

**FROM SITTlichkeit TO RECOGNITION: HEGEL'S ETHICAL LIFE AND
CHARLES TAYLOR'S MODERN SOCIAL IMAGINARY**

**Gabriel Zombobah FELIX, PhD,
Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, PhD
&
Ejikemeuwa J. O. NDUBISI, PhD**

Abstract

Hegel is often seen as a philosopher of history, probably because of the ardent desire to remain relevant. For Charles Taylor, rather than simply being an insightful history scholar, Hegel becomes very interested in resolving Enlightenment and Romantic tensions through a totally new ontology. Philosophers never write in vacuum. For this reason, Taylor makes us battle with serious issues, at times cogent philosophy and he at least gives us the intellectual background to comprehend the who-what-where-and-whys of the goals of Hegel. This study explores the philosophical trajectory from G.W.F. Hegel's concept of Sittlichkeit (ethical life) to Charles Taylor's notions of recognition and the modern social imaginary, employing a hermeneutic method to interpret their continuity and divergence. For Hegel, Sittlichkeit represents the concrete realization of freedom through participation in family, civil society, and the state, sustained by mutual recognition within ethical institutions. Taylor, drawing on this heritage, reformulates recognition as a moral and political necessity in the context of modern pluralist societies. His concept of the social imaginary extends Hegel's insights by emphasizing the lived background of practices, norms, and expectations that structure collective life. The hermeneutic approach adopted here situates both thinkers within their historical and cultural contexts while uncovering the dialogical threads that link them. The paper argues that Taylor's framework may be read as a reinterpretation of Hegel's Sittlichkeit, adapted for the challenges of modernity: cultural diversity, secularization, and globalization. While Hegel locates ethical life in the rational structures of institutions, Taylor underscores the fluid, historically contingent imaginaries through a hermeneutic lens. This study demonstrates how the dialogue between Hegel and Taylor illuminates contemporary debates on identity, justice, and human flourishing. In sum, Taylor's analysis of recognition and the modern social imaginary can be seen as a critical extension of Hegelian ethical life for the 21st century.

Keywords: Taylor, Hegel, Sittlichkeit (Ethical life), Recognition, Social Imagery, Modernity

Introduction

Taylor believes so much in the importance of the writing of Hegel in philosophical discourses for two reasons: first because it provides the required background in

order to understand the present situation; and secondly, because the philosophical synthesis of Hegel presents a good example for a meaningful organization of our thoughts into a new synthesis that is very significant.

To clarify this better, we look at the earlier days of Taylor's philosophical endeavor, where he dedicates a great deal of efforts in studying Hegel. Consequently, in 1975 he produced the most relevant work of that period which he titled *Hegel*, where he sufficiently breaks down Hegel's philosophical opus. An abridged version of the same book was published in 1979, as *Hegel and Modern Society*. These two books do not have the same center of gravity even though the second is more or less a summary of the first (Hegel). The first (Hegel) gives abundant exposition of Hegel and somehow a re-introduction of his philosophy into the English-speaking environment, which was greatly dominated at that period by the analytical philosophical viewpoint and, as a result, skeptical of the philosophical statements of Hegel. On the other hand, the second book (Hegel and Modern Society), as mentioned earlier, is a summary of the first, though it omits the interpretation of *Logic*, *Phenomenology* and the chapters on art, religion and philosophy. With this, we can see that the second book is more than simply a summary of the first, that is why Taylor writes in the introduction that: "The purpose [of *Hegel and Modern Society*] was to produce not only an exposition of Hegel, but a view of the ways in which he is vital to contemporary philosophers".¹

To this end, our focus is to analyze mainly the second book on Hegel and some of the articles Taylor wrote about Hegel. Being a child of the Romantic era, Hegel highlighted various means by which we can overcome the myopic tendencies of the Enlightenment period with its prioritizing of reason. During the period of his studies at Oxford University, Taylor faced similar issues to that of Hegel. He discovered some of his professors were logical positivists, their lectures on linguistic and ethical theories are based on logic, and there is so much emphasis on rational approach. Taylor found their statements rather very boring, uncharitable, and baseless. Therefore, as a contrary reaction, Taylor diverted his focus to Hegel and the Romantic epoch, where he discovered so much fount of illumination for his own philosophical mirroring and, especially for his critique of modern scientism, positivism, behaviourism, atomism, and liberalism, as he explains in an interview for the journal *Idler*.² For Taylor to re-introduce the not so easy philosophy of Hegel into the pragmatism of the Anglo-Saxon world, he suggested his first book (Hegel), where he analyzes Hegel and also gives a critique

¹ Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. xi.

² Charles Taylor, 'Balancing the Humours: Charles Taylor Talks to the Editors', in *The Idler*, Nov.- Dec. 1989, p. 24.

which is based on pragmatic principles.³ Taylor states clearly in the same interview for the journal *Idler* that he has never been Hegelian, regardless of his passion for Hegel; all the same, he admires Hegel because of all sorts of insightful analyses on certain periods of the history of Europe and of a new vision of human development in a unified way.

