

**CHALLENGING TAYLOR'S ONTOLOGY OF COMMON SENSE**

**Paul Saurette**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**University of Ottawa**  
**Email: [Saurette@uottawa.ca](mailto:Saurette@uottawa.ca)**

**Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association**  
**Halifax, Nova Scotia**  
**May 30, 2003**

Comments welcomed. Please do not cite without permission of the author.

## CHALLENGING TAYLOR'S ONTOLOGY OF COMMON SENSE

Paul Saurette

Over the last several years, I've become increasingly interested in the role that appeals to 'common sense' play in both political thinking and in practical politics. There is, of course, a history of appealing to 'common sense' in Anglo-American philosophy – with Hume perhaps being the most famous philosophical example. I began to suspect that appeals to common sense might be wider than this select group, however, when I started to investigate the role this strategy plays in underpinning what is usually seen as the opposite of Hume's common sense philosophy: Kant's practical moral and political philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Since that point, I've found that overt and implicit appeals to common sense play important roles in a wide variety of contemporary political theory. A surprising number of 'procedural liberals' appeal to 'common sense' principles to ground their thought at difficult moments. Rawls, for example, has frequent recourse to this idea. When trying to ultimately defend the central idea of political liberalism (that of the overlapping consensus), he often describes it as the 'common sense' of our democratic culture – as if this in itself is enough to make it acceptable. For those more 'civic' or communitarian liberals who explicitly identify the important links between culture and politics – 'common sense' is perhaps even more central. Thus, both Robert Putnam and Michael Sandel mourn the loss of the common, republican identity – and with it the principles of common sense – that once characterized America. For they trace many of the problems of contemporary America to this loss.

While I appreciate the importance of the 'common' to politics, I am also deeply wary of appealing to 'common sense'. More often than not, an appeal to 'common sense' has the effect of imperiously disbaring contending positions from voicing their view on key issues by rendering certain assumptions and values incontestable (who, after all, wants to admit to lacking common sense). I am especially wary of these appeals because in my experience, they tend to be mobilized to silence questions which highlight the most contestable – and often the most important – grounds of that same 'common sense' position. Too often, the appeal to common sense both coercively limits the questions posed and papers over the insufficiency of the 'common sense' position.

It is thus critical to identify, evaluate and challenge the political strategy of appealing to common sense in both political thought and practical politics. To do this we need to ask a number of questions. What is common sense – and what does it mean to appeal to it in a political sense? How does it function in the most important contemporary figures in political thought today: in Kant, in Rawls, in Habermas, in Taylor, in Sandel? How does it function in practical politics? How did Harris convince Ontarians that his programme was a 'common sense revolution' as opposed to a coup d'état of certain narrow interests? And what are the impacts of these appeals – both positive and negative?

These are the larger questions I'm beginning to examine in my research. In this paper, I address only a small portion of this. Here I will only (i) discuss the role of common sense in Charles Taylor's thought and (ii) examine the positive and negative impact of it on his political perspective. In regard to the first question, I will argue that the appeal to common sense is a central strategy in Taylor's work and that it characterizes his thought as fundamentally as his ontological investigations. Taylor's defence of 'the community' and the common in political issues such as language rights, etc is well known. However, most interpreters of Taylor argue that this 'advocacy communitarianism' is a result of Taylor's ontology – that is his fundamental conception of how society functions and what relationship

individuals and communities necessarily embody. I want to argue that Taylor's ontology is only part of the story – and that in fact, a conception of 'common sense' is equally important to his thought.

Understanding the role of common sense, then, gives us a more accurate picture of how Taylor's thought functions. Understanding its role also allows us to identify a number of positive – but also very troubling – consequences of Taylor's political vision. On one hand, we need to acknowledge that his appreciation of common sense has allowed him to question certain problematic areas of procedural liberalism. On the other hand, Taylor's idealization of 'community' as a single common sense is highly contestable. And furthermore, Taylor's orientation toward common sense carries with it three dangerous consequences as well: that of intensifying contemporary fragmentation, cultivating fundamentalism and inspiring tactics of social humiliation

This essay is therefore organized into 4 main sections. The first outlines the traditional interpretation of Taylor as employing a method of ontological reflection. The second will briefly outline my understanding of the role of ontology in Taylor. The third section will then argue that our understanding of Taylor's thought is incomplete without an appreciation of the role common sense plays in establishing and securing Taylor's moral and ontological vision. The fourth and final section will then explore the impact of Taylor's appeal to common sense – and will conclude that the risks of his strategy are too large to accept. I will therefore begin with the discussion of traditional interpretations of Taylor.

## 1. Ontology in Political Theory

If there is wide acknowledgment of the importance of Charles Taylor's thinking to contemporary political and moral theory, there is also wide disagreement about its validity and even about the specific contours of his specific positions. One of the key axes of disagreement in interpretation surrounds how Taylor applies ontological reflection to political theory. Virtually all interpreters suggest that Taylor's perspective on most political issues is determined – to some degree – by his deep convictions about the fundamental nature of the self, community and morality. However, there is disagreement exactly *how* Taylor's ontology influences his political and ethical thinking.

Today, we might say that there are at least three main views about what role ontological thinking should play in political theory: the thin secularism of procedural liberalism, strong ontology and weak ontology. The most famous proponent of the first position is Rawls' *Political Liberalism*. This perspective argues that political thought should avoid ontological discussions of the good – both because we should never seek to eliminate the 'fact of plurality' and because public discussion of these issues only intensifies disagreements and clouds our ability to come to a political, and just, resolution. It is this position – one we might call a proceduralist, thin secularism since it relegates discussions of the 'good' primarily to the private realm – that Taylor has most forcefully argued against.

In contrast to thin secularism, Taylor claims that deep ontological beliefs necessarily influence our political discussions (whether we acknowledge them or not). Moreover, he argues that articulating this ontology will actually help to resolve the political and moral fragmentation afflicting (in his eyes) contemporary society. On Ruth Abbey's reading, it is Taylor's belief that the self always already is embedded in a moral framework. Ontologically speaking, the individual "is always socially situated and always points beyond itself". According to Abbey, this ontological picture is thus the "basis for his attack on atomism" and his affirmative political and normative recommendations.<sup>2</sup>

In charging that even Rawls' thin secularism must ask – and answer – ontological questions, Taylor asserts that liberal proceduralism can not, in practice, ignore the relevance and power of moral sources. Taylor's critique of Rawls on this dimension is compelling (I will discuss this in more detail below in section 4.2). But if Taylor shows the relevance of ontology to political thought – it is still unclear *what role* he thinks it should have. How should we (and how does Taylor) acknowledge and account for deep ontological convictions?

Here, there are two very different perspectives on how Taylor employs ontology. Using Stephen White's terms, we can say that some interpreters view Taylor as a strong ontologist while others view him as a weak ontologist.<sup>3</sup> According to White, strong ontologists believe that there are clear ontological truths about the world – and that these need to be reflected in our political and moral thought and structures. A variety of interpreters put Taylor in this camp. Quentin Skinner, Michael Rosen and Isaiah Berlin, for example, see Taylor as a renewed 'moral realist' who is trying to convert us to a single set of moral, ontological absolutes.<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Berlin, for example, believes that Taylor is "basically a teleologist - both as a Christian and as a Hegelian", that Taylor "believes in essences" and that his moral position is one that sees a basic orienting purpose at the heart of human life, institutions and proper moral systems.<sup>5</sup> Others identify Taylor as a 'moral realist', one who thinks that we must understand morality in terms of objective good(s). Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that the aim of Taylor's *Sources of the Self* is to establish a set of objective late modern goods that guide us morally.<sup>6</sup> Both Quentin Skinner and Michael Rosen also see Taylor as 'returning' to moral realism (as Rosen's title suggests).<sup>7</sup> But where MacIntyre seems to support this approach, Skinner and Rosen find it fundamentally problematic. Rosen suggests that Taylor's 'moral realism' returns us to the search for a "transcendent" rational order while Skinner further suggests that Taylor's theistic impulses are not only dangerously monological, but ultimately unhelpful for our late-modern quest to "find the values to sustain social life within the practices of social life itself".<sup>8</sup> These critics charge that Taylor tries to use ontology to unquestionably ground moral and political imperatives – and that this leads us back to the bad old days where religious wars sought to eliminate the plurality of being by imposing a single conception of the good.

Other theorists challenge this view and instead paint Taylor as a weak ontologist. Weak ontologists, according to Stephen White, acknowledge that we all have deep convictions. However, they believe that these convictions only *prefigure* and inspire us towards certain questions and solutions – these convictions don't determine certain perspectives as incontestably necessary. According to White, this approach best defines Taylor. On White's view, Taylor highlights the importance of re-articulating the questions of political theory as a way of opening us up to new possibilities. Taylor ontology "focuses attention cognitively and orients us affectively" towards certain modes of "ethico-political perception and judgement".<sup>9</sup> According to White, however, Taylor doesn't simply move imperiously from unquestioned ontology to incontestable moral imperatives.

