

Taylor's Ontologised Moral Realism and the Problem of Authenticity

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Abstract: Authenticity is a crucial contemporary pathos that has immense socio-political currency. Charles Taylor reinterprets the Romantic authenticity of being true to one's originality in ethical vocabulary to argue that discovering our essential self-identity does not conflict with the objective moral demands that emanate from outside the self. This article examines if the implied ontology of the *higher good* reconciling the subjective and objective morality in Taylor's philosophy offers a coherent conception of authenticity. To that end we closely examine Taylor's moral philosophy and critically evaluate its consequences for authenticity as a moral ideal. The study problematizes the dominant view that Taylor demands an interpretive opening to mere intersubjective values to fulfill authenticity. We expose the implicit non-anthropocentric ontological commitments that authenticity necessarily requires in his account through which Taylor ultimately wants to achieve a fusion of the transcendent and immanent horizons. This paper contends that such ontologised moral realism remains arbitrary, in effect, constraining individual dignity on one side and offering no clear criteria to validate authenticity from inauthenticity on the other. Finally, the pathological constitution of modern subjects poses a possible danger of legitimizing a restrictive public sphere, subverting authenticity as an ideal of public significance.

Keywords: authenticity, Charles Taylor, moral realism, plurality, ontology, uniqueness.

I. Introduction

The question of authenticity is closely and intimately linked with the idea of modernity. Other than the philosophical and historical genesis of the idea of authenticity, its impact as an ideal on contemporary socio-political culture has continued the scholarly interest in understanding authenticity. Traditionally, 'models of authenticity' have been understood in an 'inner sense' or a 'productionist' manner (Varga 2012, 61). Between the divergent views of the Romantic conception of discovering one's true inner self and the neo-Nietzschean aestheticization of authenticity as understood in fashioning one's self, Charles Taylor argues for a reasoned rethinking of the ideal of authenticity.

Taylor undertakes the project of salvaging authenticity from the attacks of cultural critics and those who criticize it on ethical grounds. In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, he argues that authenticity as a moral ideal is worth pursuing. However, Taylor agrees that a certain trivialization of the ideal has occurred in the contemporary culture (1991a, 22-23). The self-centering of modern individualism

that is closed to “greater issues or concerns that transcend the self” is a poignant criticism Taylor mounts against contemporary projects of authenticity (1991a, 14). This positions him as a critique of modern subjectivism. At the same time, he is also critical of the postmodern trends of authenticity that deconstruct the ideological constitution of modern subjects. He argues that these postmodern trends in opposing social and moral conformity fall for self-determining freedom and moral relativism, rendering the ideal of authenticity empty (Taylor 1991a, 55-69).

Taylor’s reformulation of authenticity posits authenticity as an ideal of constituting fulfilling self-identity in the conspicuous absence of onto-theological grounding. Authenticity, thus, appears in his account as a peculiarly modern moral problem (Taylor 1991a, 3). In contemporary culture, the moral fulfillment that authenticity seeks is trivialized due to what may be called an individual moral failing. Taylor argues that authenticity, adequately understood as an ideal of fulfilling self-identity with its deep sources in modern moral outlook, has a necessary self-transcending element. Authenticity constitutes a hermeneutic opening to the demands of history, nature, society, solidarity, citizenship, religion, ‘or something else of this order’ that emanates from beyond the self without which one’s identity cannot find meaning, significance, and fulfillment (Taylor 1991a, 40). Taylor terms these self-transcending elements as the *background of intelligibility* or *horizon of significance* based on which some things may be evaluated as more or less worthy.

In his authenticity debate, Taylor touches on some of the most significant aspects of our contemporary predicament. However, what is authenticity in the sense that my convictions reveal “something essential about who I am” and “how am I different from other authentic individuals” is not clearly exposed (Bialystok 2014, 292-293). The debate preemptively proceeds into the discussion about defining a fulfilling and virtuous self-identity to establish what constitutes significant or higher-order authenticity. Unraveling what is at stake for the uniqueness of the individual in Taylor’s conception of authenticity requires closely engaging with his larger philosophical project.

This paper critically engages Taylor’s account of authenticity in the backdrop of the original tension in his moral philosophy of aligning subjective experience and the objective (intersubjective) world. Authenticity as an ethical ideal explicitly captures Taylor’s concern of “resolving the tension between the subjective and the objective.” (Anderson 1996, 35, n. 1) The paper argues that culturally situated morality, entwined with modern self-identity, is the central hypothesis of Taylor’s reimagining of modernity. This thesis entails synthetic logic, advancing ontological claims continuously tense throughout Taylor’s oeuvre.

The paper attempts to disentangle the constitution of moral self-identity in Taylor’s works. Authenticity in Taylor is inspired by the Romantic conception of discovering one’s *own* originality. The straightforward reading that Taylor only advocates for openness to the self-transcending intersubjective demands as a

crucial condition for living authentically does not entirely convey the profound and complex nature of Taylor's reconceptualization of collective and individual identity.

Taylor's entwinement of subjective moral instincts and objective morality is grounded in the historical imaginary of ontological moral sources, which are in themselves beyond subjective and objective distinctions. These moral sources imply a transcendental ontology in as much as they constitute the universal human predicament and a cultural framework of significance. This ontology entails a coming together or fusion of transcendent and immanent frames in closer proximity. This paper seeks to demonstrate the consequences of precisely this ontologized moral realism in Taylor's conception of authenticity.¹

Taylor's entwinement of subjective moral experiences and objective moral values is achieved by integrating both in the ontologically independent moral sources. These moral sources are neither a subjective creation nor an objective fact about the order of things. They are nevertheless related to the individual moral sense and the cultural common sense that matters collectively by constituting and empowering both. This independent ontology that we refer to in the paper as non-anthropocentric ontology (not strictly Platonic) is best understood as the *higher good* hidden in the *whole of history*. This higher good constitutes our understanding of the present both *universally*, as an essential predicament of motivating us toward goodness, independent of our subjective volitions, as well as *contextually*, in the existing consensus about values within a particular culture.

The predicament that our individual and collective identities are embedded within cultural morality is only a minor point in Taylor. What is more fundamental is that our identities are under the *asymmetrical* influence of context-transcendent *force* of morality, which is a strong universal claim posited by the non-anthropocentric ontology. However, this ontology of the higher good is not so strong as to empower universal morality due to the historical contingency of various cultures and, therefore, only capable of constituting culturally situated moral common sense. This paper is primarily a survey of the philosophical status of this non-anthropocentric ontology and its constitutive powers, which aims to

¹ Maeve Cooke (2000, 202), in "Between 'Objectivism' and 'Contextualism': the Normative Foundations of Social Philosophy," argues that Taylor's attempt to reconcile the tension between contextualism and objectivism remains problematic. Most commentaries on his many-faceted oeuvre deal with some strand of contextualism by situating him in the hermeneutic tradition, dealing with his views on language. By bringing out the transcendental strand of Taylor's works, this paper focuses on his moral realism and its implication for the conception of authenticity. To that end, we focus on the objectivist impulse in his writings and, therefore, do not deal with the hermeneutic side of his philosophy, at least, not exclusively. We follow Michiel Meijer's reinterpretation of Taylor's moral philosophy and, in doing so, bring to light the problem of non-anthropocentric ontology and its interaction with his immanent moral phenomenology.

achieve the resolution of seemingly contradictory demands of personal fulfillment and objectivity of cultural values.