Taylor argues that Hegel was the first influential thinker to attempt to put together the entire Western Modernity, and understand the religious, economic, and political, cultural, and philosophical developments in a unified way. He is indispensable as one of the starting points, because he did it very well, and because everyone has been reacting against him or trying to footnote or amend him all along.⁴

By this, Hegel is interpreted by Taylor as the link between the Enlightenment and the successive nineteenth and twentieth centuries, likewise our own time. As a result, he views the philosophical thought of Hegel as also mind-shaping and inspiring in our post-modern period. He adds: Hegel has contributed to the formation of concepts and ways of thinking which are irreplaceable if we are to navigate through particular modern problems and dilemmas.⁵

Modern Identity and Its Moral Source

Taylor normally distinguishes two aspects when he talks about modern identity: the first is the subject of modern identity or what it means to be a human agent, a person, a self; while the second is the good, and morality and the sources of morality.⁶ What concerns us in this dissertation relates to the status of the question in Taylor's work. Taylor gives a new meaning to the question of morality in modernity with regard to the prevalent normative ethics. He does this with his description and definition of the good. His meaning of the good is derived from the context or the framework where the good is placed, and from its relation to the human agent. With this, Taylor has brought us to the present. The history has largely been told; getting to the 19th century is so much all we need of a genealogy that will make sense of our present. Taylor is in the habit of talking about "our Victorian contemporaries."⁷ One of the things we notice in Taylor's writing is how he moves from history to analysis – though the distinction is mostly heuristic at its

³ The presence and relevance of Hegel has never been in doubt anywhere except within the Anglo-Saxon world. Therefore, every manual on Continental Philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth century will demonstrate the enormous influence of Hegel on modern philosophy, theology and other human disciplines.

⁴ Charles Taylor, 'Balancing the Humours: Charles Taylor Talks to the Editors', p. 23.

⁵ Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, xi.

⁶ Barrie, J. A., 'Probing Modernity', *Quadrant*, 40(5), 82-83, 1996.

⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, 395.

best in the work of Taylor. When Taylor tells (his)story he has already departed from the “standard story” about the path to our present – the standard story always being some version of a subtraction story. Let me state something I have seen in Taylor’s work thus far, Taylor takes up themes and issues generally treated under the rubric of “secularization,” giving an account of the decline of religious practice in the Western world. He points out clearly in the eleventh chapter of *A Secular Age*,⁸ that what he is particularly interested in is how religion has been decoupled from society and its institutions.

Lack of Sufficient Foundations for Morality in Normative Ethics

Taylor broadens the notion of morality in what modernity normally describes as the *moral*, from the very start of his masterpiece, *Sources of the Self*. After looking at the issues such as justice, respect for the life of people, well-being, and dignity, we have to look “at our sense of what underlines our own dignity, or questions about what makes our lives meaningful or fulfilling”.⁹ Having given this extended definition of *morality*, Taylor distinctively reveals the insufficiency of the prevailing mainstream of moral philosophy in the English-speaking world over the last two centuries. The same moral philosophy reduces *morality* to moral obligations or theories and principles of right conduct, telling us what we ought to do, but excluding what is good to do or what may be good.¹⁰ According to Taylor, this type of comprehension of morality contradicts itself because it does include a certain good. At the same time, such a discourse based on a limited notion of morality lacks precision, which is necessary for an adequate explanation of morality, human nature, and the moral sources of modern identity. Taylor did not only resist the mainstream of modern moral philosophy while introducing an extended notion of morality, but also criticizes every theory that favors “a conception of the world freed from anthropocentric conceptions”.¹¹ First of all, by this, Taylor means all a naturalistic conception of human being and any moral teaching is based on naturalism. Such theories insist that we ought to understand human beings in terms contiguous with the modern natural sciences. As a result, we should include the methods and ontology of natural sciences as the most appropriate model for our self-understanding, and turn away from the descriptions of things in terms of significance, value, and meaning. Naturalism, and moral thinking based on naturalism, understands morality simply as a guide

⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* 377-419.

⁹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 4.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, ‘A Most Peculiar Institution’, in J. E. J. Altham & Ross Harrison, *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 134-135.

¹¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 56.

to human *action*.¹² This guidance explains to us what is right to be done and what the contents of moral obligations are, but leaves out the explanations about what good means, what the nature of the good life is, what is valuable in itself, or what we should admire or love. Instance given, there is a general agreement that we have to observe certain social obligations like forbidding killing, violence, lying, and the likes, as the functional requirements of any human society. From the naturalist perspective, these rules taken in themselves are sufficient.¹³

But for Taylor, they are weak if we do not take them as a part of the background through which we understand these concepts, e.g., ‘murder’, ‘assault’, ‘honesty’. We can justify and explain these terms only through perceiving the good behind them, i.e. the sanctity or dignity of human life, of bodily integrity, and of human aspiration to the truth. The point Taylor makes is clear: we should not consider right and good as two properties of the universe which are without any relation to human beings and their lives.¹⁴ For this reason, a naturalistic approach and any moral code base on naturalism are unacceptable because they produce a vision of the moral life which is insufficient; it neither helps us in our way to “make the best sense” of our lives nor establishes what it means to “make sense” of our lives.¹⁵ Naturalism does not orient us to this, just in case that the greatest challenge we desire to achieve. Naturalistic descriptions of the good life in terms of right action do not articulate adequately the significance that particular actions or feelings have within our life. They reduce human nature to his rationality and ignore the specificity of the moral subject, likewise the relevance of human embodiment in space and time. For Taylor, such a reductive approach to morality is typical not only for the naturalist explanation of morality, but also for modern utilitarianism and various derivations of Kant’s moral philosophy, when they assert to have found and based the entire morality on one specific principle, like human pleasure, or the greatest amount of human happiness, or human reason, and from there derive other moral principles.

