abbey 36) or of an environmental activist living in a tree with the sacrifices to her comfort and privacy that such measures entail to fight for her convictions (35). This definition could imply that the transcendent, whether in the form of organized religion or an embodiment of

a particular denomination, could be a hypergood – for instance in the life of a cloistered nun or of a catholic priest – where one's entire life is dedicated to one's hypergood, at the cost of most other goods.   Yet, the modern notion of the transcendent in its secular context would define the Kierkegaardian hegemonic commitment as exclusive and hermetic. In addition, within Abbey's definition, the error-reducing motion of hypergoods could not apply to individuals because then the hypergood would not hold such a hegemonic position in a person's life if it could always be toppled by a better version. Such a supersession of the hypergood at the individual level would wreak havoc in the identity of one who goes through that kind of transition, as it has been established that Taylor tightly links morals and identity.   Moreover, if the Hypergood is contingent and essentially individual as Abbey argues, this close relation between the individual and its hypergood might just make it unintelligible to others.

Rather, Taylor gives hypergoods a role to play in individuals' lives – in the sense that they do contribute to further define identity – but they are essentially a great and important characteristic of social morality and identity. He defines them as a source of conflicts in a society, as former hypergoods are replaced by a more suitable one that will hold what its adherents will consider as a "higher moral consciousness" (Taylor "Sources" 65).   Thus a hypergood is understood as providing a much better moral source than the previous one and its supersession establishes a new standard by which to evaluate the current views held in a society. The hypergood can therefore alter what was considered a good moral value in a society and posit it as no longer relevant, thus creating a break over time, pushing aside what was once esteemed. However, the hypergoods that are superseded still remain, some "seem[ing] ineradicable from the human heart" (65) and thus may cause tension within a society.   Furthermore, since it has such a strong emotional hold on the individual and therefore on its very identity, and since the process of its supersession in time suggests an improvement towards a "higher moral consciousness" (64), accepting someone holding a different hypergood will prove difficult when there is an irreconcilable "absence of unanimity" about them (70). However, Taylor is very clear when he states that such hypergoods, as they are replaced by 'better' ones, do not wholly disappear and still inform some aspects of the moral landscape (65-70) and as a result keep a society's morals in tension, which hints at a notion of plurality.   Thus Abbey's argument that "the challenges of pluralism would not be as piquant as Taylor […] suggests" (Abbey 37) if hypergoods were central to everyone's moral structure is not entirely justified since the broad adoption of a hypergood is not a unanimous phenomenon. While there may be a prevailing one in a society, it is nonetheless constantly challenged by resilient moral standards left by former hypergoods.

The transcendent therefore cannot be plausibly understood as a hypergood since the nature of the hypergood as something that can and will be superseded – as we come up with better standards for the good – cannot be reconciled with the a-temporal character of the transcendent. Moreover, since one's adoption of a hypergood is predicated on one's ability to be moved by it, it can often be informed by a higher order, viz. nature, the Good, or God (Taylor "Sources" 73), and it would therefore be redundant to understand the transcendent as something predicated on a transcendent notion. On the contrary, it is this paper's argument that Taylor understands the modern context as only able to articulate the transcendent as a constitutive good.

Constitutive Goods – or the Innocuous Transcendent

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

Taylor argues that constitutive goods had once a source external to humans (when based on the good, nature, or God), whereas with modern humanism, the source of constitutive goods is internal. However, "an entirely immanent view of the good is compatible with recognizing that there is something the contemplation of which commands our respect, which respect in turn empowers" (94). The important factor is in how one's love of a constitutive good "empowers us to do and be good" (93), whether the source is rooted in the transcendent or in the immanent, whether it is exogenous or endogenous. Therefore, what is important is that the constitutive good is purposefully adopted by the individual. With love as the power behind one's choice of a constitutive good, it becomes clear that the object of that love will not be the same for everyone. It is therefore reasonable to assume that constitutive goods will be multiple within a given society, but also that one single constitutive good can be widely shared as well, such as with religion, the scientistic view, the radical humanist view, or utilitarianism (339). All of those constitutive goods coexist within modern liberal democracy.

The modern view of the transcendent as a constitutive good gives to one who holds this notion as a moral standard an understanding of one's world that does not necessarily contrast with a society that might not share this position. A constitutive good does not fundamentally conflict with others' or the state's established values and morals since there are already some levels of commonality in the goods that are more widely shared as a society, such as the hypergoods and the framework. While constitutive goods are essentially individual and may not be fully comprehended by others, such lack of understanding does not make interlocution impossible: the framework allows various constitutive goods to interact and coexist – at least on a basic level. Such goods can furthermore be primordial for an individual without necessarily being so for many, as would a hypergood. Also unlike a hypergood, a constitutive good is predicated on individual choice and not on something that is error-reducing. Finally, the transcendent as constitutive good does not have a hegemonic hold on one's life at the cost of all other goods, like it would if the hypergood was simply an individual good, as Abbey argues. However, the transcendent still has a great deal of meaning in that it is linked to one's identity but it also announces a new approach to belief and religious practice: privatization in what Taylor terms as excarnation, or "the transfer of our religious life out of bodily forms of ritual, worship, practice, so that it comes more and more to reside "in the head"" ("Secular" 613).