Taylor's work itself is deeply ambivalent about where it falls in this strong/weak ontology divide.<sup>10</sup> His writings seem to embody a deep drive to convert his ontological picture into binding moral imperatives. Much of his work is scathingly critical of atomist and naturalist epistemology and ontology.<sup>11</sup> And he has spent considerable effort laying out a philosophical anthropology that appears to function as an incontestable ontology replete with moral implications.<sup>12</sup> If we focus on these, Taylor might well appear to be a moral realist and a "strong ontologist" to boot.<sup>13</sup> Yet this representation sits somewhat unevenly on Taylor's work. For there are too many moments when he explicitly

acknowledges the impossibility and undesirability of returning to naive moral realism. And his historical study of late-modern identity reveals that we face multiple moral sources. Moreover, Taylor himself rejects the strong ontological reading of his thought in several places.<sup>14</sup> Given this, therefore, I agree with Stephen White's judgment that Taylor does not naively forward his ontology as a "foundationalist, determinate truth about the shape and direction of self and world" with which to ground a single moral order.<sup>15</sup> Contra Berlin's and Skinner's portrayal, Taylor does not simply rely on ontology to establish an imperative image of morality (which to them appears as merely an authoritarian and teleological vision of the Good). But while I appreciate White's project of generously understanding Taylor's project, I do not believe that his portrait of Taylor's thinking as "weak ontology" is a sufficient representation either. For Taylor's philosophical project does not recognize its own contestability to the degree that White would like. While Taylor does not share the Platonic model of ontology, given the choice between subjectivism and realism, he clearly prefers "to go on thinking of [himself] as a moral realist"<sup>16</sup> and to speak of a "moral demand" that "we discover".<sup>17</sup>

How can we explain Taylor's vacillation between strong ontological claims and qualifications more akin to a weak ontology? And how can we evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Taylor's approach in light of these tensions? Here, I believe we need to understand how Taylor's thinking is characterized not only by a communitarian ontology – but is also oriented by another mode of political thought which is defined by, and attempts to appeal to, an ideal of common sense. Only once we appreciate this element of his thinking, I believe, can we properly understand it and evaluate it.

## 2. Taylor's Ontology

I will not go into great detail about Taylor's ontology here. However, it is clear that Taylor strongly believes that a crucial part of his project is excavating and articulating the ontological 'background' in which he thinks we all exist. From Taylor's perspective, the key point is that we cannot formulate our political and ethical principles without taking into account – and following the dictates – of our fundamental nature as beings with identity, beings that need to make imperative, universal moral judgements, beings that use language and beings that cannot but exist in communities. For Taylor, these ontological facts mean that "there are some peculiarly human ends".<sup>18</sup> And according to Taylor, this means that even though we exist as autonomous subjects, we must nonetheless all recognize the 'call' these conditions of possibility place on us. The moment we exercise our human agency through speech, for example, the speaker becomes

enmeshed in two kinds of larger order, which he can never fully oversee, and can only punctually and marginally refashion. For he is only a speaking agent at all as part of a language community...and the meanings and illocutionary forces activated in any speech act are only what they are against the background of a whole language and way of life.<sup>19</sup>

Language and our communities embody powerful imperatives whose authority is in excess of our voluntary consent to it.

Taylor concludes, therefore, that we must recognize our implication in a moral system that transcends our subjective desires. The constitutive status of this linguistic and cultural system means that even the autonomous subject must look beyond her own desires for guidance. For Taylor, "the subject himself cannot be the final authority on the question of whether he is free; for he cannot be the final authority on the question of whether his desires are authentic, whether they do or do not frustrate his purposes."<sup>20</sup> Since "the free individual or autonomous moral agent can only achieve and maintain his identity in a

certain type of culture...And I want to claim finally that all this creates a significant obligation to belong for whoever would affirm the value of freedom.”<sup>21</sup>

Taylor, when describing what role his ontological reflections play, often has refers back to the Kantian Method. According to Taylor, his ontology is like an updated transcendental argument.<sup>22</sup> They do not *prove* themselves correct through empirical evidence. Nor do they close the door definitively to other perspectives. However, they do have the power “to formulate boundary conditions we can all recognize. Once they are properly formulated, we can see at once that they are valid. The thing is self-evident.”<sup>23</sup> It may be tough to get to that point of perfect articulation – but that is the ideal.

It is not surprising, then, that Taylor describes his ontology as a map – one that clarifies points us towards our necessary moral goal. In the *Sources of the Self*, he states that his “entire way of proceeding involves mapping connections between sense of the self and moral visions, between identity and the good”.<sup>24</sup> Later, he suggests that the end product of his articulation is a “map of our moral world”, which, “however full of gaps, erasures and blurrings” is “interesting” and presumably useful. In “Social Theory as Practice”, Taylor argues again that contending social and moral theories should be evaluated as if they were maps, for each offers a description of the good and its role in our life and each functions to help us navigate this life. In Taylor’s eyes, then, in the debate between himself and atomists,

what is at stake is more like rival maps of the terrain. One might say, the terrain of possible practices is being mapped in contour, and this purports to give the shape and slopes of the heights of value.<sup>25</sup>

According to Taylor, every theory – whether they admit it or not - has an ontological map. And for him, we should evaluate social theories like maps - that is, according to their actual practical value. “The proof of a map is how well you can get around using it.”<sup>26</sup> Once again, the parallel with moral realism is obvious: if the practice of articulation in social theory to function as a map that can be tested, there must be a clear moral referent that it represents and against which it can be measured.

### 3. Common Sense Recognition and the Insufficiency of Ontology

Here, the portrayal of Taylor as a strong ontologist seems to be the most persuasive. Taylor seems to argue that his ontological vision is a more accurate existential representation of what it is to be a human agent – and thus we must accept its description of the ‘good’.<sup>27</sup> But – if this were his argument, Taylor would run into a variety of problems. For contending positions not only disagree about which map is best – but also about what the ‘actual’ terrain really looks like. Atomists don’t even see the ‘good’ to which Taylor refers – thus how could we together judge which ontological map of the good as superior? If we can’t even agree on the referent or model against which we test the map, how could we even begin to evaluate which is the best map? If we interpret Taylor as a straight-forward ontological realist – he would seem to inherit a variety of problems he is acutely aware of. For Taylor has always been aware that our relationship to ‘nature’ is a mediated one. If we believe – as Taylor does - that the human being is a self-interpreting animal whose relation to ‘nature’ shifts as a result of its own self-understanding – it would be impossible to forward a straightforward ‘realist’ argument. Yet – Taylor consistently argues that the imperatives he seems to derive from his ontological map are accurate and should be accepted by all ‘Western’ subjects – whether we accept it or not.

How does he manage to inhabit both of these positions? I believe that an appeal to, and analysis of, ‘common sense’ is precisely the method that allows Taylor to try to square the circle. For in Taylor’s work, ‘common sense’ is precisely the moral referent against which we can test our ontological maps. Where, after all, does Taylor find the ground from which to determine ‘what we really are’?<sup>28</sup> He finds it in his understanding of our common sense. It is not coincidental that Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* – his most important work and the book he spent 20 years writing – does not merely forward a theoretical ontological defence, but instead analyzes the common practices, institutions and identities he thinks we actually and historically occupy.

Before going into a detailed reading of common sense in Taylor, I want to briefly outline what the appeal to common sense is. Essentially, I see the appeal to common sense as a philosophical attempt to ground certain values, claims or assumptions as unquestionable through the paradoxical idea that we all already recognize and accept the value, claim or assumption in question. Roughly, we might say that the appeal to common sense is characterized by 5 elements:

1. The implicit assertion that at base, ‘we all share’ whatever values or claims are being made, regardless of whether we might superficially believe otherwise
2. The belief that this common sense, though shared by all, can sometimes be distorted, muddled, obscured or otherwise hidden by incorrect beliefs, habits, etc
3. The faith that once these distortions are revealed and exorcized, that we will all recognize the basic values of common sense as self-evident.
4. The belief that this recognition alone justifies and valorizes the values of common sense. Common sense, on this view, is a good in itself – or a fact of life. It does not need further justification or reasons.
5. The belief, therefore, that common sense – once recognized – is authoritative and cannot be challenged within its sphere.

Disaggregated into its various assumptions, the appeal to common sense seems highly problematic and unlikely to convince many people of its merits. However, when used as a rhetorical and philosophical strategy – it builds on so many positive connotations and affective associations that it can be highly effective. And this is why we find it at those crucial moments in Kant, Rawls, Habermas, and Taylor when philosophical justification meets its limits but when further political persuasion is necessary.

I believe that for Taylor, this point – where philosophical justification is insufficient but where it is crucial for him to authoritatively establish his perspective - is his defence of the ontology and the moral imperatives he wants to defend. He knows that he has outlined a possible ontology – and a possible moral vision. But he also knows that he has not proven it as undeniable. He has shown that atomism is problematic – but he has not unquestionably proven that his communitarian ontology is necessarily the only alternative. It is here, then, that Taylor turns to common sense to ground his ontology – and to make his moral vision authoritative and unquestioned.

We can see the link between ontology and common sense in Taylor’s thinking in his outline of the method that defines the *Sources of the Self* – articulation. Taylor states that he wants to defend the strong thesis that doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us, otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discrimination. Moreover, this is not mean just as a contingently true psychological fact about human beings...Rather the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that

stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood.<sup>29</sup>

This quotation makes clear several elements of Taylor's position. On one hand, Taylor seems to be an adamant strong ontologist – that this ontology of the self and its need for objective, moral 'frameworks' is authoritative and must be acknowledged as such (along with whatever moral imperatives this also gives rise to). However, this quote also has an interesting twist at the end. For it turns out that the definition of human agency is not guaranteed by the authority of an ontology so much as it is authorized by our common sense recognition of what undamaged human personhood is. Our moral frameworks are inescapable not because they are theoretically necessary - but also because our common sense recognizes them to be essential.