Since this non-anthropocentric ontology of the higher good in the *whole flow of history* is not objectively or canonically *given*, it is accessible only through the subjective route of phenomenological experience, interpretation, and articulation. This predicament leads to the problem of relativism in validating the formation of diverse, authentic identities, which is precisely the kind of authenticity that Taylor opposes. The problem, however, is that, at the same time, Taylor cannot argue for any objective understanding of this non-anthropocentric ontology of the higher good for supporting his universal claim or grounding cultural morality.

This higher ontology cannot be transcendently grounded due to the finiteness of historical understanding and, thus, its cultural contextualism, where *the whole of history* is devoid of any universalistic impulse. Simultaneously, this higher ontology cannot be accessed through moral phenomenology as the *infiniteness* of the whole of history transcends the *finite* historical experience of individuals, which leaves us to settle with its relative understanding. This philosophical difficulty, or, as some would say, the limit of philosophy, renders Taylor's reconciliation of subjective and objective by postulating such non-anthropocentric ontology as a mere declamation beyond possible thematization as a reasonable knowledge.

Taylor's account of authenticity, which aims to empower the recognition of this non-anthropocentric ontology or, more precisely, its constitutive power in shaping our identity, individually and collectively, as a society, culture, or civilization, can be interpreted both conservatively and liberally. The most pernicious problem is that interpretations are justified either way as long as one can persuade through the evocation of cultural history, some binding sources of authority.

In order to bring the inherent tensions of Taylor's philosophy in general and, more particularly, its implication for his account of authenticity, our reading is more critical than charitable. The purpose of such reading is not merely polemical. Instead, it aims to examine the complexity and depth of Taylor's project carefully and, in doing so, further problematize the notion of authenticity. Our reading of Taylor's philosophy gives more weight to the conservative potential of his works as opposed to more sympathetic readings that wish to come to terms with his thoughts by hurriedly assimilating them into the liberal project. We think such efforts are often reductionist and underplay elements of his thought that are not easily reconcilable with liberal modernity.

Through our critical reading, we advance and defend two claims regarding authenticity in Taylor's account. The first central claim is that Taylor's postulation of non-anthropocentric ontology and its constitutive power necessarily prioritizes the existing cultural consensus against an individual's articulation, constricting the demand for uniqueness in the projects of authenticity and the demand of

contingency and spontaneity of beginning something new. The second minor claim that follows the first is that Taylor's account of authenticity provides no clear criteria to subject the authenticity of individuals and collectives to public critique. Instead, the primacy of existing cultural common sense can potentially lead to endless reproduction of existing consensus, whether organic or constructed through ideological pathologies, subduing any form of radical dissent as inauthentic. More comprehensively, these two claims ultimately problematize the political relevance of authenticity as a public ideal.

This paper is divided into six sections. In the first section, we expose the implicit non-anthropocentric ontological status of Taylor's moral sources as abstractions from the whole of history that empowers humans, universally, toward transcendent higher good and grounds the goodness of diverse intersubjective agreements within various immanent frames of reference, contextually. In the second section, we provide a holistic reading of horizons of significance in Taylor's strong evaluation thesis, which brings out the often-ignored fusion of transcendent and immanent horizons in secondary literature, laying the ground for subsequent discussions. In the third and fourth sections, we thematically distinguish and discuss Taylor's transcendentalism in his claims about universal human agency (philosophical anthropology) and the immanentism of his moral phenomenology, respectively, to clearly show their interwovenness. In the fifth section, we analyze the arbitrariness of higher ontology that Taylor posits to reconcile these two frames (transcendent and immanent). In the final section, we comprehensively discuss the implication of this moral philosophy for the conception of authenticity. We conclude that Taylor's contradictory commitments of achieving objectivity on the one hand and personally fulfilling resonance on the other end up in irresolvable ambiguities. Ultimately, as we show, both commitments get compromised; we have no clear and distinct criteria to distinguish authenticity from inauthenticity, and individual uniqueness and contingency are as well jeopardized in favor of communal interests.

II. Reviewing Metaethical Moral Sources

Taylor sketches in *Sources of the Self* the history of modern identity and an entwined conception of the *good* that constitutes such identity. In this, Taylor traces the foundation of contemporary moral identity that is 'sober, scientific-minded and secular' to accommodate various ordinary moral goods that are inseparable from individual and collective identities (Taylor 1989, 519). These *life goods* of modern democratic societies in the West, such as benevolence, universal respect, justice, freedom, autonomy, self-fulfillment, self-realization, and avoidance of death and suffering, are constituted by the *constitutive goods*. These constitutive goods are themselves "unarticulated metaphysical and epistemological ground from which life goods arise," constituting a *shared* intersubjective world (Redhead 2002, 806). These constitutive goods also act

upon us *individually*, commanding ‘our moral awe or allegiance.’ (Taylor 1991b, 243) The imaginary refraction from the whole history of Western civilization that Taylor refers to as constitutive goods are three historical ‘moral sources’ of Romanticism, Christian turn inwards, and the affirmation of ordinary life (Redhead 2002, 808).

Taylor considers authenticity as one of the various life goods as a ‘child of the romantic period.’ (1991a, 25) *Romanticism* is associated with the original impulse of nature as always good that a depraved culture alienates us from. Nature has ‘a voice within’ that speaks to us (Taylor 1989, 284, 357, 371). Romanticism posits that it is possible to recover this original contact by fully knowing “this nature through articulating what we find within.” (Taylor 1989, 374) Therefore, Taylor argues that there is an original way in which each individual is different, and one ought to “live up to our originality.” (1989, 375) The deep source of authenticity is in this romantic conception that being true to oneself means being true to one’s own originality, which is discoverable through articulation and expression only by the individual.

Authenticity in the contemporary conception and practice is also subsidiarily influenced by the ‘original theistic grounding’ (Taylor 1989, 495) of us as ‘beings with inner depths’ (Taylor 1989, x) that is referred to as the *Christian turn inwards*. The *affirmation of ordinary life* that validates the ‘inclinations and tendencies of our own nature’ (Taylor 1989, 282) as morally good also constitutes our contemporary understanding of authenticity as an ideal of self-fulfillment.

These moral sources are refracted images of a metaethical ground from which emanate the goodness of ordinary life goods in self-interpretation. In that sense, they are constitutive goods that motivate the self to goodness (strong evaluation of worth) independently of the self. In general, these constitutive goods are critical for Taylor to defend the collective moral value inherent in the contemporary project of authenticity. Therefore, this paper focuses mainly on the moral stance in the otherwise broader connotation implied in the evaluation of worth for critically analyzing Taylor’s notion of authenticity.

Moral sources interweave cultural morality and individual self into an overarching moral horizon or metaethics so that these sources stand independent of subjective impulse or objective reality and yet act upon the moral subjects and constitute shared moral goods. In other words, Taylor’s ‘ontology of values’ takes a balanced view between the two extremes that values are ‘totally independent of human activity’ or they are ‘mere human constructions.’ (Laitinen 2008, 272) Therefore, for Taylor, moral sources presuppose that there are “features of the universe, or God, or human beings, (i) on which the life goods depend, (ii) which command our moral awe or allegiance, and (iii) the contemplation of or contact with which empowers us to be good.” (1991b, 243)

Some scholars interpret moral sources anthropologically to claim that Taylor’s abstraction of historical-cultural moral sources are ‘contingent features of subjectivity’ (Smith 2002, 8) or reveal ‘ontological features of the self.’ (Abbey

2000, 56) Michiel Meijer, in his interpretation of Taylor's project, goes against such anthropocentric clarifications. He argues that Taylor posits an essential 'non-anthropocentric' 'metaphysical reality underlying our human nature' that alludes to 'the world qua world.' (Meijer 2018, 64) Therefore, what is ultimately disclosed as moral sources with the help of historically situated 'cultural webs of meaning' is not merely the contingent or ontological features of the self or the contextual intersubjective horizons of significance (Laitinen 2008, 274-275). Instead postulation of moral sources conceals a metaphysical reality of *inherent goodness* in the flow of whole of history that constitutes and empowers the goodness of *immanent* cultural goods and simultaneously motivates human subjects towards *context-transcendent* higher goods.