Now, what we observe in Taylor’s thinking is that these moral theories have something in common: they share a *procedural conception* of ethics, which he describes as the opposite of *substantive* ethics.¹⁶ What Taylor means by procedural conception is that the ethics which considers the way of thinking of the human agent – the procedure of his reasoning, as more important than the outcome of his

¹² Blakely, J. *Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor and the Demise of Naturalism: Reunifying Political Theory and Social Science*, Notre Dame Press, 2016, 7.

¹³ Garza,

¹⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 56.

¹⁵ Robert Bellah and Hans Joas, eds. *The Axial Age and its Consequences*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012, 146-188)

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 85.

reasoning. This kind of ethics, at least apparently, does not refer us to any external good and does not construct morality in relation to the good. Instead of any substantive good, procedural ethics perceives in *substantive* terms an agent's rationality, thoughts and feelings. Taylor refers to this as ontologizing a rational procedure, meaning the reading of the ideal method into the very constitution of the mind.¹⁷ As a result, good and correct thinking is not defined by the substantive truth or by a correct vision or by reference to the good, but by a certain style, method, or process of thought that has to be correct and coherent in itself. In line with this, moral action should be defined by what is good, but by the principles of action. In summary, Taylor argues that procedural ethics: "demands that one proceed on the assumption that metaphysical questions can be decided independently of assumptions about the good".¹⁸

It is at this juncture that Taylor sees the procedural conception of ethics and the theories of right action in contradiction with themselves. At least apparently, they claim that they do not refer to any kind of overarching good, but *de facto* they are motivated by the strongest moral ideals, like freedom, altruism, and universalism. These ideals are in modernity so crucial that Taylor calls them "the central moral aspirations of modern culture, the overarching goods which are distinctive to it".¹⁹ Let us simply assume with Taylor that there is a general agreement on the importance of these moral aspirations in modernity. His assertion is that the advocates of procedural ethics simply deny any relevance for these supreme goods, ideals, and prefer to ignore them, rather than struggling with explanations about the deeper sources of their own thinking. According to Taylor, procedural ethics, despite its oversight does hold to a kind of hierarchy of goods in its way of thinking and does refer us to the substantive forms, though struggles to bring this hierarchy and the thinking pattern into coherence with its own statements. The position of Taylor is very clear at this point: any theory that claims to be right has to base the primary position in reality on a notion of the good. And if this is the case, then the question about the good is an unavoidable question; otherwise, the discussion collapses into incoherence.²⁰

The Larger Horizons Involve Morality

We have observed previously Taylor's claim that we should not consider right and good as two properties of the universe without any relation to human persons and

¹⁷ Charles Taylor, 'The Motivation Behind a Procedural Ethics', in Roanld Beiner and William James Booth, *Kant and Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, 202.

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, 'The Motivation Behind a Procedural Ethics', 338.

¹⁹ Charles Taylor, 'A Most Peculiar Institution', 151.

²⁰ Charles Taylor, 'The Motivation Behind a Procedural Ethics', 349.

their lives.²¹ In this my brief endeavor to show what I intend to add to scholarship by having a new interpretation to Taylor's view on modernity, we will address to some extent one of the main characteristics of human agency as embodiment – living in a concrete time and place. In line with Taylor's thinking, we can conclude that the good can only be defined in relation to human embodiment in a time and space. This relation refers us to a framework or background of information, within which our lives take place where we can find meaning.

Let us consider it more elaborately. Defining the meaning of human life, identity and good, Taylor analysis human lives and the good as being inserted in a horizon or context which provides the sources with which humans can connect to their spiritual lives. Taylor speaks extensively in the first chapter of *Sources of the Self*, about this horizon in terms of "inescapable frameworks." Initially, he describes these frameworks as the background language where we set the basis of the moral obligations that we recognize. In this case, frameworks are like the background information about our spiritual nature and predicament which lays behind moral and spiritual intuitions of our time, and in virtue of which we make our moral judgments, intuitions and reactions.²² Eventually Taylor becomes more specific in his definition: "framework" incorporates a crucial set of qualitative distinctions, which makes some action, or mode of life, or mode of feelings incomparably higher, deeper, fuller, purer, more admirable, than others. In each of these cases, there are some ends and goods that are worthy or desirable in a way that cannot be measured in the same way as our ordinary ends, and goods. These goods and ends stand independent of our own desires, inclinations, or choices. They present standards by which these desires and choices can be judged.²³

When Taylor talks about the human agent at this point, he takes a strong position and uses firm language. We as human agents always live in a framework. It is possible that the framework is not articulated sufficiently or is neglected; nevertheless, it is there. Not to have a framework is utterly impossible for us; we have to live within frameworks or horizons because this makes sense to us and provides us with qualitative distinctions – which goods condition our moral reactions and make sense of our moral acting. Living in a framework is crucial because it makes possible our identity as a human agent. To define who we are and describe our identity, we have to include what is important, good, and valuable to us. We cannot describe human agency without reference to the good. The good gives a sense of wholeness and fullness to the person. 'What I am as the self, my identity, is essentially defined by what things have significance for me'.

²¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 56.

²² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 3-4.

²³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 20-19

Hence, living in a framework is not simply an option but a necessity because the framework is the constitutive factor of human agency, the good and our sense of the self being so closely interwoven. In order to refute naturalistic descriptions and analyses, Taylor insists on this point, based on neutral observations of human agency as an object of scientific study, with no reference to values and to goods.

And as for the second reason why we need a framework, Taylor argues that it helps us in the orientating of our lives in relation to the good.²⁴ By orientation he means having a sense of where we stand in relation to what is qualitatively higher – the good. We cannot take an indifferent position or treat the question of the good as essentially a neutral question. We always have to take a stand in our present lives in relation to the good. This question is inevitably linked to the question about the direction of our lives – where we are headed from the present situation. And this last question inescapably includes the question of where we are coming from. All three together make the understanding of our lives intriguing. As the best way on how to understand our lives, Taylor suggests reading them as an unfolding story, or as a narrative, where there is space for questions and a desire for answers.²⁵ Be that as it may, this narrative has to be inescapably placed in a moral space.

The Characteristic of the Moral Good as Seen Through Articulation

Having seen framework as the inescapable place of the goods, and about our relation to the goods. We would like to answer with Taylor the very question about the nature of these goods, or simply what do we mean when we talk about “the good.” Taylor says as the first possible answer, that the good is what “makes sense” in the life of people.²⁶ Therefore, to explain the meaning of the good, we have to explore how people live their lives; we have to examine the terms by which people describe the good. These terms cannot be removed from their *explanandum* – for example, *dignity*, *courage*, *brutality*. There is no way to explain these concepts scientifically in a neutral way. The only way to grasp their meanings is to explore how people live their lives in these terms, and through these terms rediscover the meaning of the good. Taylor introduces articulation as the key factor in the process of defining the notion of the good or the making of qualitative distinctions. By articulation Taylor refers to laying out what underlies our ethical choices, leanings, intuitions; to exposing of what moves us in our acting, what is clear, important, valuable in our moral life, and what commands our allegiance. “Articulating these

²⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 33.

²⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 47.

²⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 58.

distinctions is setting out the moral point of the actions and feelings that our intuitions enjoin on us, or invite us to, or present as admirable".²⁷

In other words, articulation is the essential factor because the values of the goods are expressed for us only through some articulation. Without articulation, the distinction of goods would not be recognized and would not require our adherence to them. An articulation of such good is necessary because through it we come closer to the moral sources, and we have a clearer view of the sources. Knowing better the moral sources should increase our love and respect for them, and consequently empower us to act morally.²⁸ Though not every articulation will bring us automatically closer to moral sources. Taylor measures the quality of articulation by its capacity to empower us and bring us closer to the moral source. A good articulation will expose the moral sources in all their inherent force and capacity to inspire our love, respect, and allegiance. In the light of a qualitative articulation of moral sources, we will be able to articulate our feelings better as well as our personal stories so that they will bring us into contact with the source that we have been yearning for. The most powerful articulations are those in which the speaker, the formulation, and the act of delivering a message all combine to reveal the good. In this sense, for instance, the Gospels continue to have an immense power over us. A special category of articulation of the moral sources represents narratives of the history of a particular nation. They have a tremendous force of attraction and inspiration, because they have the capacity to confer meaning on the lives of people in that culture. Some of these articulations in the form of historical narratives have a remarkable history.

But at the end, Taylor insists that the necessity of articulation is the crucial factor for our moral lives. We cannot live without some articulation of our moral sources. Taylor affirms the necessity of articulation because silence and inarticulacy are unhealthy, preventing us from seeing ourselves clearly, and leaving us in confusion without answers to the crucial questions of our lives. Again, Taylor points out that articulation of the goods has to be an historical enterprise.²⁹ Our current situation is always defined by its relation to the past. Thus, the path of articulation has to be historical as well. In his *Sources of the Self*, the belief of Taylor is so clear where he analyzes more elaborately the characteristics of modern identity through its historical development. And if we wish to understand who we are, what our identity looks like, what we mean by the human agent in his present relation to the good, we should follow the evolution of these terms throughout

²⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 78.

²⁸ Sybil Cook Anderson, *Hegel's Theory of Recognition: From Oppression to Ethical Liberal Modernity*, (London: Continuum, 2009, 101-102)

²⁹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 104, 103

their history. We will be able to better grasp our present situation if we become conversant with the previous narratives and explanations about the meaning of life and the good.