Implications

The modern framework puts a strong emphasis on the individual and, with regards to the transcendent, it means that we have the notion that "we should be following our own spiritual sense" (516). This hints at a notion of having grown out of the "naïve" framework of belief in the transcendent, into the "reflective" condition of unbelief (15). There is almost a hint of having reached the adulthood of humanity in that ability to define what provides meaning to one's life rather than having one unchallengeable version. However, Taylor looks at this shift in terms of how fullness became understood as not being necessarily "beyond" human life but rather often replaced by a view of it "within" human life (15). This notion brings about the possibility of a wide range of ways to reach human flourishing that will conflict with each other (15).

"It is a pluralist world, in which many forms of belief and unbelief jostle, and hence fragilize each other. It is a world in which belief has lost many of the social matrices which made it seem "obvious" and unchallengeable" (531). Now belief has not only become an option among many others but this range of options have caused fragmentation and instability in societies "as people change their positions during a lifetime, or between generations, to a greater degree than ever before" (594). There is an increasing gamut of possibilities in what Taylor calls the Nova effect, which "generated the challenge, undermining and dissolution of the early social forms which embedded God's presence in social space" (531). There are resulting pressures from the options where an immanent outlook is appealing but the transcendent highlights its inadequacy, which is reflected in a great range of middle positions between those two extremes (595). The mutual exclusiveness of belief and non-belief becomes less relevant with the emergence of many alternatives between.

Taylor argues that such a fragilizing effect often comes with a mingling of the various views, where an everyday proximity and a mutual adoption of the practices and culture of the other makes differences greatly decrease. Consequently, when the only difference is faith, the shift might not seem so preposterous, thus otherness will tend to turn into the familiar. "Homogeneity and instability work together to bring the fragilizing effect of pluralism to a maximum" (304). The modern ability to choose among an increasing range of explanations and moral standards can be and certainly is perceived as an unprecedented achievement towards an autonomy that roots meaning in an internal source as opposed to an external one. As a result, the source of meaning in one's life is essentially constituted of one's choices, views, beliefs and position towards what one defines as the good. The end of the unchallenged framework that provided a hermetical meaning – which made it impossible for one to doubt the legitimacy of that framework – brought about a greater emphasis on human agency as provider of meaning. What I referred to above as the adulthood of humanity – one's self-determination defining what is significant – therefore results in a weaker notion of meaning since it is predicated on individual choices that can always change and consequently that can redefine what is meaningful. Hence, what Taylor understands as fragilizing is the narrowing of meaning and the limited range that this meaning has over a life that comes with such possibilities.

This modern stance centered on individual agency means that "[w]e tend to live in our heads, trusting our disengaged understandings: of experience, of beauty […]; even the ethical: we think that the only valid form of ethical self-direction is through rational maxims or understanding" (555). Such turn inward defines the notion of the 'buffered' self, which allows the possibility to distance oneself from everything that is not of the mind and thus to rely solely on oneself to order one's life (38). The sense of vulnerability to the world that came with a more

'porous' self is rejected with the notion that what matters and is real is inward, which gives a different understanding of self and world. As a result, negative things are viewed as inward and not outward and therefore are dealt with differently (38). Following such focus inward to establish meaning, the notion of a higher end that was posited by the cosmological order shifts into a life devoid of higher purpose and essentially based on mutual benefit and on human flourishing (242). Furthermore, any notion of miracles are reified as they are put within an order of things grounded on the predictable, natural order and thus are mere "punctual intervention interrupting a regular order (547)." This emphasis on inwardness opened the way to a culture of authenticity where human flourishing and self-realization depends on the individual and where outside pressures to conform are to be rejected in favour of one's own individuality, the affirmation of which will be praised (475).

The drive towards authenticity, in turn, results in a quest for meaning that is limited to a shallow version, based on the immanent and self-centeredness: a search for spiritual depth predicated on the 'I'. That focus on individual experience sees the rise of numerous alternatives that attempt to provide a middle ground between blind obedience to authority and shallow self-actualization (508-9). Authenticity and these alternate sources of meaning demonstrate the flattening that meaning has gone through when the end result is essentially confined to self-development. This flattening results in the fact that individuals "sense the inadequacy of [a spiritual quest as a move towards immanence]; this itself awakens the "Peggy Lee" response, and they want to move on" (508-9). Yet as the alternatives based on the transcendent become less and less plausible and agency within the immanent frame which was once "one possible construction among others […] becomes part of the unquestioned background", something unnoticed but which "conditions […] the way we think, infer, experience, process claims and arguments" (565). It gradually becomes the default paradigm and any other alternative recedes to the margins and the immanent frame (modern science, buffered identity, individualism, reliance on instrumental reason, action in secular time) becomes unchallengeable (566).