Taylor employs philosophical anthropology to abstract "those timeless features of human agency that hold across cultures whenever we try to define the historically specific sense of self of a given age." (1988, 299) In sketching 'historical reconstruction of the modern moral identity,' (Meijer 2015, 447) Taylor discovers the metaethics of moral sources to argue for his foundational thesis in which selfhood and morality are 'inextricably intertwined.' (Taylor 1989, 3) The underlying point of *universal* philosophical anthropology in Taylor is that "what we are and what matter to us is essentially linked to our sense of morality." (Meijer 2018, 54) The metaethical claim that follows is that not only certain things matter to us but that certain "goods matter *more* than others and strike us as imperative." (Meijer 2018, 54) Morality in Taylor's framework is anchored in human experience. Nevertheless, the *original* source of its motivation is neither cultural (intersubjective) nor experiential (subjective) but ontologically independent of both.

It is safe to clarify at this point that Taylor's ontology of moral sources does two things at a time. One, it aids in grounding Taylor's anthropological claim about universal human nature, where the *context-transcending* higher good concealed in history provides the external intrinsic motivation for overriding phenomenological subject's moral experience, independently of their dialogical or critical self-control. Secondly, these sources as constitutive goods ground Taylor's cultural moral realism as an existing instance of shared consensus, preparing the starting point of phenomenological experience within an *immanent* cultural frame. This interwoven strategy in Taylor aims to reconcile fragmentation in modernity "by arguing that subjectivity and objectivity *are essentially* intertwined in the realm of value" (Anderson 1996, 17) and *ought to be* seen as such.

The fusion of the transcendent and immanent horizons in higher non-anthropocentric ontology interweaves philosophical anthropology and moral phenomenology. They fit together through Taylor's concept of strong evaluation 'as a binding theme.' (Meijer 2018, 8) It reveals his attempt "to delineate structural features of moral experience." (Meijer 2018, 69) In succeeding sections, we critically analyze this fusion of horizons to expose the inherent tension in Taylor's project later to discuss its repercussions for his conception of authenticity.

III. Reviewing Strong Evaluation and Horizon of Significance

Strong evaluation essentially refers to the background against which we see ourselves and is constituted by “the distinction between things which are recognized as of...higher importance...and things which...are of lesser value.” (Taylor 1985a, 3) Such a background facilitating the distinctions of worth is essential to what we would understand and recognize as full normal human agency. Taylor claims that the primordial source of our diverse and distinct evaluative backgrounds on an *individual* level is constituted by the metaethical moral sources, which, at the same time, constitute a *shared* collective evaluative background of specific cultures.

To evade the methodological problem of synthesizing these two perspectives through an implicit ontology in moral sources, scholars like Arto Laitinen reject Taylor’s ontological moral sources. He limits the moral realism in the accessible public language of historically contingent intersubjectivity of cultural forms of life. This corrective of Taylor’s project only restricts itself to the phenomenological explanation to extricate critical subjectivity from being invalidated by the ontological explanation.

Laitinen points out two usages of strong evaluation in Taylor’s works. Strong evaluation refers “to the process of evaluation, reflection, deliberation in general” and “to stable pre-understandings, to a background knowledge or a horizon of significance.” (Laitinen 2008, 26) He rejects the fusion entailed in Taylor’s ‘phenomenological-ontological explanation’ (Meijer 2018, 124) of moral sources. However, Laitinen’s treatment of the horizon of significance as merely a culturally contextualized phenomenological prejudice (individual and collective) is insufficient to appreciate Taylor’s holistic project of rehabilitating such prejudices beyond rational control. Therefore, Meijer argues that rejecting ontologized moral sources or constitutive goods is inconsistent with Taylor’s philosophical position. Without these constitutive goods, culturally situated life goods would not appear as a moral obligation (Meijer 2018, 124-125) but merely as alienated norms or demands. Meijer clubs Laitinen’s hypothesis as another anthropocentric clarification of Taylor’s ontological project² that underplays his *non-anthropocentric* claims about our ‘metaphysical predicament.’ (Taylor 1989, 307) Taylor himself argues against such anthropocentric clarification of human subjectivity. He argues that it “is deeply wrong that you can give a state description of the agent without any reference to his or her world (or a description of the world qua world without saying a lot about the agent)” to emphasize ‘interaction’ involved in the possibility of knowledge (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015, 94).

More rightly, anthropological claim captures the transcendental authority of non-anthropocentric ontology over human nature and the immanent moral phenomenological realm of experience. Together they provide a comprehensive

² For similar anthropocentric clarifications, see Nicholas Smith (2002, 63), *Charles Taylor: Meanings, Morals and Modernity*, and Ruth Abbey (2000, 29), *Charles Taylor: Philosophy Now*.

moral map of 'spatial orientation' (Meijer 2018, 54) in Taylor's strong evaluation thesis, revealing the complete meaning of horizon of significance. Authenticity in Taylor is prone to partial reading and misapprehension without this holistic view inherited from Romanticism. Sidestepping from Taylor's non-anthropocentric ontology leads to reinterpreting his moral philosophy and account of authenticity purely as a project of symmetrical dialogue and self-reflection grounded in cultural intersubjectivity. This confinement within an immanent frame of reference gives more space to critical subjectivity and autonomy than Taylor is willing to concede.

It amounts to hurriedly assimilating Taylor into the Enlightenment project, underplaying reactionary elements of his thought that are not easily reconcilable. This predicament has even led to epistemic accounts of Taylorian authenticity predicated on 'a form of self-knowledge, or reflected self-evaluation' in the Kantian image of being 'an autonomous person.' (Bauer 2017, 576) The confusion leads to assessing if authenticity could be more accommodative to advance the liberal modern project (Cooke 1997, 258); if not, to reduce authenticity to caricature the ideals of autonomy. Below are some examples of such reception of Taylor's philosophy that fail to fully confront his Romantic inheritance and retrieval to re-enchant modernity.