I want to argue that this appeal to recognition is not epiphenomenal or coincidental, but indicates the central role of common sense recognition in Taylor's philosophy. Taylor realizes that an ontological strategy is inconclusive in an era where the moral referent of 'the good' is open to debate. Thus, Taylor's strategy is not only to provide an ontology that 'prefigures' a certain vision of the good. It is also to show that 'we' share a historically created common sense which nevertheless authoritatively compels us to recognize certain moral ideals and ethical imperatives. There are intimations that Taylor has an affinity for appealing to common sense even before *Sources of the Self*. For example, Taylor is explicit about the ontological value he wants to accord the common sense of communal language, social practices and our common identity. According to Taylor, we can be autonomous individuals and experience truly human emotions only insofar as we exist within a community. And

Common meanings are the basis of a community...only with common meanings does this common reference world contain significant common actions, celebrations and feelings. These are objects in the world that everybody shares.<sup>30</sup>

Taylor is explicit that the common meanings to which he refers are not simply convergent or shared understandings - an aggregate agreement between discrete units. Rather, as a constitutive condition for convergent agreement, this deep common sense is prior to, and authoritative over, merely convergent or divergent 'opinions'.

Taylor thus wants to argue that we must explore and explicate this deep common sense if we are to correctly discover our moral constitutive goods. This is one place where Taylor thinks that "Hegel's philosophy provides useful insights".<sup>31</sup> For what model of morality better elevates the value of common sense than the logic of *sittlichkeit*? Taylor, of course, denies that we must understand our *sittlichkeit* as oriented by Hegel's ontology of *Geist*. But he seems convinced that once the Hegelian ontology is subtracted, Hegel's conception of *sittlichkeit* provides insight into the character of ethical thinking. So important, in fact, that according to Taylor, our age "cannot afford any longer to suppress the question of *Sittlichkeit* altogether, as does the mainstream of modern political science."<sup>32</sup> Why? Because the central insight of the concept of *sittlichkeit* is that the moral imperatives we must obey are already embedded in our common sense.

*Sittlichkeit* refers to the moral obligations I have to an ongoing community of which I am part. These obligations are based on established norms and uses...The crucial characteristic of *Sittlichkeit* is that it enjoins us to bring about what already is. This is a paradoxical way of putting it, but in fact the common life which is the basis of my *sittlich* obligation is already there in existence.<sup>33</sup>

*Sittlichkeit* describes the essence of common sense morality. The process of clarifying our *sittlichkeit* is the process of striving to become a more authentic version of what we already are. We must strive to embody what we already recognize, we must become what we already are. For the common sense of *Sittlichkeit* “provides a goal which is at the same time already realized, which is brought about and yet is.”<sup>34</sup> We all share a common moral sense. However, it is obscured by our atomist philosophy and procedural liberal political and economic context. Once we articulate it clearly, however, we should immediately recognize it. Moreover, we must also recognize its unquestioned authority. *Sittlichkeit* has authority because of its basis in common sense – not merely because it can be philosophically justified. Taylor’s moral method, then, is a classic case study in using the appeal to common sense as a strategy of moral and political persuasion.

Since Taylor believes that our common sense is deeply distorted and obscured in contemporary society, he knows that simply outlining a model of morality based on a common sense will not bring it about. Much like Kant – or even Wittgenstein – Taylor has much ‘clearing’ to do before common sense will emerge and be recognized. Thus, much of Taylor’s work is, I believe, an attempt to excavate this common sense and encourage our recognition of it. This is the essence of articulation. Where does Taylor look to uncover and reveal this common sense that is currently obscured and distorted? I believe his philosophy looks for this common sense in three places: in his analysis of (i) our modern identity, (ii) our standards of practical reason, and (iii) our common moral affect and emotions. I will outline each attempt in turn.

### 3.1 *The Common Sense of Modern Identity*

Taylor’s most detailed attempt to put some flesh on his appeal to common sense recognition is found in the *Sources of the Self* and the *Ethics of Authenticity*. Here, Taylor argues that the common sense of our modern *sittlichkeit* is found in the deep imperatives of our common modern identity. *Sources of the Self*, as Taylor claims, is the attempt “to articulate and write a history of the modern identity.”<sup>35</sup> It does not seek to explain the rise of our modern identity.<sup>36</sup> His aim, rather, is to “articulate the visions of the good involved in it” through an exploration of its animating and constitutive moral ideals.<sup>37</sup> Taylor wants his philosophical exposition to also be seen as an exploration of the “deepest moral allegiances” of our modern identity.<sup>38</sup> In this work, Taylor shows that on his view we are not bound to certain goods and forms of morality because we are ontologically a certain type of human agents. We are bound to certain goods because we are human agents with a very particular common sense historical identity in which are embedded a series of particular substantive moral imperatives.

The challenge Taylor faces is to show that these imperatives operate in all forms of modern identity whether they are overtly accepted or not. Taylor addresses this in two ways. First, in the *Sources of the Self*, he claims that an identity is a historical (narrative) artefact - and then spends 400 pages laying out a narrative of the roots of modern identity which understands all forms of modern identity as inextricably influenced by these roots. Thus, while he acknowledges that he cannot claim to have proved the absolute necessity of his particular interpretation of modern identity, Taylor “hopes” that what “emerges from this lengthy account of the growth of the modern identity is how all-pervasive it is, how much it envelopes us, and how deeply we are implicated in it.”<sup>39</sup> In *Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor makes a second, related argument as well. There he relies not so much on a historical exegesis of the roots and influences of our modern identity but rather on an analysis of our contemporary beliefs to establish the commonness of our modern identity and the respect it is therefore due. Thus, the *Ethics of Authenticity* argues that we can see our common identity in the fact that we all share a certain moral ideal of authenticity that, while distorted in some, is ultimately grounded in a particular identity whose

fundamental common sense, once clarified, lead us towards a single interpretation of authenticity. Hence, Taylor seeks to “understand the moral force behind notions of self-fulfilment” since “many people feel *called* to do this, feel they ought to do this, feel their lives would somehow be wasted or unfulfilled” if they didn’t live up to this fundamental ideal of our modern identity.<sup>40</sup>

It is true that in this quotation Taylor does not say “all people”, but rather “many people”. Yet since Taylor can make his articulation of the moral ideal of authenticity imperative only if he can show that it properly encompasses everyone who experiences the common sense of our modern identity, this “many” implicitly takes on the rhetorical force of “all”. Without that force, Taylor cannot convict ‘narcissist’ versions of self-choice as a deviant, distorted ideal and press them to recognize his articulation of authenticity (as he does throughout *Ethics of Authenticity*).<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere, Taylor makes explicit the strong claim underlying this practical position.<sup>42</sup> In his article “Foucault on Freedom and Truth”, Taylor wants to categorically disallow what (he misreads as) Foucault’s claim that we are able to entirely step outside common sense and its moral claims. According to Taylor, we must see common sense as an authoritative ground in itself - even if it isn’t independently and apodictically verifiable as in the model of the natural sciences:

it seems clear to me that there is a reality here. We have become certain things in Western civilization. Our humanitarianism, our notions of freedom...have helped to define a political identity we share; and one which is deeply rooted in our more basic, seemingly infra-political understandings: of what it is to be an individual, of the person as a being with inner depths - all the features which seem to us to be rock-bottom, almost biological properties, so long as we refrain from looking outside and experiencing the shock of encountering other cultures.<sup>43</sup>

This is classic Taylor. Theoretically, Taylor recognizes that this modern identity is not eternal, completely universal nor, therefore, incontestably transcendent. Yet, practically, Taylor wants to make it binding on those within the community. Hence his use of metaphors of naturalization - “rock bottom”, “almost biological”, “infra-political” - to suggest that these are, if not natural, at least deeply enough engraved to feel so. As contested and historical as they are, “they count for us. None of them can be simply repudiated in the political struggle”.<sup>44</sup> We might struggle over their meaning since the process is fundamentally interpretive. But we cannot step outside and “repudiate” or even, it seems, challenge the terms of debate themselves. Practically, we are inextricably bound by the contours of our common identity.

What is notable is the degree to which this logic parallels the strategy of common sense recognition. As we saw above, it is the inescapably common that defines our moral identity. But when we reconsider some of Taylor’s claims about the role of his ontological vision, we can now see the role the logic of recognition also plays in this project. Consider this quotation:

Transcendental arguments thus have to formulate boundary conditions we can all recognize. Once they are properly formulated, we can see at once that they are valid. The thing is self-evident.<sup>45</sup>

If we read this quote without an appreciation of the strategy of common sense recognition, it would seem as if Taylor is making a purely ontological claim about the validity of transcendental arguments and how they set the limits of common sense. With the strategy of common sense recognition in mind, however, it seems that the reverse it equally true.

It is this common sense recognition that guarantees the validity and authority of the transcendental argument. From this perspective, then, Taylor does not view Hegel’s model of *Sittlichkeit* as a site in which the truth of an ontological vision manifests itself. Rather, Taylor’s entire mode of articulation

embodies the logic of recognition central to a moral model of *sittlichkeit*. It is telling, then, that when we return to many other apparently ontological claims which underlie the authority and necessity of a certain form of strong evaluation, we see that Taylor does not usually suggest that this necessity is granted because it is inescapable, but rather because we recognize it as inescapable.<sup>46</sup> Which is why in the *Sources of the Self*, Taylor often suggests that we should pay attention to hypergoods not merely because they are ontologically necessary, but rather because “it would appear that we all recognize some such”.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.2. Common Sense Recognition in Taylor’s Practical Reason

If the role of common sense recognition is implicitly suggested in many of these formulations about ‘our’ identity, Taylor explicitly acknowledges its role in his vision of practical reason. Taylor explores his conception of practical reason in the *Sources of the Self*, the *Ethics of Authenticity* and “Explanation and Practical Reason” - an article Taylor considered including in *Sources of the Self* but decided to leave out due to the length of the book.<sup>48</sup> According to Taylor, the grandest illusion of the naturalist predilection to model moral thinking on the model of the natural sciences is the belief that “we ought to be able to convince people who share absolutely none of our basic moral intuitions of the justice of our cause” and that therefore we cannot (and should not) rely on our “spontaneous moral reactions”.<sup>49</sup> But according to Taylor, there is no other way to establish a moral position than to rely on common sense.