Accordingly, without the notion that the current paradigm (framework) could be inadequate, people merely go from one immanent source of meaning to another, without thinking that perhaps it is not the source of meaning that is the problem but the fact that it is based on immanence. Taylor describes how the unsatisfactory way immanence accounts for significant moments in one's life leaves one with an especially strong sense of flatness, which is exacerbated within consumer society. He also claims that such flatness explains how religious rituals are still sought to solemnize rites of passage, even by those with no other connection with religion outside of these ceremonies (309). One can therefore argue that as a mere matter of choice, meaning will never have any authority above human agency since one can always replace it by what one deems a better choice. Thus, meaning is always tentative.

Under the predominance of the immanent frame the transcendent cannot hold the place it used to when the immanent currently holds a similar unchallengeable place. The transcendent is still plausible as a good but not for everyone, which is why this paper argues that in the modern context, the transcendent can only be articulated as a constitutive good which allows for both detachment and a deep engagement while not being prescriptive to others nor challenged by any other authority than the holder of that good.

However, the modern articulation of the transcendent as a constitutive good does not change its all-encompassing existence for Taylor. He does not believe that the transcendent has lost its position as the overarching moral standard: even in the atheists' rejection of the transcendent, it is still inescapable. He argues that this modern rejection of the transcendent as

the provider of meaning and as a moral source, while understood as a liberation of humans in having the prerogative to define what is meaningful for them, nonetheless requires the acknowledgement of the transcendent as an option in order to reject it. "Faith has to remain a possibility or else the self-valorizing understanding of atheism founders" (591). Since identity and one's moral standard are still strongly connected to faith – or lack thereof – it is impossible for humans to not stand in some relation to faith without it being an identity-defining issue (592). Unless religious belief becomes detached from our identity and our ethics, the option of non-belief will still hold within it the possibility of faith. For Taylor, what is missing is a way to articulate this 'reality' in a language that can be palatable to the moderns.

Taylor suggests that any notion of fullness responds to a transcendent reality, whether the notion is a theistic or atheistic fullness – the non-religious notions are simply misrecognizing it (768). He makes himself even more explicit in his claim that the outlook on the world through the perspective of the transcendent provides a richer life in the following:

> "Our sense of the universe is not unequivocal […]. It can occlude all sense of order, but it also can be the locus of powerful spiritual meanings. When these are denied, the result is often a narrow and philistine scientism. But if we are open to them, the outcomes can be very varied: read one way, in an Epicurean-naturalist direction, they lead us towards a deep and rich materialism; taken another way, they can open us to a range of spirituality and for some people, to God ("Secular" 375)."

It follows that the transcendent for Taylor is not an option and that to reject it is merely to have a poorer experience of the world and a false sense of freedom and disconnection from that world. Taylor wants to articulate this view so people find the meaning they need. However, he acknowledges that many good things came out of secular modernity such as equality, plurality, affirmation of ordinary life and its anti-elitist stance on some religious practices ("Catholic" 23) and gospel-inspired action (26) so Taylor tries to find a way that could safeguard aspects from both modern secularism and the transcendent so they can plausibly coexist.

He thus offers examples of possible attempts to rearticulate the transcendent in ways that can be intelligible to a society living within an immanent frame. Art becomes a probable avenue through which the transcendent could be articulated. However, what tend to result are dissociation between the content of the work of art, in this case the divine, and the form that depicts it. The work of art represents an archetype aimed at moving us as the transcendent would, but it is becoming something that merely triggers and portrays being moved as emotion. As a result, one experiences similar feelings as one might experience with the divine without having it as subject of the work of art ("Secular" 355). Art, however, is also an outlet, a middle ground for modern unbelief where one can experience a sense of a beyond, a greater unity through what Taylor terms "subtler languages" which allow one to experience beauty and its link to a notion of cosmos or unity through the language of art, be it music, painting or poetry (359).

Another channel for a modern encounter with the transcendent has to do with seeking to live a common experience. While the quest for authenticity and meaning is perhaps not favourable to common experience, Taylor claims that one's desire to identify with a community will find the desired connection in the festive (516). By the festive, Taylor understands various experiences, gatherings, celebrations or even tragedies, from raves to pilgrimages to the funeral of an important public figure that will "wrench us out of the everyday, and put us in contact with something beyond ourselves" (516). The festive is understood as "a niche in our world, where the […] transcendent can erupt into our lives, however well we have organized them around

immanent understandings of order" (518). These immanent experiences of order and greatness beyond human flourishing, stand as an attempt to articulate the transcendent in immanent terms, rooting its articulation in human agency – by being the author or the viewer of the works of art or being an organizer or a participant in popular gatherings.