The privileging of self-reflective evaluation leads Samogy Varga to a volitional account of authenticity. Varga builds on Taylor's horizon of significance as an "intersubjectively constituted horizon of a larger community that ultimately is the source of the normative pull." (Varga 2012, 98) He argues that it provides 'social context and public space of reasons' for articulation and critical judgment of authenticity (Rings 2017, 480). Varga reads ontological motivation in Taylor's personal resonance as expressing 'crucial volitional characteristics,' (Bauer 2017, 577) which leads him to redraw authenticity 'as *the practice of autonomy*.' (Varga 2012, 6)

Charles Lowney also interprets the horizon of significance by privileging the rational dialogic element in authentic self-definition that "implicitly brings a more *interpersonal* notion of value" and "the notion that we can reason about and rank order values." (2009, 36) In doing so, Lowney sees a possible danger in Taylor's account of authenticity in "discovering standards that define and create your own being" that may "backslide to a position where defining yourself and doing your own thing again collapses into doing whatever you feel like." (Lowney 2009, 37)

However, the ontological reading of the synthesis implied in the horizon of significance (transcendent and immanent) discloses an overriding affective dimension of strong evaluation that desubjectivizes normative motivations, pulling us independently of our wills, both as a fact and a value. Overreading rationalistic impulse either ignores this affective dimension in Taylor's thesis or confronts it as a potential problem. Therefore, such readings fail to fully account for the fusion in Taylor's philosophy of the constitutive power of higher ontology

with the immanent phenomenological moral experience. In other words, they overlook the essentialism in which human nature is surrendered to the whims of higher non-anthropocentric ontology that simultaneously empowers intersubjective consensus with a certain objectivity. Our holistic reading proposes that the often-ignored transcendental picture of Taylor's philosophical anthropology and the fusion of the transcendent and immanent horizons of significance leaves very little room for any autonomous, volitional, or subjectivist slide of authenticity in his account.

This holistic reading offers two contradictory consequences for authenticity in Taylor: (a) the transcendental ontology is so rigid that originality or uniqueness as demands for authenticity become ambiguous, superfluous, and restrictive as this ontology constitutes a binding objectivity of shared collective consensus; (b) this ontology is so malleable and permissive as to leave no possibility for any conception of valid inauthenticity except very vaguely in the degrees of authenticity. As the primary focus of this paper is to bring to light the transcendental frame and the asymmetrical authority of higher ontology in Taylor's philosophy, we have limitations in doing full justice to his response to the problem of legitimizing an authentic self-interpretation from the inauthentic one within an exclusive immanent frame. However, we can safely say that stress on Taylor's immanent strand at the cost of transcendental explanation leads to unavoidable relativism.³

Brian Braman's aesthetic interpretation stands out as sympathetic to Taylor's transcendental strand. Braman compares Taylor's project of authenticity as an epiphanic art 'mediated through imagination' that in articulating 'personal vision' traces wholeness through ideals "that calls to us independent of our will." (2000, 234-236) This reading underlines Taylor's fundamental emphasis on the affective dimension of a hidden ontology of the *higher good* that acts upon us. Our aim is not to raise disputes with various readings of Taylor's philosophical project but to read Taylor's reinterpretation of authenticity in light of his synthetic and interwoven moral philosophy and its largely neglected or undermined transcendental horizon.

To sum it up, the horizon of significance in Taylor alludes not only to the interpreter's phenomenological background (internal) against which a second-order distinction of worth becomes possible but also to the *originary* source that constitutes such phenomenological background and empowers it to command us independently of our subjective inclinations. Additionally, it also refers to the existing intersubjective agreements (external) where the disclosure of standards for second-order distinction becomes possible for a moral subject, which itself is constituted by the same *originary* source. Therefore, the intersubjective context

³ Cooke (1999, 199), in *Habermas: A Critical Reader*, focusing on the immanent phenomenology of Taylor, argues that his "picture of human agency seems to permit too much," providing "no non-arbitrary basis for discriminating between conceptions of the good, thus leaving open the possibility that these may be supremacist, racist, patriarchal and so on."

depends not only on the meanings interpreters freely and explicitly create through mutual dialogue. Instead, the intersubjective context has an implicit moral common sense constituted by the *originary* ontological source that flows in history, independent of the interpreter's success or failure to grasp it. This gives a certain organic objectivity to the existing intersubjective consensus. The openness to the horizon of significance and articulating one's moral motivation through inert and overt dialogue suggests proximity between the two horizons of significance. As Taylor argues, "that articulation can bring us closer to the good as a moral source, can give it power." (1989, 92)

Something higher and transcendental is at play, which demands our moral allegiance on the one side, making the immanent strong evaluation in dialogue possible. On the other hand, it is the source of moral realism in an intersubjective context, where the disclosure of the transcendental force becomes possible. To properly expose the tension inherent in bringing the two horizons (transcendent and immanent) into a synthesis, the succeeding two sections navigate the thesis of strong evaluation thematically as philosophical anthropology and moral phenomenology, respectively.

IV. Transcendental Horizon in Philosophical Anthropology

Taylor's strong evaluation is derived from Harry Frankfurt's 'second-order desires' as a peculiar 'characteristic of humans.' (Frankfurt 1971, 5) Second-order desire relates to volitional free will regarding the desirability or undesirability of desires in the sense that "what my will *should* be." (Meijer 2018, 22) The 'capacity for reflective self-evaluation' (Frankfurt 1971, 11) is, for Taylor, "an essential feature of the mode of agency we recognize as human." (1985a, 16) Taylor distinguishes evaluation based on the 'worthiness of desires rather than their desirability' (Meijer 2018, 23) to propose the difference between strong and weak evaluation. The weak evaluator is a 'simple weigher of alternatives.' (Taylor 1985a, 23) In contrast, the strong evaluation is to order desires 'against a background of qualitative distinction' (Meijer 2018, 23) and to express the articulation as a belief or conviction. The desires that appear as impulses in weak evaluation reveal a *moral map* in raising questions about worth. In strong evaluation, we phenomenologically *come in contact with* those strong motivations that appear valid 'independently of our preferences.' (Meijer 2018, 42)

From this picture of human agency, Taylor draws the anthropological claim about the peculiarity of strong evaluation as a *transcendental condition* of human agency that orients a person to a 'culturally mediated framework of strong evaluation.' (Laitinen 2008, 90) Taylor claims that strong evaluation is 'a condition of being a functioning self.' (1989, 99) In this sense, the reference is not to a mere psychological capacity. As Meijer points out, it is 'a universal feature of human agency' (2018, 6) in a way that "the human beings we are and live with are all strong evaluators." (Taylor 1985a, 28)

Taylor moves from this descriptive assertion to a normative claim regarding strong evaluation. He proposes two claims concerning strong evaluation: one about selfhood and another about morality. The claim about selfhood is that human beings *are* necessarily strong evaluators, and about morality that they *ought* to be seen as such (Meijer 2016, 136). The only exclusion from the thesis of strong evaluation is a damaged person “suffering from a pathological disability.” (Taylor 1991b, 251) Taylor’s philosophical anthropology of strong evaluation is, thus, both a descriptive and normative claim.

The descriptive-normative claim suggests that our individual moral motivations have a distinct ontological status, with truth claims as ‘affirmations of a given ontology of the human.’ (Taylor 1989, 5) The individual moral motivations require the cultural context. However, the cultural context is not the fundamental source of the ontological allusion in the individual moral experience. If it were so, the transcendental claim about strong evaluation as the universal feature of human agency would not be context-transcendent. Then, this transcendental claim could only be categorized as a weak evaluation.

This is what Taylor refers to as the *metaphysical predicament* that ethical experience necessarily requires. Therefore, the contingent cultural context does not exhaust the truth claims of a given ontology. Instead, Taylor’s affirmation of the truth claim of individual moral motivations is a quest for a more fundamental normative grounding beyond the immanent context in what we refer to as a non-anthropocentric ontology. This transcendental claim rejects subjectivism to reinstate the source of normativity in higher ontology, which is neither subjective nor objective (intersubjective). The metaethical moral sources are imaginaries or abstractions of the ontology of the hidden higher good in the flow of history that constitutes and empowers individual moral motivations and existing intersubjective agreements within various cultures.