I can only convince you by my description of the good if I speak for you, either by articulating what underlies your existing moral intuitions or perhaps by my description moving you to the point of making it your own.<sup>50</sup>

In either case I must share something in common with you - I must be able to ‘speak for you’. Either I must recognize myself in the articulation of my authentic self or I must recognize something that ‘moves’ my deepest sense of self to make that articulation my own nature.

This is why Taylor thinks that there are no other plausible models of moral argumentation. For if we encountered a person wholly outside of our broad common sense ethical discussion, then it would not be possible to persuade them of any definitive moral position.

How do we reason? Reason in moral matters is always reasoning with somebody...you don’t reason from the ground up, as through you were talking to someone who recognized no moral demands whatever. A person who accepted no moral demands would be as impossible to argue with about right and wrong as would a person who refused to accept the world of perception around us would be impossible to argue with about empirical matters.<sup>51</sup>

The analogy between the world of perception and the recognition of moral common sense is not coincidental. For Taylor is insistent that the appeal to common sense does not reduce the imperative force of its moral conclusions. For in our actual moral reasoning, we are fortunate not to be in the situation of dealing with someone who doesn’t recognize our moral ideals. According to Taylor, we all share a deep moral identity. Thus the moral imperatives of this recognized common sense can be authoritative. In our context,

we are imagining discussing with people who are in the contemporary culture of authenticity [and modern identity]. And that means that they are trying to shape their lives in light of this ideal...If we start from this ideal, then we can ask: what are the conditions in human life of realizing an ideal of this kind? And what does the ideal properly understood call for?<sup>52</sup>

Articulation, thus, is the paradoxical attempt to clarify - and thus bring to explicit recognition - what we already/must recognize. And how does Taylor’s form of articulation establish its case? It “bring[s] to

light something the interlocutor cannot repudiate”.<sup>53</sup> What is the ‘something’ the interlocutor cannot repudiate? A clarified presentation of our own sense of dim recognition. “What they appeal to in the interlocutor is not there, explicit at the outset, but has to be brought to light”.<sup>54</sup> Both common sense recognition and articulation are crucial. For only articulation can “bring to light” the depths of our common sense recognition which has been hidden, distorted and confused by modern naturalist epistemology and certain misguided moral ideals.

And here we can see how Taylor’s moral realism resembles, but departs from, objectivist forms of moral realism. For Taylor, there is a common referent to which we can all refer to establish moral positions. Thus, articulation as moral analysis is similar to the act of taking a second glance to confirm perceptual impressions.

The predicament of practical reason resembles the most primitive context in which I acquire factual knowledge, that of perception. My confidence in my awareness of my perceptual surroundings rests in large part on the quite inarticulate sense I have of enjoying a sure perceptual purchase on things, a sense which enframes all my particular perceivings.<sup>55</sup>

According to Taylor, when we perceive something “surprising, unsettling or seemingly wrong”, we “stop, shake our heads, concentrate, set ourselves to command a good view and look again”.<sup>56</sup> And something like this is what Taylor wants us to do in moral judgment as well. When we encounter something surprising, unsettling, confused or seemingly wrong, we need to check it against something. But in contrast to both the naturalist and objectivist view, Taylor contends that this ‘something’ cannot be outside ourselves. This is a perceptual impossibility. What grounds our moral second glance then? The moral imperatives of the identity we recognize in our clarified common sense.

### 3.3. Taylor’s Affective Common Sense

In Taylor’s opinion, then, “the most reliable moral view is not one that would be grounded outside our intuitions, but one that is grounded on our strongest intuitions.”<sup>57</sup> But what form, exactly, does this moral intuition take? One form, as we saw above, is our conscious sense of our identity. Another is the form of practical reasoning we use. However, following another archetypal move used by thinkers who appeal to common sense, Taylor looks to an analysis of our common ‘moral emotions’ to ground his appeal.

According to Taylor, since we face a contemporary common sense that is not only “divided...and confused”<sup>58</sup>, but also deeply distorted in its support of rampant individualism, what is needed is a *clarification* and *purification* of that common sense. One of the most convincing ways Taylor thinks he can do this is by showing that we are not being authentic to our own emotional experience if we embrace atomistic individualism. For example, Taylor often relies on an analysis of what he takes to be commonly shared moral emotions to prove that we all feel a need for strong evaluation. How are we sure that we all experience and rely on strong evaluation? Because according to Taylor, we all feel admiration and respect or contempt and disgust in certain circumstances:

These emotions are bound up with our sense that there are higher and lower goals and activities. I would like to claim that if we did not mark these contrasts, if we did not have a sense of the incommensurably higher, than these emotions would have no place in our lives.<sup>59</sup>

Since we all have these emotions (according to Taylor), we must recognize that they compel us to formulate a moral system that looks beyond the individual for its values.

According to Taylor, “our emotions make it possible for us to have a sense of what the good life is for a subject.”<sup>60</sup> And while Taylor sometimes calls strong evaluations “assessments”, he also argues that they are more accurately described as “anchored in feelings, emotions, aspirations and could not motivate us unless they were.”<sup>61</sup> It is thus our emotional common sense that helps us judge the morality of an act: “our moral revulsion before an act of spite is our affective awareness of the act as having an import of moral baseness”.<sup>62</sup> Interpreting this moral common sense – and deriving the moral imperatives embedded in them is thus a crucial strategy for Taylor.

Taylor admits, of course, that we do need to interpret their meaning – and that this process can be potentially difficult. But Taylor has faith that our emotional common sense is not radically transformed by these articulations and that we can interpret their meanings authoritatively despite the challenge of interpretation.<sup>63</sup> Thus, while our articulations

are constitutive of our feelings, these cannot just be shaped at will by the account we offer them. On the contrary, an articulation purports to characterize a feeling; it is meant to be faithful to what is that moves us. There is a getting it right and getting it wrong in this domain. Articulations are like interpretations in that they are attempts to make clearer the imports things have for us.<sup>64</sup>

For Taylor, then, Kant was on to something profound when he examined the ‘special moral feeling’ of respect. For the fact that we have a moral common sense is both demonstrated by, and simultaneously makes sense of, “why there is a dimension of human emotion, which we can all recognize, and which Kant again tried to articulate with his notion of *Achtung*, which we all feel before the moral law.”<sup>65</sup>

### 3.4. *The Relationship between Ontology and Common Sense Recognition*

We can now see both the interrelationship between common sense recognition and ontology in Taylor’s work and the role each plays. Taylor knows that having lost Kant’s supra-sensible real or Hegel’s Geist, late modern ontologies are not incontestably authoritative. Ontology alone cannot ground moral imperatives. Common sense, in contrast, could help ground these moral imperatives – if it was actually experienced and recognized as authentic and authoritative in our society. But Taylor also realizes that today, common sense is divided and contested on many levels. He appreciates that the challenge he faces is not only that no single common sense is unproblematically recognized by all of us moderns. It is also that it has become possible to ask why common sense should be authoritative at all.

Taylor wants to claim that common sense is authoritative for us because we must rely on it in our language and for our existence as autonomous beings. Since it is necessary for our existence, we must ascribe it imperative value and take steps to reproduce it and its conditions. But the necessity of this claim relies on (and embodies) Taylor’s ontological vision. And, as he makes clear, the prime difference between his ontology and that of naturalism is that the latter does not appreciate the role of common sense and thus does not recognize the imperative force of its various modes. The issue, then, is this: while common sense is an indispensable resource for Taylor’s practical reason, an examination of common sense through a naturalist (or other on-Taylorian) ontology will not lead us to an authoritative common sense or to the particular imperatives that emerge from our historically modern version of it. And the difficulty Taylor faces is that unlike Kant and Hegel, he cannot appeal to an ontology that automatically distinguishes legitimate from corrupt common sense to do so.

Skinner and Rosen think that this is precisely where Taylor stumbles - and that ends up insinuating a theistic transcendent as the ground of his moral position. They suggest that he fails to appreciate that “if we wish to be true to the range of feeling and beliefs that actually go to make up our modern age,

we must somehow find the values to sustain social life within the practices of social life itself.”<sup>66</sup> But they get it wrong. Taylor does see this self-positing character as constitutive of our age.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, once we appreciate the interrelation between common sense and ontology in Taylor’s thinking, it becomes clear that far from appealing to a transcendent, other-worldly authority, Taylor’s project actually attempts to establish a particular moral code using only the worldly values and practices of modernity’s common sense. On this view, Taylor’s appeal to affective common sense, common sense recognition and a particular ontology work together. Taylor’s analysis of affective common sense and moral feelings leads him (and, he hopes, us) to a certain ontology of the moral law, individual will, language and community. This ontology is then used to purify the distortions of contemporary common sense by encouraging us to understand our own common identity in terms that recognize the authority of common sense. And this now purified common sense then buttresses Taylor’s articulation of our moral and political imperatives by ensuring that our self-examination (now undertaken through the lens of Taylor’s affectively guaranteed ontology) has little choice but to recognize the authority of Taylor’s articulation of common sense recognition. If we accept Taylor’s initial model of affective common sense, we are predisposed to accept his ontological vision. And once we share his ontological vision of the authoritative value of common sense recognition, it is difficult to avoid recognizing the imperative force of his moral vision.