These attempts to re-articulate the transcendent are tried out as a result of the modern tension between meaning and agency with which individuals struggle. "[T]hose who want to opt for the ordered, impersonal universe, whether in its scientist-materialist form, or in a more spiritualized variant, feel the imminent loss of a world of beauty, meaning, warmth, as well as of the perspective of a self-transformation beyond the everyday" (592). However, in light of that modern predicament, even those who will choose the spiritual meaning and therefore will be moved towards God, will nevertheless doubt that they might be wrong and that the world might in fact be meaningless: "they feel that their strong desire for God […] might after all be the self-induced illusion that materialists claim it to be (593)." Hence, to believe in the transcendent in the modern context viz., as a constitutive good means that one will likely be confronted with doubt as to the certainty of one's choice.

Taylor's depiction of the rise of modernity and the ensuing changes upon the self and individual notions of the transcendent make clear that a return to a previous epoch is impossible. The "ratchet effect" posits that one cannot return to a previous understanding of the transcendent even if it might constitute a more accurate vision of it (289). The return to a time when the framework was predicated on the cosmological order and was inescapable is not only impossible but also undesirable, according to Taylor's argument in *A Catholic Modernity?* In this essay, he holds that Christianity needed to take the step back it was made to take following the Enlightenment in order to take a new direction that would not negate but add to the changes that have occurred as a result of the modern framework (18).

What Taylor intends to do in his two major works but more markedly in *A Secular Age*, is to provide a language that will articulate the inescapability of the transcendent but in a way that will be acceptable in the modern understanding. Modernity has 'enframed' the transcendent as a constitutive good with the above-mentioned repercussions. It is necessary therefore to articulate to the moderns that the secular language masks the overarching presence of the transcendent and that, while it may seem like it has been debunked and replaced, it is still very much at the core of human life. Taylor wants to use the modern language to provide a way to intelligibly highlight that modern 'Enframing'. In addition, he hints at an outline of what shape a modern transcendent that would blend agency and meaning could take through art and collective experiences.

This articulation challenges Taylor's argument for plurality since an inescapable transcendent denies the validity of unbelief and dismisses it as merely misled. Moreover, while he argues for plurality as the richness of a full experience of the existence of God in *A Catholic Modernity?* (14), a contradictory argument for pluralism as providing a weakening of positions and an eventual 'métissage' of the two extremes into a myriad of other options he defends in *A Secular Age* (304) is unmistakable. Thus, in light of the contradictions and his unclear position, it can be wondered whether Taylor's plurality is a shallow notion that is only possible among believers or if he maintains that even non-believers live by theistic precepts but are merely unaware of it. If the latter formulation is the case, is there any notion of plurality in Taylor's view if all moral positions are in fact based on the transcendent, whether they are postulated as an affirmation or a rejection of it? Moreover, considering Taylor's position towards the

inescapability of the transcendent, one can ask what kind of pluralism does he describe? Is it similar to Lockean toleration? Given that a large range of moral options is taken to weaken every moral position, how can a pluralistic society provide anything more than a narrow and temporary kind of meaning? Furthermore, if we follow the claim that Taylor seeks to articulate the inescapability of the transcendent in modern, secular terms, it is a wonder whether the transcendent can be re-articulated in a way that does not use any metanarratives or hegemonic, universal language. Moreover, to break its modern enframing, is a re-articulation of the transcendent even possible or would it yet again provide a mere temporal interpretation of it? Would it be a problem if that were the case?

Finally, Taylor tries to provide the space for a new version of the transcendent where the modern dilemma could be solved but what does it entail to blend the transcendent with agency? Thus one comes to the question at the core of modernity and of Taylor's work: is a synthesis between agency and meaning at all possible?

Taylor's project in both *Sources of The Self* and *A Secular Age* is to define the transcendent in modernity by way of articulating the secular. The place given to the transcendent in modernity is one that does not provide the richness of meaning it used to provide when it had an unchallenged place in people's lives. Without arguing for a return to the past, Taylor tries to provide a notion of the transcendent that will make sense and be acceptable to non-believers in an attempt to reconcile them to an idea of the beyond: he thus attempts to unify transcendence and modernity by catering to human agency. Such an endeavour posits that Taylor holds a narrow view of pluralism because it is one essentially predicated on transcendence, albeit expressed in various forms. If one takes the position that there is no pluralism possible between faith and unbelief since they are two mutually exclusive positions, then in defining atheism as nonetheless informed by the transcendent, atheism is uncovered as a delusion, a failure of the non-believer to see the truth of the existence of the transcendent. As a result the dichotomy between faith and unbelief dissolves but so does the option of unbelief.

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