The realist perspective of philosophical anthropology is that there is an ontology implicit in the fact that we have intuitions of strong values that matter to us individually and collectively, putting demand on us or striking us as imperative, independently of our predilections. Meijer is right to point out ‘an unbridgeable methodological gap here.’ (2018, 113) The transcendentalism of Taylor’s philosophical anthropology does not ground the realism of a higher non-anthropocentric ontology and its constitutive powers, from within the limitations of human self-understanding and experience.

Regardless of the methodological gap, what happens if we accept Taylor’s transcendental argument that strong evaluation implies some form of realism in an implicit ontology and that we have ‘no good grounds to question’ (Taylor 1994, 208) their force? In this case, we have to concede that the ontological force over individuals is that of asymmetrical authority against which they have no critical self-control. Secondly, the collective consensus within a culture is organically *given* and *always already* valid being constituted by the same historical force.

V. Immanent Horizon and Moral Phenomenology

Reading Taylor's immanentism in exclusion of the pre-reflective pull of a *non-anthropocentric* transcendental influence is misguided and misses Taylor's insistence on a substantial grounding of normativity. Overreading Taylor's cultural situatedness and the binding of dialogical reason within such an immanent context, as argued before, fails to fully bring to view the relevance of fusion or interaction implied in Taylor's philosophy of the transcendent and immanent horizons. Phenomenologically, strong evaluation provides a modicum of self-control and critical autonomy, albeit contextualized, which otherwise appears non-existent from Taylor's transcendental horizon.

The hermeneutic freedom and dialogical reason constitute the self-definition of identity (authenticity) and offers a phenomenological explanation for individuation. However, this individuation is constricted by an overarching subordination of human nature and the realm of intersubjective values under the authority of Taylor's transcendental ontology. Joel Anderson exposes this tension in Taylor's account between "the contingent fact that some projects, relationships, and ideals have greater personal importance for me than for others," individuating me as a 'unique individual' and the 'ontological account' of 'the *general* prescriptive and motivating character' of values (1996, 18).

Taylor conceives strong evaluation as having a 'reflective-affective' (Meijer 2018, 36, 38, 55) nature that is an endless 'ongoing process of *self-interpretation*.' (Anderson 1996, 19) On the one hand, there are some strongly valued goods in the sense of a strong distinction of worth that is part of the implicit background of an individual's understanding felt intuitively as an impulse. On the other hand, our moral reactions are not ordinary instincts as they "involve claims, implicit or explicit, about the nature and status of human beings." (Taylor 1989, 5) Additionally, any description of human nature requires an interactive description of the 'world qua world.' (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015, 94) In moral reactions, "there is something there to articulate," and we can 'argue and reason' over our claims (Taylor 1989, 6). This specific character of strong evaluation brings out the dialogical nature of self in a way that, despite being entangled in emotions, our intuitively held values require *adequate articulation* of our feelings so that they strongly *move us* and open our articulations to a critical bearing.

The never-ending hermeneutics of strong evaluation as having a reflective-affective nature may suggest that we are subjectively free to *invent ourselves*. However, "strong evaluations are constrained by standards" of discrimination of higher worth beyond 'our own desires, inclinations, or choices.' (Anderson 1996, 19-20) Moral orientation opens the hermeneutic subjects to the force of the tacit background of their strongly valued distinctions of worth that are not merely subjective or cultural production.

These motivations from beyond the human sphere, which suggests an implicit non-anthropocentric ontology, demand articulation and open the moral subjects to the intersubjective and cultural web of meanings, revealing *subject-*

transcending standards. These individually articulated motivations may affirm or deny the intersubjectively held distinctions of worth. However, this critical self-control is complicated because these intersubjective moral standards are themselves constituted by the same non-anthropocentric ontology within a historical or cultural contingency, in a way affirming that there is something organically objective about cultural morality denying which would be a moral failing.

The fusion of the transcendent and immanent frames discloses the tension between two strained ontological claims, one that constitutes cultural morality, independently of the individual subjects and another articulated by the reflective-affective phenomenological experience of the individual moral subject's commitments. Taylor's conception of authenticity is plagued by ambiguity because of this ontological conflict. The question that afflicts Taylor's philosophy is the philosophical status of this ontology and its constitutive force.

VI. The Problematics of Ontology

As discussed, the culturally situated life goods are constituted by Taylor's non-anthropocentric ontology to support his moral realism, establishing the 'sovereignty of good' (Kerr 2004, 84) on moral agents. These intrinsic goods have the potential to inspire and motivate us "independently of one's success or failure in finding one's bearings." (Taylor 1989, 30) This non-anthropocentric ontology underpins our moral commitments and commands our awe or allegiance, placing a demand upon us "without which our strong evaluations would not make sense." (Meijer 2018, 55) Without this moral ontology, the attribution of human meanings will be arbitrary. Therefore, in Taylor's moral phenomenology, self-interpretation is 'in response to something' that is ontologically real (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015, 129). As we have seen, this ontological claim is context-transcendent and, therefore, a universal subordination of human nature and cultural moral values to the authority of the constitutive power of the non-anthropocentric ontology.

If we take for granted that a non-anthropocentric ontology underpins our *collective* moral commitments, then it remains ambiguous as to what we are ontologically committed to *individually* through our moral phenomenology to account for the plurality of ways our *unique* contingent commitments can account for authenticity. If, on the other side, we take hermeneutic freedom for granted, the objectivity of the general moral standards appears problematic. This conflict in Taylor leads to incoherent conception of authenticity, as will be discussed in the next section.

The ontological ambiguity in Taylor can be interpreted as Wittgenstein's views on ethics as 'supernatural.' (Wittgenstein 1965, 7) Taylor draws a demarcation between naturalist or scientific explanations of the world that works on the dichotomy of fact and value, subject and object, and the ethical experience in which the distinction between fact and value or subject and object blurs. Taylor's non-anthropocentric ontology is a way to reveal the meaning of the

supernatural claims that ethical experience makes in ordinary moral reactions. However, in this endeavor, Taylor pushes himself beyond what Wittgenstein would call 'misuse of our language.' (1965, 9) To believe that "certain experiences constantly tempt us to attribute a quality to them which we call absolute or ethical value and importance" as revealing some sense that a 'correct logical analysis' would be able to express is not appreciating "that their nonsensicality was their very essence" – pushing against this limit of language to describe the ethical experience is what Wittgenstein says he would reject '*ab initio*, on the ground of its significance.' (Wittgenstein 1965, 11)

Taylor eschews the temptation of any *significant description* by agreeing that there is "no shared public language for the articulation of moral sources" (Laitinen 2008, 274) that is rationally accessible. For moral subjects, the culturally situated life goods in Taylor's account dialogically "contribute to the *disclosure* of value." (Laitinen 2008, 275) The revealed strong value moves the subjects and affirms its ontological independence and context-transcendence by virtue of such revelation. Culturally situated life goods, in themselves, are not the source of value. By arguing that there is a plurality of ontological moral sources, Taylor suggests that various manifestations constitute uniquely different cultural and individual worldviews. Through this argument of plurality, Taylor rescues his account from a significant description of the *original* source of ethical experience. However, this relativism of sources only further complicates comprehension of his higher ontology.

The plurality of sources does not satisfactorily explain how they constitute culturally mediated life goods across and within different cultures, providing phenomenological access for strong evaluation by the moral subjects. The plurality of revealing perspectives (sources) and embracing the plurality of essences do not inform the conflicts of ontological differences between two individuals and two cultures and the ontological conflict between the individual and general moral claims. In other words, it affirms all possible perspectives by implying an optimistic construal of the whole of history within a culture or as a universal whole that necessarily moves us toward inherent goodness.