And this is why Taylor thinks we need both correct ontology (map) and common sense recognition in ethical thinking. According to Taylor,

Orientation in moral space turns out again to be similar to orientation in physical space. We know where we are through a mixture of recognition of landmarks before us and a sense of how we have traveled to get here.<sup>68</sup>

We need to recognize key moral landmarks so that we might trace our affective common sense into a more accurate and systematic map (ontology). Moreover, we need just this moral common sense later so that we can orient this ontological map properly when we try to use it. But we need the map of ontology because relying on our primary common sense affective moral intuitions is both imprecise and inefficient. A clearly articulated map marks more clearly the landmarks of our common sense. By clarifying our initial common sense, it gives us more precise and faster moral recognition - allowing us to more efficiently and correctly traverse complex moral situations. Without moral common sense, we can’t have morality. But without an ontological map, chances are that we will ignore, distort, mis-recognize or disobey these intuitions and end up far from where Taylor thinks we should be. And once we see this intimate relationship between ontology and common sense recognition, it is easy to understand why Taylor resists being portrayed as an objectivist moral realist yet feels compelled to retrieve the term moral realist in relation to his project. While Taylor is not a Platonic realist, he does advance a position we might call common sense moral realism which seeks to discover unchallengeable imperative moral claims in a common sense we all share and cannot renounce.

#### 4. The Impact of Taylor’s Appeal to Common Sense

Why does it matter if we understand the ways in which Taylor’s appeal to common sense functions? It matters for several reasons. First, I believe we have a better understanding of how Taylor’s work does and should (or doesn’t and shouldn’t) persuade us of his view. It explains *why* Taylor shares qualities associated with both strong and weak ontology perspectives – but in the end falls comfortably into neither camp. I therefore think it gives us a better understanding of Taylor’s work than either the perspective of strong or weak ontology.

More importantly, however, it is important to understand the role of common sense in Taylor's thought because it orients his thought in a number of ways – some positive, some negative. Understanding the role of common sense therefore lets us interrogate Taylor's political and normative positions critically – but without dismissing it outright as some of his critics tend to do.

I therefore want to conclude the paper by discussing the consequences of Taylor's appeal to common sense. On one hand, Taylor's attunement to the value of the 'common' has had the positive influence of allowing him to challenge two important weaknesses of procedural liberalism: (1) the ability to balance individual rights against social goods and (2) the sufficiency of thin secularism as a resolution to the question of how to address deep ontological commitments in the public realm. While Taylor's appeal to common sense is not the only way to identify and challenge these weaknesses, we should acknowledge that it has allowed him to do so. However, it is equally important that (3) we recognize that Taylor's valorization of common sense carries with it a set of significant dangers: of intensifying contemporary fragmentation, cultivating fundamentalism and inspiring tactics of social humiliation. In light of this, we should acknowledge Taylor's critique of procedural liberalism – but also strongly resist his valorization of 'common sense' solutions for the public sphere.

#### *4.1 Balancing Individual Rights and Social Goods*

One of Taylor's most significant contributions to political theory is showing that the predominantly procedural and liberal question ('what inalienable rights do each of us hold as individuals') makes it difficult to ask – and sufficiently answer – the equally important question of "under what conditions, if any, should certain social goods outweigh certain individual rights?"<sup>69</sup> Much of Taylor's writing on political theory has focused on showing that any question of individual rights is necessarily linked to this second question – and on asserting that we need to ask and answer the question about social goods whenever we talk about individual rights.

To be sure, Taylor does not believe that contemporary liberalism is ignorant of the need to make these determinations. In a liberal democracy we balance individual rights and social goods all the time. The right to contribute to political campaigns against the need to avoid ceding politics to the rich and powerful. The right to free speech against the reality that many forms of speech and advertising produce destructive dispositions towards women. The right to freedom of religion (or not to have religion) against the perceived need to instil a greater cultural cohesion. The right to civil liberties and privacy against calls for increased government surveillance and powers of incarceration in light of the threat of terrorism. There are no easy answers here. Taylor wouldn't argue that 'social goods' should win out every time. However, he would argue that simply falling back onto a discourse of individual rights or social goods is far too restrictive. We might very well support more campaign finance regulation in the name of the social good of participation but resist those who push for more restrictive immigration policy in the name of the social good of national security. By revealing that procedural liberalism too often underplays the intensity, frequency and importance of these trade-offs, Taylor highlights the potential danger of too quickly prioritizing individual rights in our haste to avoid the dangers of communal authority. Thus, he argues powerfully for the importance of *explicitly* asking the question of social goods each time we consider individual rights.

This is especially important for Canadian political thinkers since the question of how to balance individual rights and social goods is at the center of Canadian constitutional issues. For Quebec's willingness to limit (what many would consider) individual rights to preserve French language and culture are frequently depicted as deeply 'illiberal' policies.<sup>70</sup> There is no doubt that they restrict

individuals from doing things they can do in other provinces. But does this mean they are necessarily illegitimate and illiberal?

Taylor challenges the idea that these policies are obviously and incontestably illiberal through a variety of arguments. Rather, he suggests that the Quebec response is driven by a very different conception of ‘the political’ – one that legitimately places a different value on the relationship between individual rights and social goods. Taylor’s communitarian ontology *and* his valorization of common sense encourage him to question the easy procedural liberal dismissal of Quebec’s language laws and forces open some space for us to at least consider the question.

Here, the point is not that English Canadian outrage, Bill 101’s policies or Taylor’s own view is correct. The point is rather that this is a legitimate debate – and that no one side has a clear, knockdown argument. I do not share the vision of an expressive identity born of linguistic and cultural purity held by some of the original architects of Quebec’s language policies. And as I am originally an Anglophone, I don’t share the affective and cultural attachment to the French language that many Francophones do. Moreover, I am not convinced that the Quebec’s specific language laws are the only, or even the best, way to achieve their goals. However, given the massive predominance of English in North America and the concomitant economic and cultural pressures for assimilation this creates, I absolutely believe that some sort of concerted social action is required if you believe that it is important to preserve the French language and culture in Canada and don’t believe that everything should be left to market pressures (in the broad sense) to decide. There are many good reasons to want to support individual rights as important protections against illegitimate state authority and communal power. However, if we reify the idea of individual rights too deeply, we risk ignoring the fact that leaving things to ‘free choice’ is not a neutral, apolitical decision if certain choices and patterns already have significant momentum and power behind them. In these circumstances, leaving it up to ‘individual choice’ means that people will have the ‘right to choose’ until the social forces of choice eliminate the very conditions which make choice possible.

Taylor’s attunement to common sense – its problems notwithstanding – has the positive impact of helping us hesitate for a moment before too quickly closing the issue in favour of one side or the other. Re-articulating the problem as one of balancing - rather than trumping - doesn’t solve the issue. Difficult discussions about the right balance are still required. However, Taylor helps us see that crudely contrasting individual rights against communal rights merely heightens tensions and misunderstandings – leaves us the equally unappealing options of *laissez faire* capitulation (to the ‘market’ forces of Anglicization) or knee-jerk protectionism (through the creation of a closed language economy of Quebecois French).

#### *4.2 The Critique of Thin Secularism*

The other important positive effect of Taylor’s combination of ontology and common sense has been to highlight a number of weaknesses of liberal proceduralism and the contemporary consequences of what might be called its ‘thin secularism’. We have already seen that there are at least two ways to address ontological questions in political theory – strong and weak ontology. However, the predominant method of dealing with ontological questions in contemporary political theory is a third way: the thin secularism of liberal proceduralism. The most famous proponent of this position is Rawls’ *Political Liberalism*. Rawls’ perspective essentially argues that political thought should avoid ontological discussions of the good, the self, etc – both because we should never seek to eliminate the ‘fact of plurality’ and because public discussion of these issues only intensifies disagreements and clouds our

ability to come to a political – and just – resolution. It is this position – one we might call a proceduralist, thin secularism since it relegates discussions of the ‘good’ primarily to the private realm – that Taylor has most forcefully argued against.

In charging that even Rawls’ thin secularism must ask – and answer – ontological questions, Taylor asserts that liberal proceduralism can not – in practice – ignore the relevance and power of moral sources. Taylor’s critique of Rawls on this dimension is compelling. Moreover, an increasing number of non-communitarian theorists are equally critical of thin secularism as a political and theoretical solution. William Connolly (though he disagrees with many other elements of Taylor’s project) has shown that the secularist attempt to erase the public role of religious belief (for example) doesn’t necessarily resolve or eliminate the problems of fundamentalism.<sup>71</sup> Connolly shows, in fact, that secularism’s disavowal of the public relevance of ontology (whether it be religious faith or other pre-metaphysical dispositions) can often reinforce and intensify fundamentalism by creating resentment, frustration and insecurity among constituencies who see this disavowal as liberalism’s hidden and illegitimate intolerance. Given the theoretical gaps and negative practical effects highlighted by Taylor and Connolly, the avoidance tactics of thin secularism appear highly problematic.

#### *4.3 The Problems with Common Sense: Fragmentation, Fundamentalism, Humiliation*

The problem with Taylor’s work, however, is that while his common sense perspective highlights certain problems with procedural liberalism and thin secularism, it also drives him to solutions which not only exacerbate the problems he identifies – but also runs the risk of creating new ones he does not recognize. For Taylor, the most important element of the ‘Malaise of Modernity’ we face is essentially the problem of fragmentation. Indeed, Mark Redhead argues that Taylor’s thought is profoundly oriented by a desire to solve the problem of fragmentation.<sup>72</sup> For Taylor, the problem with modern society is that it has lost any ability to recognize a common sense – and thus it cannot inspire its members to recognize the value of anything other than pure self-interest and individual (or small group) identity. Given this understanding of the problem (which, I will argue, is itself a product of a perspective that takes for granted the existence of common sense and defines it in a specific way), it is not surprising that Taylor’s answer is to try to recover that common sense through an articulation of our common identity, etc.