In-Depth Characterization of the Good

Of course, not every good has same importance or relevance in our lives. Definitely some of the goods are more important in our moral space, and our relation to these defines our identity in a different sense than our relation with another of the goods. For this reason, Taylor argues about the qualitative characterization of the goods that defines some as higher and of greater importance than some other goods. Taylor calls these higher-order goods *hypergoods*, and defines them as the goods that are incomparably more important than others and provide the standpoint from which we weigh, judge, and choose other goods.³⁰ Yet the nature of hypergoods is problematic and controversial, in that these hypergoods inevitably lead to different evaluations of the good, conflicts, and tensions. Nevertheless, these conflicts and tensions are not a sufficient reason for suspending the entire process of articulation of the goods and their hierarchy. This hierarchy of the goods is not an absolute and universally accepted structure. The question now becomes how we can establish the hierarchy of hypergoods and how can we rank them. As a solution, Taylor refers to the principle of the best possible explanation of human life.³¹

There are two basic criteria which make an explanation the best possible explanation. The first criterion is that the explanation has to include those terms that have meaning in our lives – these terms have to refer us to what is real for us, what gives us a sense of our lives, and a fullness of being as a person. The second criterion is that the explanation has to present these goods in a way that they will challenge us – these goods should help us to grow from a normal condition of our life to a higher condition in which we recognize that such goods have an incomparably greater dignity and value than any others. Acceptance and love of these higher goods should help us in reevaluating our understanding, and consequently in changing our lives. Using a somewhat different terminology, Taylor describes the same principle in his article “Leading a Life,” where he speaks of using a “difference of weight”.³² In any given domain, there are issues that are of great importance and those that are more peripheral. This is the logic we should apply to our lives. If we take our life as a whole and *weight* the different goods, we will discover that some of the goods are preeminent while other goods can be

³⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 63.

³¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, p. 69.

³² Charles Taylor, ‘Leading a Life’, in Ruth Chang, *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reasoning*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, 176.

sacrificed. So, we have to evaluate from context to context, as to what is the matter at stake and what is the right action in that particular case. As the solution to finding out the right action, Taylor refers us to Aristotle's practical wisdom (*Ethics IV*), that he finds as a helpful tool in our dilemmas of weighting the different goods. Talking about practical wisdom or reason, Taylor does not claim that practical reason has to establish goods by arguing – by convincing anyone and everyone, no matter where they start from or where they stand in their moral views and sensibility. By arguing, Taylor means that we have to start our confrontation with others not by abstracting but “by drawing on the full range of our moral sense of things”.³³ By this, Taylor means that our arguments and confrontations must be directed at a particular position and sensibility in which the human agents find themselves. Simply put, our argumentation has to be turned *ad hominem* and not some abstract principle. This explains why Taylor opposes any form of general and universally valid solution, applicable to every situation and providing an obligatory course of action.

Shockingly, Taylor does not give any *criterion* for how to accept and evaluate a person's moral position. What he rather did suggest very cautiously is the establishing of the best possible account, which should not be based on the rightness of an action, but “on the inescapability of some understanding of good.”³⁴ What is inescapable in a certain case is that we have to take some hierarchy of the goods into serious consideration. Our identity depends on this hierarchy of the goods. As soon as we identify these goods, we can attempt to include them in the best possible account or present them as solutions to eventual conflicts.³⁵ Such a discovery as to what the right solution is requires from us again the capacity to evaluate the particular situation. Evaluation in this case is based on our capacity to articulate, where articulation refers us to the identification of different goods in our life and to the correspondent judgment of them. Such articulation will help us to fit together a variety of goods in our unfolding of the whole life and help us to direct different tensions in our life to some extent in one direction.³⁶ Taylor refers to this entire proceeding as “reasoning in transition,” the aim of which is to establish certain positions as being superior to others.³⁷ They are superior because they include fewer errors and offer greater clarity; they convince us and give us a better understanding of our moral experience. They are superior because we feel moved by what is good and infinitely valuable in these accounts.

³³ Charles Taylor, “Reply to Commentators”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54, 1994, 207.

³⁴ Charles Taylor, ‘Hegel's Ambiguous Legacy for Modern Liberalism’, in *G.W.F. Hegel: Critical Assessments*, Vol. 4, (London: Routledge, 1993, 345)

³⁵ Charles Taylor, “Précis of The Sources of the Self”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54, 1994, 207.

³⁶ Charles Taylor, ‘Leading a Life’, pp. 178-180.

³⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 72.

With the best possible account, we have the sense that we have a better grasp of the situation and therefore will accept this account as reasonable and good.

Nevertheless, Taylor assures us that the process of articulation will remain an unending process, where the question about the meaning of a certain good or the question about the point of a certain practice remains open. More important than a final definition or articulation of the good is our capacity to act morally in every particular circumstance. The teaching of Aristotle about *phronesis* thus remains the most profitable suggestion, teaching us how to grasp the good and how to act morally in varying situations.³⁸ Taylor specifies that not all goods or qualitative distinctions can be defined by comparing the actions or goods among themselves in making distinctions between good and introducing practical wisdom as the best solution to acting morally. There is another category of goods which Taylor calls the “constitutive goods”.³⁹ These are goods in the fuller sense of the word, because they are good in themselves. Taylor calls them constitutive “because whatever is defined at this level is what constitutes our life goods as such”.⁴⁰ So because of our relation to these goods, our actions or aspirations become good; these goods constitute the goodness of our actions. Put differently, they are moral source of our action, meaning that the love of these goods empowers us to act in a moral way. For instance, in the cosmology of Plato, the constitutive good is presented as the order of being, or the principle of the Good.