It puts Taylor's own critical approach under suspicion as to what he supersedes as *wrong* views about human nature and the world in favour of the *right* view to critique the trivialization of contemporary culture's fragmentation and disenchantment. The divine affirmation obfuscates the difference between authenticity and inauthenticity. Taylor's commitment to rescuing authenticity from subjective relativism and simultaneously also subscribing to a plurality of ontological sources of ethical experience appears inconsistently, demanding the best of both objectivism and perspectivism. After all, there must be a way of being wrong about one's individual commitments and ontological motivations, for only then can authenticity be considered an ethical ideal. However, it remains incomprehensible to account for this wrongness

objectively by reason. Meijer thus concludes that Taylor's ontology is "incomplete and unconvincing, at best, and misleading and distorting, at worst." (2018, 191)

Taylor's commitment to plurality does not explain whether "each good is constituted in relation to a different source" or "that all goods are constituted in relation to all sources." (Laitinen 2008, 276) Concerning authenticity as a life good of self-fulfillment in the West, it is apparent by the exposition of the three moral sources that authenticity is constituted by all these three sources (theistic, naturalist, and romanticist) that Taylor outlines as modern images of the non-anthropocentric ontology. Considering that individual projects of self-fulfillment can conflict with other life goods that are collectively held and can even articulate different ontological sources other than the three that Taylor articulates, we must also be able to answer the reasonable order of the diverse manifestations of sources. If we take, as in the case of authenticity, that all sources constitute all goods, then to say that there are one or many ontological sources makes a trivial difference. It is even unclear what it means to say that all sources constitute all goods. Laitinen is right to argue that Taylor's ontological commitment "is either arbitrary or superfluous," (2008, 295) casting 'a shadow' (2008, 277) on the intelligibility of moral plurality.

Taylor's project to posit the possibility of a third alternative (divine-human union) to ontology between the Platonist mode of moral realism that is purely non-anthropocentric and the subjectivist projectivism of ethics in naturalist moral philosophy ends up in ambiguity. From clearing the immanent hermeneutic background for self-interpretation, Taylor draws the universal condition of being human as involving strong evaluation or 'second-order experience.' (Meijer 2018, 112) Furthermore, from this phenomenological description of moral experience, Taylor "authorizes the picture of the moral as involving higher goods." (Meijer 2018, 54) Bernard Williams points out Taylor's predicament of moving from immanent to transcendent by arguing that "(F)rom a strong base in experience, Taylor very rapidly moves uphill, metaphysically speaking." (1990, 48)

As we have seen, the universal picture of philosophical anthropology that constitutes an immanent phenomenological context for both individuals and collective advances non-anthropocentric ontological claims. Taylor does not propose a metaphysical theory to defend this ontology, but he argues that an ethical life requires dealing with fundamental ontological questions. The universal feature of selfhood that emerges from his thinking is a universal view of human nature that is in perpetual "need for contact with the transcendent as harboring a permanent desire to go beyond the all-too-human." (Abbey 2000, 212) This universal view also grounds and validates diverse cultural perspectives as given intersubjective consensuses. However, the status of this non-anthropocentric ontology without any strong metaphysical theory is contestable and unredeemable as it cannot unite the diversity of experiences.

Taylor's ontology is supported by semantic ontology, and his views concerning language and hermeneutics are not discussed in this paper. However,

it must be stated that if we take the linguistic paradigm seriously in Taylor, we lose the objectivity to distinguish between authenticity and inauthenticity, as such an approach unavoidably leads to both internal and external relativization of perspectives.⁴ The succeeding section examines the obscure relation of Taylor's alternative ontology to general morality and the individual moral agent from within an internal cultural perspective. To clearly see the implications of Taylor's ontological moral realism for the notion of authenticity, it is imperative to engage with his account of authenticity from the background of the discussed problematics of ontology.

VII. Specter of Authenticity

Taylor critiques dismissing *authenticity as immoral*, by arguing neglect of strong evaluation and an underlying strong distinction of worth implied in the demands of an authentic life. Also, in the same breath, he criticizes the subjectivist trivialization of authenticity as blind to the horizon of significance. Taylor understands authenticity as '(B)eing true to myself' and articulates it in the Romantic vocabulary of 'being true to my own originality' that is discoverable and expressible. Articulating the essential originality is 'also defining myself,' making authenticity a problem of identity that demands self-fulfillment by "realizing a potentiality that is properly my own." (Taylor 1991a, 29)

Taylor takes the Romantic conception of authenticity by sidestepping the conceptions and demands of authenticity developed in existential philosophy. The predicament 'of the twilight of idols' and the 'death of God' that informs the 'quest for authenticity' (Golomb 1995, 13) in contemporary culture is dismissed by Taylor as leading to trivial subjectivism and radicalization of creative freedom without ontological source. As Williams argues, Taylor does not take Nietzschean predicament seriously "that if there is, not only no God, but no metaphysical order of any kind, then this imposes quite new demands on our self-understanding." (1990, 48)

Taylor interprets Nietzsche's nihilism as 'not a loss but a *reversal* of affirmation' (Meijer 2016, 341) as "hanging on to that sense of the magnificent, of the categorically affirmable, of the infinitely worthy of love," also suggesting 'a kind of Hegelian vision' in Nietzsche's 'self-overcoming.' (Taylor 1989, 453) Taylor's peculiar reading of nihilism underplays the fundamental paradox that Nietzsche poses about the force of inescapable moral claims that are 'illusions' as far as they are understood as ontological truth (Meijer 2016, 345). This unappreciated force of nihilism in Nietzsche and the challenge it poses to ontology is dismissed by Taylor, as for him, "the denial of transcendence is bound to lead to a crumbling and eventual breakdown of all moral standards." (2007, 638)

⁴ For Taylor's hermeneutic theory of social critique and its inadequacy, see Titus Stahl (2022, 42-56), *Immanent Critique*.

Therefore, although problematic, Taylor proposes a moralizing non-anthropocentric ontology to find “grounds to affirm living as humans.” (1993, 186)

Taylor does not only defend the social foundation for morality where ‘the validity of moral beliefs’ is embedded in intersubjective practices and agreement. Moreover, the domain of intersubjective ethical-political values serves Taylor as ‘only the starting point of a more fundamental’ (Meijer 2018, 188) ontological grounding of morality that ultimately appears as objectively existing independent of human reality. Although, the grounding is not strictly Platonic due to the human relatedness of Taylor’s non-anthropocentric ontology.

Taylor does not partake in the Nietzschean predicament of understanding authenticity in the contingency of searching for value “while at the same time recognizing the illegitimacy... of this very pursuit.” (Meijer 2016, 344) Taylor instead proposes an ontology of order to argue:

that authenticity (A) involves (i) creation and construction as well as discovery, (ii) originality, and frequently (iii) opposition to the rules of society and even potentially to what we recognize as morality. But it is also true, as we saw, that it (B) requires (i) openness to horizons of significance (for otherwise, the creation loses the background that can save it from insignificance) and (ii) a self-definition in dialogue. (1991a, 66)

Taylor recognizes some timeless features of selfhood, such as “the self’s moral orientation, the centrality of self-interpretation, the fact that humans are animals with language, the dialogical nature of selfhood, and the significance of embodiment.” (Abbey 2000, 2) These essential features of selfhood require Taylor to subsume the demands of authenticity as categorized in (A) creation and discovery, originality, and opposition to social norms under (B) horizons of significance and self-definition in dialogue. In other words, the demands categorized as (A) cannot be grasped in the absence of strong evaluation as an essential feature of selfhood in a way that (A) necessarily presupposes (B). Therefore, it is incorrect to see the demands of (A) and (B) as two dialectical poles of equal status.