On the face of this, this diagnosis and response seems reasonable enough. I can certainly admit that our society is increasingly individualistic and driven by specific interests (perhaps foremost among them economic ones). But I don’t believe that Taylor’s analysis (driven by a variety of assumptions about the value and necessary shape of common sense) correctly identifies the causes and solutions to this issue. For both his diagnosis and his solutions assume – and require – a fully unified community in which a clear common sense exists. Taylor assumes that the normal case is one in which an unbroken common sense pervades society – and that any other situation is suffering from fragmentation. But is self-evidently the case?

I believe no. We might just as easily say that fragmentation is a problem not because we have *lost* a common sense and identity – but instead because our society has failed to *create* institutions, rights and logics which are sufficiently inclusive to *inspire* the fundamental multiplicity and plurality of individuals and groups to come align themselves together. Taylor often suggests that anyone who doesn’t share his vision of the common is necessarily either be a nihilist relativists or a self-interested, rational actor atomistic liberal. But there are other perspectives that appreciate Taylor’s critique of procedural liberalism without believing that a common sense perspective can best diagnose or solve it.

A number of thinkers believe that other alternatives are possible. Thinkers as diverse as Deleuze and Guattari, William Connolly, Jane Bennett, Stephen White, Romand Coles, Paul Patton, James Tully and others might all be understood as exploring contending, non common sense visions of democracy that also seek to address the problems of fragmentation. However, from their perspective, democracy is possible not because we all share a common sense, a common identity or participate in a single common public sphere through which a single common mind is formed. They suggest instead that democracy is the ongoing creation of bonds of community as well as the resistance to, re-articulation and retrieval of various practices and ideals. The task they face, then, is not to establish a common mind but instead to trace possible lines of convergence and divergence between groups and cultivate particular virtues, tactics, strategies, and sensibilities to make possible ongoing co-existence and engagement. It is an incredibly difficult task. But certainly no more difficult than Taylor's attempt to create a single, unified common sense.

Taylor's common sense lens means that he cannot see this third possibility – and that he insists on solving the weakness of liberal proceduralism by trying to authoritatively establish a single unifying common sense. Thus in the *Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor excoriates Derrida, Foucault “and their followers” for “proposing deviant forms” of the moral ideal of authenticity Taylor argues we all implicitly share.<sup>73</sup> They – we might say – are the new corrupters of youth. Why? Because they fool us into believing we can *create* a new model of community and thus dissuade us from *recognizing* and obeying common sense. As Taylor claims, their “deviancy takes the form of forgetting about one whole set of demands on authenticity while focusing exclusively on another.”<sup>74</sup> The “trendy doctrines of ‘deconstruction’” stress “the constructive creative nature of our expressive languages” while forgetting its expressive nature which “binds us to others”.<sup>75</sup>

Taylor's drive towards a renewed, imperative common sense is clearly evident in his recent work on the public sphere - a concept which ideally highlights the common as a creative achievement rather than a recognized expression.<sup>76</sup> Rather than explore the ways in which the public sphere could allow various identities and communities to engage and inspire one another to create a new set of links, Taylor insists that we much recognize a single common identity according from which we can extract binding moral imperatives

And this has repercussions for Taylor's moral and political thinking. On the face of it, Taylor's discussions of multi-cultural recognition, the public sphere and a liberalism which recognizes broad tolerance and multi-cultural recognition as constitutive goods seems to be far removed from earlier positions where he clearly supported the idea a pure common national identity is required for the health of moral and political institutions.<sup>77</sup> Yet when we look closer, Taylor still assumes and requires a singularly common identity. He now claims that republicanism as the only viable model of free self-government. Why? Not primarily because republicanism allows and encourages vigorous debate and participation by its citizens. But primarily because it cultivates an ongoing concern with establishing and preserving a common identity.<sup>78</sup> “Mobilization occurs around common identities”.<sup>79</sup>

Taylor is explicit that such a community, even if liberal, requires an active sense of patriotism - for this is the manifestation of our identification with common sense. Patriotism is not just the fact of “converging moral principles” but the experience and recognition of “a common allegiance to a particular historical community. Cherishing and sustaining this has to be a common goal...patriotism involves, beyond convergent values, a love of the particular.”<sup>80</sup> On this view, then, patriotism is not just a ‘fact’ we experience but a sensibility we have a duty to cultivate. “Sustaining this specific

historical set of institutions and forms is and must be a socially endorsed common end.”<sup>81</sup> Taylor’s defence of patriotism is thus the political analogue of the moral logic of common sense recognition. And it is not surprising that Taylor’s political ideal, like his moral ideal of common sense, is allergic to, and disallows, certain types of non-common sense. Even liberalism, Taylor thinks, can only allow divergence on certain issues. The liberal state “can indeed be neutral between (a) believers and non-believers in God, or between (b) people with homo- and hetero- sexual orientations”.<sup>82</sup> These are not issues at the heart of our common identity, Taylor thinks. But it cannot be complacent against those whose common sense fundamentally threatens to infect and challenge the common identity we must necessarily hold for us to extract certain moral and political imperatives. Thus, “it cannot be [neutral] between (c) patriots and anti-patriots” which explains why “a questioning of the value of patriotism is so profoundly unAmerican” so as to be “close to unthinkable as a public act”.<sup>83</sup>

Taylor might agree that there are times when it is ethically productive to challenge particular elements of patriotism as inauthentic (ie. that positions portrayed as patriotic are actually destructive of those values patriotism seeks to protect). But can he acknowledge as well that sometimes ethics calls for a rejection of the very logic of patriotism? I don’t think he can, given the expressive logic of his common sense recognition and its political manifestation as republicanism. For if you see the ground of political and moral stability as a common identity, then anyone who belongs to your community but does not share that identity necessarily appears as an anti-patriot - for she challenges the unanimity of common sense recognition. She need not necessarily be devoted to overthrowing that common identity in its entirety nor destroy the social, political and/or moral fabric. On the logic of common sense recognition, even a patriot (in her own mind) who wants, for ethical or political reasons, to challenge certain elements of common sense betrays the community.<sup>84</sup> According to its logic, you cannot both be a patriot and articulate your position and aspirations outside the model of common sense.

There are thus multiple problems with the way that Taylor’s assumptions about common sense colour his diagnosis of – and solution to – the challenges of late-modernity. First, Taylor’s diagnosis and solution rests on a very contestable assumption about what communities are like – e.g. that they actually embody something like a single, originary common sense. I am not convinced by this vision – and at the very minimum, Taylor has not proved it as necessary and correct. As I suggested above, there are a variety of contemporary perspectives that are neither atomistic liberal nor Taylorian in nature. Moreover – there have been numerous philosophers throughout history who have also challenged this dichotomy. We need only think of the various ontologies of Lucretius, Spinoza, Nietzsche or Deleuze to see the richness of the philosophical imaginary of modes of community. If we start with a conception that sees communities as rhizomatic organisms rather than arboreal ones – then the ‘problem’ of fragmentation takes on a different hue. From this perspective, the problem is not the existence of plurality and the lack of common sense. The problem is an inability of groups to negotiate this plurality and establish lines of connection despite the differences. From this perspective, then, establishing a single common sense is not the only answer.

One problem with Taylor’s common sense perspective, then, is that it forwards as incontestable what is actually a very problematic vision of community. This is one negative impact of his valorization of common sense. Regardless of whether his perspective is an ‘accurate’ representation of community or not, however, my greater worry is that his employment of and intensification of common sense creates dynamics which run three very serious risks: the risk of intensifying fragmentation, the risk of further cultivating fundamentalism and the risk of inspiring social tactics of humiliation.

Consider the first risk: intensifying fragmentation. If Taylor's assumptions about the common sense basis of communities are wrong – if communities are not ontologically defined by a united common sense – then his solution will most likely only have the effect of intensifying the problem he identifies. If we share Nietzsche's, Foucault's, Deleuze's, or even Berlin's or Arendt's vision of a community as fundamentally characterized by deep plurality – then the attempt to mould it into a singularity is not only illegitimate – it is also likely to intensify the divisions. Imposing a common sense that reflects some, but not all, of that plurality – will only encourage resistance, extremism, and further fragmentation in groups that perceive themselves as excluded. This, I believe, has been the effect of procedural liberalism's attempt to impose a thin secular common sense. And we see the results in the US with the religious right's increasingly vocal activism against this common sense.

On the second risk – my worry is that a society based on the idea of common sense can slide easily into forms of group identity that are highly allergic to any perceived 'difference'. Here, Taylor's comments on patriotism are instructive. Patriotism – like many types of group identifications – can be a positive thing. But it is always accompanied by a very real danger: that the identity/difference dynamic can easily slide from a healthy one into a dangerously intolerant and resentment-laden one in which difference is increasingly interpreted as evil. And this can easily inspire a yearning for very problematic levels of purity of thought and loyalty within and outside the group.

As we have seen in recent world events, the cost of disallowing the right to challenge this common sense is far too high. After 9-11, 'questioning the value of patriotism' became so profoundly un-American that virtually no one could challenge dominant, common sense representations of the 'war on terror'. It became so un-American that hosts of political talk shows could be fired if they suggested that America might be, in some minor way, implicated in the causes of terrorism. It became so un-American that even the legitimate expression of anti-war sentiment over Iraq was viewed as akin to treason. It became so un-American that the practices of racial profiling - which were previously viewed as an anathema to democratic equality – were now openly justified as necessary and positive tools for national security. And these are only the mildest internal examples.