Using these images, the Good is like the sun, in the light of which we can see things clearly. For Christians like Augustine, it was natural to see God as occupying the place of Plato’s idea of the Good. He saw God as the moral source of human acting. Even though Kant does not talk about the constitutive goods existing outside the moral agent, he recognizes that there is something that the contemplation of which commands our respect and in return empowers us in our acting. In short, a constitutive good can show itself as such by its capacity to empower us morally. The definition Taylor gives of the constitutive goods becomes clearer in his paper “Reply to Braybrooke and de Sousa,” in which he responds to the commentators on his *Sources of the Self*. He argues that the constitutive goods are such not because of their *grounding* rule – giving reason for these goods, but because of (1) their clarifying and making more vivid what is involved in a certain goal of life as good, and (2) empowering the agent by a more potent sense of the constitutive good as a source.⁴¹ In other words, we cannot establish the goods in a way that our argumentation will convince everyone, no matter where they start from in their

³⁸ Charles Taylor, ‘The Motivation Behind a Procedural Ethics’, 360.

³⁹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 92.

⁴⁰ Charles Taylor, ‘Leading a Life’, 173.

⁴¹ Charles Taylor, “Reply Braybrooke and de Sousa”, *Dialogue*, 33, 1994, 125-131.

moral views. Taylor believes that the *grounding* principle as the final basis of our moral lives goes beyond ontology. Without saying it explicitly, Taylor indicates that the final basis is what we believe in and what we accept as the final basis. In our case, the final basis would be our presupposition and understanding of good in the moral horizon of the agent.

Fundamental Connection of the Good with the Human Agent in Spite of Their Differences

Talking about the good, the nature of the good, the moral space of the agent, articulation and evaluation of the good, we raise the essential questions of the human agent. The questions are essential because with them we touch what matters for us. When we talk about the good, we measure the worth, or weight, or substance of our lives; we talk about what underlies our ethical choices, leanings, intuitions. With the good we can define our spiritual orientation. Taylor has this to say: "...one of the most basic aspirations of human beings, the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value."⁴²

In summary, we cannot talk about the good or qualitative distinctions, without talking about the identity of the human agent, and the meaning of human life. Little wonder that Taylor from the start rejects naturalism, or the ethics of obligatory actions, or any moral position which tends to describe moral acting in external, universal terms, without taking into consideration qualitative distinctions of goods and the agent's insertion in particular moral space.⁴³ Certainly, particular goods depend on the existence of certain cultural form where these goods make sense for the persons involved. But does it mean that they are completely relative to a particular culture or society and that there is no way for us to understand and recognize the goods of another society as goods-for-everyone? Does Taylor in his writings favor the position of relativism? To confront these challenges, he distinguishes two elements: first is the question about the universality of the terms that are necessary for describing our lives, and secondly, the question about the commensurability of the good. On the first challenge Taylor answers that human reality cannot be understood in terms that are appropriate for

⁴² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 42.

⁴³ What we see at this point is that the fullness of ethical life involves not just doing, but also being; and not just these two but also loving (in this work it is shortened as being moved by, being inspired by) what is constitutively good. It is a drastic reduction to think that we can capture the moral by focusing only on obligated action, as though it were of no ethical moment what you are and what you love. These are the essences of ethical life. Charles Taylor, 'Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy', in Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker, *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 15.

the natural sciences, which claim to be universal and unequivocal in their application.⁴⁴

The terms which make sense in our lives do not have universal and unequivocal meaning in every culture or human situation in the same way as do terms in natural sciences. We use a particular term because it makes the best sense to us, and we still use it until we replace it with more precise substitutes that makes better sense. In a similar way, we explain a certain human situation with an account that makes sense to us, and we keep this account until we find a better one – a more meaningful account. People in cultures foreign to our own follow the same principles. In their quest for the best possible account, they take the same steps as we do. What is universal and common to both of us is the yearning for meaning, but our expression and interpretation might remain different. Taylor becomes very cautious with his claim about the commensurability of the goods at least in his *Sources of the Self*. But more explicit are his writings in “Leading a Life” where he elaborates “a plausible view of moral reasoning that reflects both its inescapable diversity and its continuing struggle for unity” of different goods.⁴⁵ At least apparently, the question of unity appears to be more generally acceptable because modern ethical thinking tends to highlight the unity of the good. For instance, utilitarianism, ethical thinking based on the material sciences, and other different attempts at universalization, argue that there is only one important value or principle or purpose in human life, and that is the search for happiness, or benevolence, or justice, or trying to avoid suffering. The rest should be subordinated to this important value or principle, which allows us to have a unity or hierarchy of the good.

The diversity of the goods becomes a greater challenge, because here we are talking about the crucial characteristics of the ethical life of an agent, residing in a culture different from ours. How do we define what is really important in his life, or what does it mean for him to have a *good life* in his particular culture? Is it possible for us to grasp the meaning of *good life* in a culture foreign to us? Taylor argues that this is possible but not automatic or without struggle. We already touched on Taylor’s on this point when we treated the framework, fundamental distinctions of the good, and the weighting of the different goods, in making sense of our lives. With the same logic but using different terminology Taylor argues in favor of the necessity to recognize a diversity of the good.⁴⁶ The same principles which we apply to the quest for the best good for ourselves, should be applied to the search for the good for other people. With this, we can identify what is truly

⁴⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 58.