Authenticity in Taylor is comprehensible through his moral hermeneutics, in which he proposes that human nature is essentially that of strong evaluation, where selfhood and general morality are entwined. The striking problem in the conception of authenticity that Taylor proposes is delineating those *unique* features from his general moral framework that can be said to be the individuating characteristics. The uniqueness of the individual in Taylor’s account is not easily accessible, which is enough to argue that his conception of authenticity is restrictive. However, it is necessary to look sympathetically at Taylor’s complex thought in the light of the previously discussed ontological problematics to fully capture what is at stake here.

As discussed, to be a strong evaluator is to have a ‘sense of higher worth’ (Taylor 1989, 20) that motivates or orients us. This higher distinction of worth involves “a certain sense of depth, admiration, or awe.” (Meijer 2016, 188) The

higher distinction of worth is ontologically distinct from the objective moral demands that emanate from the world. At the same time, it is not merely a subjective motivation. The source of the sense of higher worth can be "answered adequately only by taking into account the *ontological* conditions that allow for objective moral demands." (Meijer 2016, 190) The 'personal predilection' (Taylor 1989, 28) of higher and lower is related to Taylor's conception of constitutive goods or moral ontology as "something that we 'see' (like the Ideas), or as something we 'hear' (the 'voice of nature') or as something that comes upon us (the Holy Ghost)." (Taylor 1988, 301) This metaphysically constituted individual moral orientation or experience for Taylor is a universal condition of the constitution that simultaneously ordains cultural moral, and to imagine otherwise would be an "'existential' impossibility." (Taylor 1991b, 251)

As pointed out before, "Taylor's philosophical anthropology can *never* serve to justify [non-anthropocentric] ontological claims." (Meijer 2018, 114) Similarly, moral phenomenology that is constrained by internal cultural perspectives and limited to experience cannot ground Taylor's transcendentalism. This methodological problem of the weakness of transcendental constitution in Taylor aside, such strong constitution, on its own, does not offer us a picture of *particular* individuals and their reflective-affective sense of having any uniquely higher goods unless we examine its fusion with the immanent moral phenomenology.

We, as strong evaluators, open ourselves to "a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad", and to be morally oriented is to know "where I stand." (Taylor 1989, 28) In this context, thematically speaking, Taylor moves from philosophical anthropology to moral phenomenology and dialogical self-definition. The moral subject opens to the cultural webs of meanings to articulate its *own* response. In articulating one's stand, she must account for what *authentically* moves her through overt and inert dialogue. The affective distinction of worth comes in reflective focus and opens itself to critical deliberative judgment by challenges from within or without. It is here that convictions are individuated as a unique identity. However, what is it that we identify as our originality? Is it our stand or something else?

The phenomenological picture of discovering one's stand through dialogue appears sufficient to account for authenticity, for it also leaves room for opposition to norms. This simplistic picture, however, is contestable without its fusion with the transcendental horizon. What is articulated in strong evaluation is not merely a stand concerning cultural life *goods*, but articulation opens moral subjects to making their unarticulated moral instincts manifest as higher ontological motivations beyond their self-control. The ontological moral sources or 'constitutive goods,' as Meijer argues, are not merely descriptive for Taylor but also normative, having 'a more *practical* role' to play (2016, 204). Hence, for Taylor, "articulation brings us closer to the good as a *moral source*," (1989, 92) and to "come closer to them, to have a clearer view of them, to come to grasp what they involve, is...to be moved to love or respect them." (1989, 96) Authenticity becomes

contestable and 'open to criticism' (Taylor 1991a, 36-37) only in reference to such ontological claims. Therefore, for Taylor, authenticity cannot be understood without this non-anthropocentric ontology that constitutes and empowers individual instincts.

This is only one side of the picture. To be fully oriented within the horizon of significance is a matter of taking a stand on intersubjectively held life goods also constituted by ontological sources other than making one's moral instincts explicit in ontological terms. There is a certain claim to the non-anthropocentric ontology that makes social goods – good. Then, there is the ontological orientation articulated in individual experience about which one can be wrong. It is unclear how Taylor reconciles these ontologies.

Taylor believes that the better we articulate our respective moral instincts, the more our myriad conceptions of good would come in 'proximity' to the higher force of good (Anderson 1996, 23). That is to say that in our *individual* ontological commitments, we gradually converge into a *general* ontological source that constitutes intersubjective generality within a culture. We have seen the philosophical arbitrariness of Taylor's non-anthropocentric ontology, which constitutes individual motivations and cultural goods. What remains practically puzzling is the ontological dignity of experientially held ontology and its ultimate convergence with the general ontology. It begs us to ask the same question as before: What are we ontologically committed to *individually* by our moral phenomenology? Is it not like claiming that the more our *individual* ontological claims come closer to *generally* accepted ontology in a culture, the more defensible our authenticity is? Would it be wrong to say that Taylor conceives authenticity in a way that conformism appears as authenticity? In that case, what is inauthenticity? If that is not the case, and there is still room for opposition to norms, how do we make sense of those individually unique possibilities?

Taylor's ontological approach to realism in a moral common sense provides him with a minimal possibility of difference between individuals except in terms of degree. He argues that authenticity "clearly concerns the *manner* of espousing any end or form of life." (Taylor 1991a, 82) However, Taylor resists the idea that "the *content* must be self-referential." (1991a, 82) It is the same as saying that everybody is authentic, but some are more authentic than others. For, whatever the manner of espousing any communal end, whether in conformism, neutrality, or opposition, the claim to authenticity remains undistorted as long as one can articulate their motivations in ontological terms. Since, such ontological motivation is also a universal feature of subjectivity. Therefore, there is no way to be unmotivated, as the ontological authority that motivates us goes beyond individual predilections and self-control. However, since there is something ontologically real about what motivates us and constitutes general morality, one can be right or wrong in articulating one's claims of ontological motivations.

To argue that somebody can be wrong about their ontological commitment is to say that their articulation is not fully realized. The possible divergence is a

matter of poor articulation and must align an individual to what is good in general when corrected. Nevertheless, the degree of personal resonance may differ even if one properly aligns, ontologically speaking. Can one be wrong about their degree of motivation, and what would it mean to account for it when intrinsic or higher goods motivate us independently of our desires or subjective will? Such a description of human nature also leaves no room for any bad faith, hypocrisy, or self-deception. Moreover, since the practical matter of being right or wrong is only limited to articulation, those in a privileged position will certainly always be more persuasive.

Finally, it is regrettable that Taylor's non-anthropocentric ontology and its asymmetrical constitution of human nature and the intersubjective world of significance throw the challenge back at his own critique of contemporary culture. Meijer correctly wonders at the repercussion, suggesting "the love which generally moves people towards goods is eroding under our very noses." (Meijer 2016, 358) How does the higher non-anthropocentric ontology that lays claim to us not move us anymore? What justifies the trivialization of authenticity in contemporary culture? We are pushed back to Nietzsche's nihilism that morals lay claim on us but are not objectively real, a predicament that Taylor sees as 'a huge self-inflicted wound.' (1989, 513)

Taylor's ontological grounding of the higher *good* in the whole of history attempts to rescue morality from subjectivism in an 'impossible yearning for the ontic logos,' (Rosen 1991, 194) which consequently, aims 'at objective rightness.' (Meijer 2018, 188) The theoretical issues of such ontological speculation for Taylor's philosophical project of modernity and secularization are a different problem. However, its implication for authenticity, which is the primary concern in this paper, raises some pertinent questions.