I am certain that Taylor himself was against the war in Iraq. And I am sure he would have welcomed a more thorough debate of it in the US. But the danger of his use of the logic of common sense is that it makes it very difficult to refuse articulations of common sense you do not accept. Moreover, accepting and employing a philosophical appeal to common sense makes it very difficult to then challenge the political and popular uses of the same appeal in circumstances you don't support. Common sense philosophy easily breeds and justifies common sense identities – whether we want it to or not. And running this risk is not something I support.

As for the third risk: I believe that legitimating appeals to common sense also encourages an associated mentality in which highly problematic social modes of discipline are accepted as common place and even praise-worthy. Here, I am thinking in particular of the rebirth of 'humiliation' as an accepted form of punishment. Ian William Miller is absolutely correct when he claims that humiliation is one of the central disciplinary emotions of modern society.<sup>85</sup> From high school cliques to diplomatic relations – humiliation influences the way we behave. However, I believe that humiliation is not simply an inescapable social dynamic. There is, I believe, a clearly identifiable 'tactics of humiliation' – and that these are being increasingly employed in strategic ways. One example might be the drive to re-establish public chain gangs in certain states. Why the resuscitation of the chain gang? Part of the explanation is that its promoters believe that public chain gangs better deter those who outside of jail. But its champions also hope that the experience will inspire a deeper respect/fear of the law in the

inmates themselves by humiliating them in front of the larger public.<sup>86</sup> A similar hope, I believe, is also one reason why judges have begun to advocate overt shaming rituals as punishment for various crimes.

A valorization of common sense gives rise to these tactics. Why? For if humiliation is to function effectively, there must be a recognized, common standard of judgment among all participants: humiliator, humiliatee and audience. Without it, humiliation wouldn't work since the supposed humiliatee would not feel humiliation – and thus would not change his/her attitude or actions accordingly. Only if both the humiliatee and the humiliating agent/group share an intense respect for a common standard – can the public revealing of sub-standard behaviour (or attitudes, etc) *immediately* re-inspire a disciplined obedience.

In sum, the tactics of humiliation requires a community with a deeply inscribed and normatively powerful *common sense*. However, you might also say that the existence of, or yearning for, a deep and wide common sense can often *inspire* (while simultaneously *enabling*) a tactics of humiliation. In fact, the deeper and more normative this common sense standard is taken to be, the more likely it is to also pro-actively *inspire* the tactics of humiliation. For once we translate certain standards into unquestioned, obvious and normative common sense – then anything or anyone who departs from this norm must increasingly appear as deficient and deviant. From the perspective of common sense, then, the offending subject *should* feel humiliated – since it is obvious to everyone that they *should* aspire to the common standards even though they have failed to achieve it. And once this logical step is taken, then it is an easy enough step to believe that the community *should* humiliate that person – since it is the natural and legitimate judgment of common sense (as well as one way of encouraging that subject to live up to the standards of common sense).

The danger of common sense, then, is that it can often inspire the tactics of humiliation. But why is the use of humiliation bad? Don't some people deserve to be humiliated? Can't shame be an effective mode of discipline? On my view, using humiliation as a tool of social discipline is dangerous for two reasons.

Most obviously, it is (arguably) anathema to the ideals of democracy and virtually all versions of liberalism and socialism. It is hard to argue that we should respect individuals and individual rights – and then argue that we should enact broad policies of humiliation which seek to discipline the individual not by helping them mature or punishing them when they break the law but rather by threatening them into cowering submission by destroying their own self-respect and self-confidence.

While I believe that this first reason is a compelling one, I am in fact opposed to the use of social modes of humiliation more for a second reason: because I believe that tactics of humiliation usually create even worse behaviour than that which they are designed to control. In fact, I would argue that it is only the exceptional case where humiliation actually manages to discipline into being a self-sufficient and responsible individual.

On one hand, if the use of humiliation successfully reduces a subject to obedience – it rarely does so without creating intense resentment which either bubbles up later or is projected against something else. Nietzsche's genealogies are only the most philosophical analysis of this. We could easily generate numerous concrete examples of this. For example, think of the role that perceptions of national humiliation played in the rise of Nazism in Germany between the two wars. France may have won the war – but it certainly did not win the peace that followed. It would be simplistic to say that the

rise of Nazism in Germany was enabled simply by perceptions of national humiliation. But equally, I suspect it would be hard to argue that they would have risen to prominence if a widespread resentment against their Germany's perceived humiliation did not exist.

On the other hand, however, if the use of humiliation is not successful in beating its subject into submission, it usually still breeds resentment against the 'humiliator'. It also frequently creates a vicious spiral between the two parties where the potential 'humiliatee' perceives their identity and interests as ever more intensely opposed to the 'humiliator'. Here we need only examine the fundamentalist fervour that is fanned by the perceived humiliation of the Middle East to appreciate the devastating political consequences these types of tactics can create.

In sum, humiliation almost never inspires an affirmative ethical or civic disposition – it really only teaches its subjects to obey power. I follow the law *only* as long as I experience a fear of humiliation. The moment that fear disappears, so does my incentive to act ethically. Which means that the tactics of humiliation is not only suspect on ethical grounds (e.g. do we believe this is an appropriate way to interact with other human beings). It also means that it is suspect on the grounds of efficacy – for it is a profoundly fragile mode of political and ethical motivation.

## 5. Conclusion

The idea that politics and ethics must derive from – and reproduce – common sense fundamentally inflects Taylor's thought. While this perspective allowed Taylor to create a method more sophisticated and interesting than either strong or weak ontology and identify a number of the weaknesses of liberal proceduralism and thin secularism, it also leads to a very problematic definition of the problems of late modernity and solutions which create more issues than they solve. Thus, although contemporary political thought owes a debt of gratitude to Taylor and the questions and perspectives he has opened up, it is equally crucial that we interrogate Taylor's valorization of common sense. Instead of assuming the normalcy of the communal whole and then asking how we should reduce the fragmentation of modern society, perhaps we need to ask 'how, out of the mass of difference and diversity we encounter, might we best create a vibrant and engaged social and political body (one which is not, to use Deleuze and Guattari's term, organized merely according to the logic of the organism)?' Within this question is, of course, embedded a very different ontology and set of assumptions and commitments. And the ethical and political questions, diagnoses and responses that flow from it would be very different too. Such a perspective would argue that both the procedural politics of liberal individualism and Taylor's politics of common sense hinder the realization of an ethically responsive society by intensifying the problems of fragmentation and fundamentalism. And it would forward a type of political judgment and action that differs significantly from both the liberal and Taylor models. I have not sketched out such a perspective – nor is it an easy task. However, the first step in that task is to identify and challenge the valorization of common sense recognition that exists implicitly in much political thought. Such a project, then, cannot but seek to push beyond the questions and answers authorized by Taylor's common sense narrative.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Paul Saurette is Assistant Professor of political thought at the University of Ottawa in Canada. He is currently revising a manuscript titled Challenging the Politics of Common Sense: The Kantian Imperative and its Contemporary Legacy.*

## NOTES

- 
- <sup>1</sup> I examine this in detail in the first chapter of the book manuscript I am revising titled *Challenging the Politics of Common Sense: The Kantian Imperative and its Contemporary Legacy*. I also briefly discuss it in “Kant’s Culture of Humiliation,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 28:1, pp. 61-92. Jan, 2002.
- <sup>2</sup> Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, (Princeton: PUP, 2000), p. 104.
- <sup>3</sup> Stephen White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, (Princeton: PUP, 2000).
- <sup>4</sup> Berlin, for example, suggests that Taylor is “basically a teleologist” in “Introduction”, *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p.1. Similarly, Quentin Skinner and Michael Rosen essentially see Taylor as returning to ‘moral realism’ See Q. Skinner “Who are ‘We’: Ambiguities of the Modern Self”, *Inquiry*, v. 34, no. 2, 1991, p. 133-153; and M. Rosen “Must We Return to Moral Realism”, *Inquiry*, v. 34, no. 2, 1991, p. 183-194; Q. Skinner “Who are ‘We’: Ambiguities of the Modern Self”, *Inquiry*, v. 34, no. 2, 1991, p. 133-153.
- <sup>5</sup> Berlin, “Introduction”, *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, ed. James Tully, (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. 1.
- <sup>6</sup> MacIntyre, “Critical Remarks on *The Sources of the Self*”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, V. 54, No. 1, (1994), p. 187-190. MacIntyre does not think Taylor is successful in this attempt, however.
- <sup>7</sup> Michael Rosen, “Must We Return to Moral Realism”, *Inquiry*, V. 34, No. 2, 1991, p. 183-194; Quentin Skinner, “Who are ‘We’? Ambiguities of the Modern Self”, *Inquiry*, V. 34, No. 2, 1991, p. 133-53.
- <sup>8</sup> Rosen, p. 193/4, Skinner, p. 150.
- <sup>9</sup> White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, p. 69.
- <sup>10</sup> Taylor consistently moves between the two poles even in his most recent writings which explicitly interrogate secularism. See Taylor’s Marianist Award Lecture *A Catholic Modernity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- <sup>11</sup> For example, “Concept of a Person”, “Language and Human Nature”, “Theories of Meaning” all in *Philosophical Papers I*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1985); “Atomism” in *Philosophical Papers II*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1985); “The Validity of Transcendental Arguments”, “Lichtung and Lebensform: Parallels Between Heidegger and Wittgenstein”, “Irreducibly Social Goods” and “To Follow a Rule” in *Philosophical Arguments*: as well as Part I of *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989).
- <sup>12</sup> See articles mentioned in footnote 2.
- <sup>13</sup> The term ‘strong ontologist’ is obviously taken from Stephen White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*, (Princeton, PUP, 2000). I will discuss this view in detail below.
- <sup>14</sup> See, most forcefully, his reply to his critics in “Comments and Replies”, *Inquiry*, V. 34, No. 2, June 1991 and also his “Reply to Commentators” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, V. 54, No. 1, 1994.
- <sup>15</sup> Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology*, (Princeton: PUP, 2000), p. 43.
- <sup>16</sup> Taylor, “Comments and Replies”, *Inquiry*, v. 34, no. 2, 1991, p. 246.
- <sup>17</sup> Taylor, “Comments and Replies”, *Inquiry*, v. 34, no. 2, 1991, p. 246.
- <sup>18</sup> Taylor, “The Concept of a Person”, *Philosophical Papers I*, p. 104.
- <sup>19</sup> Taylor, “Introduction”, *Philosophical Papers I and II*, p. 11.
- <sup>20</sup> Taylor, “What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty”, *Philosophical Papers II*, p. 216.
- <sup>21</sup> Taylor, “Atomism”, *Philosophical Papers II*, p. 205.
- <sup>22</sup> Taylor, “The Validity of Transcendental Arguments”, p. 26.
- <sup>23</sup> Taylor, “The Validity of Transcendental Arguments”, p. 32.
- <sup>24</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. x.
- <sup>25</sup> Taylor, “Social Theory as Practice”, *Philosophical Papers II*, p. 110.
- <sup>26</sup> Taylor, “Social Theory as Practice”, p. 111.
- <sup>27</sup> Taylor says “This drawing of a moral map of the subject in an intrinsic part of what I referred earlier as discerning the good or higher life, or the shape of our aspirations, or the shape of our life as subject. It involves defining what it is we really are about, what is really important to us” in Taylor, “Self-Interpreting Animals”, *Philosophical Papers I*, p. 67-8.
- <sup>28</sup> It is important to note that, contra Skinner’s interpretation, Taylor is explicit that his position does not ground itself by making theism universally necessary. Taylor is a partisan for a theistic vision of moral sources, but he never argues that this is what we all share in late modernity. Thus, although Taylor might have an interest in denying the ultimate foundation of his project if it were theistic, in this case I think that his self-understanding does accurately describe the way his philosophy functions. On this see Taylor, “Comments and Replies”, *Inquiry*, V. 34, no. 2, June 1991, p. 241.
- <sup>29</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 27, my emphasis..
- <sup>30</sup> Taylor, “Interpretations and the Sciences of Man”, *Philosophical Papers II*, p. 39.
- <sup>31</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, p. 134.