⁴⁵ Charles Taylor, ‘Leading a Life’, 171.

⁴⁶ Charles Taylor, ‘Leading a Life’, 171-175.

important for them, what are their life goods, what is the hierarchy of goods for them, what are their constitutive goods, as well as the framework or larger horizon that forms their background context. By this process we should be able to define the crucial characteristics of the ethical life of an agent operating in a culture different from our own.

An entire comprehension of good across cultures seems to be very difficult, if not an untenable task. The understanding of Taylor is that transition of the good across cultures includes a certain gain or loss in our understanding. Transition of goods will increase our sensibility and capacity for critical analysis of our own position. at the same time, it will prevent us from extending our position into a universally valid position. At the same time, transition of goods does not assure us a complete understanding of the goods of other people.⁴⁷ Inevitably, in the face of certain goods of others we will remain unable to explain and defend them. In the same way, our sense of our goods will make little or no sense to other cultures. But this should not be taken as the main conclusion of the writing of Taylor about commensurability of the goods. The point Taylor makes is that a certain degree of commensurability can be attained. The main question is how far we want to extend our understanding of the goods of others, without a priori conclusions and statements about their good.⁴⁸

Taylor reminds us of the complexity of the entire question, which nevertheless must be attended because it is an important issue for us as beings when we talk about the hypergoods, and weighing the process of distinguishing and articulating different goods. Through weighing, evaluation, and articulation, we express who we are as human beings or what kind of human beings we would like to become in relation to the world. This is an inescapable question for everyone. Consequently, the main question should not be how to establish the hierarchy of goods or how to resolve the challenge of the incommensurability of the goods. Rather, Taylor suggests, we should take a different path – going beyond the incommensurability of the good to discover a way toward the complementarity of the goods in our life. More important than the ranking of the goods is our living the goods, which means, a concrete realization of the goods in our lives. In this way we can resolve the issue of plurality of the goods without denying it. Again, modern philosophy based on moral obligation or universalization is not able to provide adequate instruments to meet this challenge. Nonetheless, Taylor insists that we should talk about the diversity and plurality of the goods, because there is a very rich but forgotten resource at our disposal in modernity – our aspiration to

⁴⁷ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr., (New York : Basic Books, 1969, 9)

⁴⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 62.

oneness.⁴⁹ This aspiration can help us to shape our lives and to find a place for different goods together. Taylor at the conclusion of his article “Philosophical Reflections on Caring Practices,” refines this aspect of modernity that will shape our lives through our contacts with other people:

The ecumenical challenge is to recognize what we must live with, work with, and be in relative commerce with people from these different positions. Going further, we need to learn to feel and appreciate the force of moral sources we do not share. [...] What we need in place of this spiritual or moral self-centeredness is the capacity to sense the power of the other’s view, recognizing that it is not one’s own and probably never will be.⁵⁰

Taylor expresses the very same view while responding to commentators to his *Sources of the Self*. Modernity tends to oversimplify and judge ethics or spiritual life *en bloc*, placing the goods in conflict. What we need is a new interpretation, or creation of a better context in which these goods, regardless of their incommensurability, can exist peacefully together.⁵¹

Conclusion

Hegel’s quest to give an account of the universe from the point of view which understands both moral and scientific reasoning represents the peak of metaphysical ambition, though the idea that our moral codes should be based on ethical life is yet an important and somewhat inarticulate presence in modern moral consciousness. Strong and admirable principles seem to require us to have the freedom that is both national and also subjected to a world historical advancement toward rationality and universal right. The moral decadence that is prevalent in the modern society is not as a result of lack of believe in what is right or wrong or because the modern society disagrees vehemently with the content of moral standards, the problem is beyond that and even more fundamental. It is rather the lack of a common understanding of the basis for ethical judgment as a whole and the absence of constant connection between moral and other values. Looking at this crisis it is obvious that it is very illuminating. But then what is the solution to this crisis? The contemporary view of meaninglessness takes the form of nostalgia for a lost order, and so for this fact, it does not guarantee that such an

⁴⁹ Charles Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays in Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, Guy Laforest, ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993, 136)

⁵⁰ Charles Taylor, “Philosophical Reflections on Caring Practices”, in Susa S. Phillips & Patricia Benner, *The Crisis of Care: Affirming and Restoring Caring Practices in the Helping Professions*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994, 185.

⁵¹ Charles Taylor, “Reply to Commentators”, 205.

order is can be definitely restored or, at least that it ever existed. It is significant however that the attitude is pervasive.

If modern society is confronted by a moral crisis, it is largely because of the influence of metaphysics on us. Individually, it is neither possible nor true that we choose our values: for instance, loving your children is not a decision you make. Does this bother us? It should lead us to view our values from two perspectives. First as individuals, where our values seem necessary to us; secondly, collectively, they are conventions – set by the ‘decision’ of our environment. Seeing morality as social should not then make it appear any less objective, except if we are prisoners of a conception of objectivity which considers things to be real only when they are discovered by experiments of natural science. We should bear in mind that an inherently rational order is not merely an order chosen by God, rather it is the order chosen by God for the reason that it especially fulfils the prerequisites of goodness.