Authenticity in Taylor appears as a matter of articulating ontological motivations that dictate the life of strong evaluation. Therefore, it is wrong to assume that strong evaluation is only a matter of opening to the intersubjective realm. Instead, the epiphanic moment of realizing the commands that ontologically move us is an *un-concealment* that opens on the side of *Being* that historically constitutes beings and their world. Taylor argues that "(T)o define my identity is to define what I must be in *contact with* in order to function fully as a human agent, and specifically to be able to judge and discriminate and recognize what is really of worth or importance, *both in general and for me.*" (1985b, 258; emphasis added)

Taylor's ontological commitment to the higher good and its descriptive and normative relation to human nature restricts the individual and the world in a sophisticated necessity. Individuals are and ought to be strong evaluators. The world is and ought to be good. It leads to the predicament that everything *is* as it *ought* to be. Such quest "to reach truth or true Being," as Hannah Arendt argues, practically "discriminates against appearances." (Arendt 1977, 1978, Thinking, 8) Moreover, articulating such truth for authenticity is not merely aesthetic or a

matter of '(E)piphanic art,' as Braman (2000, 236) suggests. Taylor is unwilling to submit to the *regulative* role of the 'creative play' (Braman 2000, 233) of imagination and understanding implied in aesthetic understanding. Since what ontologically *constitutes* us (individually and collectively), there is also a practical matter of "getting it right and getting it wrong," (Taylor 1985a, 65) opening such a constitution to a critical evaluation in the public sphere.

Articulation for Taylor is aimed at making "clearer the imports things have for us," (1985a, 65) *individually*. At the same time, it also opens our self-interpretation to evaluation by the measure of what is objectively valid or invalid, *generally*. It remains unclear what these objective criteria may be except maximization of articulation and persuasion in its character as *will to power*. If the criterion of validity is the maximization of articulation, it would most likely lead to endless confirmation of one's own prejudices or merely conforming to the maximum available articulation in an existing consensus legitimized by authority rather than insight. Taylor's romantic optimism in the goodness of Being underestimates the influence of contemporary ideological pathologies and their iron grip of instrumental rationality on the modern human condition.

Taylor's authenticity, understood as the fulfillment of moral self-identity by recovering contact with the transcendent, maybe restrictively conceived as spiritually intimate. However, how this authenticity manifests to ultimately salvage the fragmentation in modernity between subjective and objective robs individuals of their ontological dignity unless they are in conformism with the generally held commitments. Nick Smith points out that Taylor's strong evaluation is formally appealing within rational intercourse. However, the conditions under which such a "properly articulated ideal of authenticity may become a political reality" (Smith 1994, 24) cannot be accounted for.

One can also be skeptical of the inherent goodness of such a project of bringing pathos of authenticity in the public realm as an ideal, because the concretization of the existing consensus in higher ontology restricts the contingency of beginning something new. Taylor appears unwilling to pay the price of contingency for public freedom and the autonomy of the individual, without which the political opening of his authenticity remains restrictive. Furthermore, Taylor's critique of subjectivism and relativism in the contemporary culture of authenticity and his attempt to subject authenticity to public critique itself remains ambiguous in the absence of clear criteria for distinguishing authenticity from inauthenticity.

VIII. Some Reflections and Conclusion

Taylor's project of authenticity can be interpreted as an attempt to recover the premodern security of Being to romantically address the homelessness and meaninglessness of the modern subject in a disenchanted world. He wants to rescue the abandonment of the modern subject from a horizonlessness of cosmopolitan universalism, which radically throws them upon themselves

(subjectivism) without simultaneously entirely abandoning the Enlightenment ideals of disengaged freedom and reason, which guarantees objectivism.

By grounding subjects in their diverse cultural contexts, Taylor limits or situates freedom and reason. However, this situatedness is guaranteed against the transcendental constitution of human agency and culture interwoven in a non-anthropocentric ontology to ensure some form of objectivity of knowledge. It is incomprehensible how Taylor wants to bring two quite different things together: first, the contextualism of every understanding (immanence), and second, the closedness of each understanding in an ambivalent objectivism (transcendentalism). We have thoroughly shown the tension in Taylor's attempt to bring these two frames of reference into a fusion and its consequences for his conception of authenticity.

Taylor's optimism in the progress of history is only conservatively sympathetic to the demands of spontaneity and contingency, which poses the predicament of authenticity as a *hero's gesture*. Therefore, his conception of authenticity dismisses the pathos of authenticity that developed in the existentialist tradition. To address the individual's alienation from their world, Taylor postulates a non-anthropocentric ontology as the transcendental source of the experience of the world. The coming in proximity to one's own originality is to come in touch with this ontology that is the constitutive source of our individual instincts and general morality. However, this ontology fails to explain the diversity of perspectives within and outside a particular cultural reference.

The transcendental picture renders the factual character of existing as an individual different from another individual, almost impossible to grasp. Hermeneutics in Taylor's moral phenomenology does provide a semblance of individuation within an immanent frame. However, the ontological dignity of an individual interpretive stance seems compromised to a generally held ontological commitment due to his arguments about the transcendental constitution of both. Since Taylor cannot construct binding metaphysics in the post-metaphysical age, he relies on the plurality of ontological perspectives, consequently legitimizing goodness in all understandings. Therefore, the fusion of the transcendent and immanent horizons rather than rescuing objectivism, quite paradoxically, leaves us with no clear criteria to distinguish authenticity from inauthenticity. The only form of criteria available is the maximization of articulation or, in other words, persuasion, which indeed will always be tilted in favor of the powerful and not immune from being manipulative or deceptive, at least in the eyes of those to whom it is addressed.

This final consideration becomes particularly compelling in contemporary times. In the romantic nostalgia for the original dwelling in the security of Being over and above the existing liberal consensus, we witness exceeding hypocritical and authoritarian tendencies in politics across the world. They want to contextualize dominant and majoritarian views of society in cultural, religious, or ethnic sources through anonymous or direct force, often encroaching on the

constitutional or legal consensus, which, from such perspectives, is poorly grounded on secular reason. Such projects in the name of external cultural plurality and exclusivism are often internally restrictive to the eclectic nature of public reason. In such cases, the construction of common good, interests, and purposes are undifferentiated from the logic of mass society and the ideological influences of bureaucratic state and capital, in which modern subjectivism is entrenched.

Our peculiar condition is such that we are all too well aware of our abandonment from the cosmic context, which is irrecoverable. At the same time, our attempts to recover from this predicament through a romantically tinged optimism anesthetizes us in the face of severe and pressing injuries of our time, with little at our command to imagine something new. Our critical analysis of Taylor's moral philosophy and his conception of authenticity may appear prejudiced. However, it is prejudiced in the specific sense of confronting his optimism with a pinch of salt, for which, we have shown, we have sufficient reasons. Otherwise, as it seems, the romantic quest for transcendental ontology to rationalize our present commitments in order to address individual alienation from its historically constituted cultural world ends up alienating us from the contingency of our present worlds, which becomes the prey of being validated by the past in a manner that we have no recourse but to take the future goodness of this tide of history as a matter of faith.

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Ankur Ranjan, Sreekumar Nellickappilly

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