---

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, p. 134.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, p. 83.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. ix.

<sup>36</sup> Taylor is both fully aware of the fact that his narrative would be radically insufficient to this task and explicit that his goal lies elsewhere - in sketching the contours of modern identity, its "spiritual power" and, most importantly, "the visions of the good involved in it". See *Sources of the Self* chapter 12.

<sup>37</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 203.

<sup>38</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 105.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 503.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 16 and p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> For without common sense identity as universal, narcissist version of ideal of authenticity might legitimately be seen as a competing common sense, quite distinct from authenticity and thus, not subject to its ideals and imperatives. Taylor relies on this for the practical force of his argument against narcissism through the book. See especially Chapter 6.

<sup>42</sup> It is telling that these passages occur in his critique of Foucault. For Taylor's modesty disappears and his practical dogmatism becomes most intense when he faces a non-naturalist position that equally challenges his own approach. Why? Because I suspect that he senses the fact that the only way to disallow such a contending approach, which, since it doesn't merely reproduce the naturalist shallowness, is to ratchet up the imperative force of common sense. But as we shall see below, Taylor has little legitimate ground to do this - for his increasingly rigid appeal to the constitutive authority of common sense tends to contradict other elements of his own ontology (which are equally necessary to convict these contending visions of illegitimacy in the *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 66) in which he recognizes the equally constitutive role of innovative creation in the expression of our modern identity. More on this later.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth", *Philosophical Papers II*, p. 181.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth", *Philosophical Papers II*, p. 181.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor, "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 32.

<sup>46</sup> Once, of course, the confusing illusions of naturalist epistemology have been dispelled.

<sup>47</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 63.

<sup>48</sup> It was a decision he later partially regretted. On this see Taylor's reply to MacIntyre, "Reply to Commentators", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, p. 205. "I made a (it now seems unfortunate) strategic decision not to include a discussion of practical reason in an already too long book, just referring the reader to an as yet unpublished paper." For his reference to the article "Explanation and Practical Reason" (later published in *Philosophical Arguments*) see *Sources of the Self*, p. 72 and p. 530 n36.

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 72.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 77.

<sup>51</sup> Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 31.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 32.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 54.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 54.

<sup>55</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 74.

<sup>56</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 75.

<sup>57</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 75.

<sup>58</sup> Taylor, "Irreducibly Social Goods", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 127.

<sup>59</sup> Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods", *Philosophical Papers II*, p. 239.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", *Philosophical Papers II*, p. 65.

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", *Philosophical Papers I*, p. 67.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", *Philosophical Papers II*, p. 67.

<sup>63</sup> Of course, Taylor does argue that articulation shifts the content of some emotions and is actually indispensable to certain peculiarly human emotions (like shame, contempt, pride, etc). See, for example, "What is Human Agency", "Self-Interpreting Animals" and "The Concept of a Person", *Philosophical Papers I*. But Taylor is equally adamant, as we see below, that this articulation, while partially transformative, is primarily expressive.

<sup>64</sup> Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals", *Philosophical Papers I*, p. 64-5.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods", *Philosophical Papers II*, p. 240.

<sup>66</sup> Skinner, "Ambiguities of the Modern Self", *Inquiry*, p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> This is exactly what Taylor's recent consideration of the public sphere highlights. According to Taylor, all of our (ie modern) attempts to articulate our moral sources take place dialogically and interpretively in the public sphere. But the public sphere "is an association constituted by nothing outside the common action we carry out in it: coming to a common mind where possible through the exchange of ideas...Common action is not made possible by a framework that needs to be

---

established in some action-transcendent dimension: either by an act of God or in a great chain, or by a law coming down to us sine time out of mind. This is what makes it radically secular. And this, I want to claim, gets to the heart of what is new in it.” Taylor, “Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere”, *Philosophical Arguments*, p.267.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 48.

<sup>69</sup> There is significant debate about the terms ‘right’ vs. ‘good’ and the assumptions embedded in each. I will not pursue this question here. Instead, I will primarily focus on the issue of how to balance considerations of individual and communal values. Thus, I will use ‘individual right’ to denote primarily individual values and ‘social good’ to denote primarily communal values.

<sup>70</sup> The best work on this subject is Marc Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in a Bilingual City*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

<sup>71</sup> William Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>72</sup> Mark Redhead, *Charles Taylor: Thinking and Living Deep Diversity*, (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

<sup>73</sup> Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 66.

<sup>74</sup> Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 66.

<sup>75</sup> Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 66-7.

<sup>76</sup> Although this concept is investigated primarily in “Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere”, *Philosophical Arguments*, all final four chapters of *Philosophical Arguments* explore related themes. I think it is especially important to interrogate the vision presented in these final chapters because they are the affirmative political and ethical extension of his explorations in *Sources of the Self*. For as Taylor suggests, “the “explorations of public culture” of these final four chapters “are like additional chapters to the *Sources of the Self*”. See “Preface”, *Philosophical Arguments*, p. xi.

<sup>77</sup> See “Why Do Nations Have to Become States”, *Reconciling the Solitudes*, (Montreal: McGill UP, 1993) for an example of Taylor’s earlier and less flexible views on the commonality necessary to a nation-state.

<sup>78</sup> On this see the last four chapters of *Philosophical Arguments*, as well as Taylor’s response to Martha Nussbaum, “Why Democracy Needs Patriotism”, in *For Love of Country*, Martha Nussbaum, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

<sup>79</sup> Taylor “Why Democracy Requires Patriotism”, *For Love of Country*, p. 120.

<sup>80</sup> Taylor, “Cross Purposes”, p. 198.

<sup>81</sup> Taylor, “Cross Purposes”, p. 198.

<sup>82</sup> Taylor, “Cross Purposes”, p. 198.

<sup>83</sup> Taylor, “Cross Purposes”, p. 198.

<sup>84</sup> Consider the campaigns of civil disobedience for civil rights or against the Vietnam War. Taylor of course, would no doubt side with the protesters. He would say that it was a struggle about the definition of patriotic common sense - which is acceptable - and that the key point was that there was little anti-American attitude in these protests. The protesters were merely arguing for a different common articulation of what it means to be American. Three things are important here. First, while this may explain many attitudes of those involved, I’m not sure it encompasses them all. Second, this a priori setting of the terms of debate means that it is very difficult to establish if most involved held this common sense or whether they were struggling to create a profoundly new common sense. Third, it minimizes our ability to see that the organizing of many of these protests did not occur under the logic of common sense recognition - but rather according to a more rhizomatic model of alliance building across difference. It is thus not that Taylor’s logic of common sense recognition is necessarily conservative and cannot appreciate and support any progressive position. Clearly Taylor’s own active politics dispels this. The point, rather, is that it leads to a very particular image of morality and a specific mode of progressive politics that makes it difficult to appreciate and cultivate other forms of protest - especially those that do not find sustenance in and aspire to common sense recognition.

<sup>85</sup> William Ian Miller, *Humiliation*, (Cornell: CUP, 1993).

<sup>86</sup> This element is clearly highlighted in interviews with its proponents. See the Witness special report on incarceration in North America, aired February 28, 2003.