In the course of this study, we have seen how Taylor, following in the footsteps of Hegel, proposed a new synthesis – a new vision of unity. He however acknowledges that he is not the first to undertake such a project. There have been many other philosophers who have been inspired by Hegel who also have proposed new syntheses. Taylor has given a serious thought to their attempts because they are expressions of the same influence to a radical freedom that has been identified by Hegel. As mentioned previously, modern agency struggles to express properly a new and creative way. Facing the discomfort in the society, Taylor mentions some ways by which the modern man reacts, in his quest for fulfilment, to the potential for a new vision of unity. Generally, the modern agent opposes modern civilization and searches for new ways of expressing himself; hence, the focus in Taylor is on the man who feels oppressed by the “system” and looks for new directions to unity. One way of forming this unity represents different forms of the agent’s desire to express himself, his deepest desires and his motivations, through the release of the spontaneous, the natural, or the sensuous – the *Dionysiac* – in his nature.

The agent, expressing himself in such modes, hopes to reach a wholeness of life, a sense of fulfillment, to heal the divisions between body and soul, will and inclination, Spirit and nature. This is the way post-romantic nationalism, which tries to restore certain facts about the life of human beings: their heredity, where they live in, the language group they belong to – centrally relevant motivations in a fulfilled human life – against “abstract,” “cosmopolitan” ideas of man. And another way of achieving harmony and unity between man and nature is by transforming nature. Creation of this harmony depends on reshaping nature and society, transcendental dimension, is the full-hearted love of some good beyond

life. Here, Christianity offers the possibility of a transformation based on hope and faith. This offer is easily dismissed in modernity as an unreal optimism, or substituting hope for reality, or propagating a comforting myth about the human conditions that obscure the hard truth. Taylor disagrees with such an understanding, because it is based on the assumption that our sensual nature cannot be accepted by Christianity.

Bibliography

- Anderson, S. Cook. *Hegel's Theory of Recognition: From Oppression to Ethical Liberal Modernity*. London: Continuum, 2009.
- Barrie, A. John. 'Probing Modernity', *Quadrant*, 40(5), 82-83, 1996.
- Charles Taylor, "Précis of The Sources of the Self", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54, 1994
- Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Jason, Blakely. *Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and the Demise of Naturalism: Reunifying Political Theory and Social Science*, Notre Dame Press, 2016
- Kanu, I. A. (2016). Igwebuike as an Igbo-African hermeneutic of globalization. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2(1), 1-6.
- Kanu, I. A. (2017). Igwebuike as the hermeneutic of individuality and communality in African ontology. *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*, 2(1), 162-179.
- Kanu, I. A. (2019). Igwebuike research methodology: A new trend for scientific and wholistic investigation. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 5(4) 95-105.
- Kanu, I. A. (2019). Igwebuikeconomics: The Igbo apprenticeship for wealth creation. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 5(4) 56-70.
- Kanu, I. A. (2019). Igwebuikecracy: The Igbo-African participatory Socio-political system of governance. *TOLLE LEGE: An Augustinian Journal of the Philosophy and Theology*. 1(1) 34-45.
- Kanu, I. A. (2019). On the origin and principles of Igwebuike philosophy. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. Vol. 11. No. 1. pp. 159-176.
- Kanu, I. A. (2019). An Igwebuike approach to the study of African traditional naming ceremony and baptism. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. 11(1) 25-50.
- Kanu, I. A. (2017). Igwebuike as a wholistic response to the problem of evil and human suffering. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3(2)12-24.

- Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African modality of peace and conflict resolution. Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars. 1(1) 31-40.*
- Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike and the logic (Nka) of African philosophy. Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities. 3(1) 1-13.*
- Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike philosophy and human rights violation in Africa. IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities. 3(7) 117-136.*
- Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike as a hermeneutic of personal autonomy in African ontology. Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars. 2(1) 14-22.*
- Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr., New York: Basic Books, 1969.
- Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker, *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996
- Robert Bellah and Hans Joas, eds. *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Taylor, Charles. 'A Most Peculiar Institution', in J. E. J. Altham & Ross Harrison, *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Taylor, Charles. 'Balancing the Humours: Charles Taylor Talks to the Editors', in *The Idler*, Nov.- Dec. 1989
- Taylor, Charles. 'Hegel's Ambiguous Legacy for Modern Liberalism', in G.W.F. Hegel: *Critical Assessments*, Vol. 4, London: Routledge, 1993.
- Taylor, Charles. 'Leading a Life', in Ruth Chang, *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reasoning*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Taylor, Charles. 'The Motivation Behind a Procedural Ethics', in Roanld Beiner and William James Booth, *Kant and Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993
- Taylor, Charles. "Philosophical Reflections on Caring Practices", in Susa S. Phillips & Patricia Benner, *The Crisis of Care: Affirming and Restoring Caring Practices in the Helping Professions*, Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 1994.
- Taylor, Charles. "Reply Braybrooke and de Sousa", *Dialogue*, 33, 1994, 125-131.
- Taylor, Charles. "Reply to Commentators", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54, 1994.
- Taylor, Charles. *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Taylor, Charles. *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays in Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, Guy Laforest, ed. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993.