Putting the Apolitical into Question: A Critique of Fullness in the Work of Charles Taylor

Josée Bolduc
Carleton University (josee.bolduc@carleton.ca)

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In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor points to the ambiguous relation between the liberal values of freedom and equality and what he claims is a fundamental human search for meaning in our secular modern society. The relation between society and the individual, especially in a context of deep diversity, is likely to see tensions over values, convictions, or traditions. Taylor has long been concerned with the effects that the absence of a universal authority has on establishing rules and values and on the state's ability to choose between equally valid demands. He contends that our secular age restricts the dominant discourse to a secular one, which hinders the possibility for an open and diverse dialogue among cultural and religious groups. Thus, Taylor seeks to articulate a notion of a 'beyond' that could be palatable to modern values and outlooks. From his own interpretation of Rawls' overlapping consensus, he proposes that the universal sentiment of fullness – or the existence of something that gives sense to one's existence – is a proper basis for the consensus.

In this essay I claim that Taylor errs when he attempts to establish an overlapping consensus based on fullness. He suggests that fullness is a fixed and universal emotion triggered by the experience of open-ended and ambiguous subtler languages. I argue however that articulating what these subtler languages communicate, as Taylor attempts, is in fact denying their essence, since this experience, by definition, takes place outside of discourse. I further contend that, while these subtler languages can play an important role in mitigating cultural and religious tensions in multicultural or intercultural societies, this role must retain a great deal of inarticulacy.

First, I will establish that Taylor turns to the overlapping consensus to find a common premise from which to begin a dialogue across cultural and religious groups. I will then refer to Heidegger's conception of the work of art to oppose Taylor's assumptions about subtler languages. I will then point out that language, if it is to be "subtle", must remain constitutive[1]: In other words, that which is communicated through emotions and experiences goes beyond language and must therefore remain largely inarticulate. Finally, I will give an account of Taylor's distancing from the concept of fullness in his later work, preferring interaction and openness and I will conclude by offering a possible, yet precarious avenue to encourage diversity and openness in modern society.

[1] Literature, and more specifically poetry emphasize subtler languages' focus on the constitutive aspect of language. Taylor argues that this aspect of language has been neglected for the use of the more designative aspect, thus making renditions of transcendence lack credibility since it refers essentially to that which is beyond language; something one cannot use descriptive language to define.

An Overlapping Consensus Based on Emotions

Taylor's focus on Western pluralistic societies has led him to seek a possible solution for the inevitable tensions bound to occur when values and practices come into conflict. Rawls' account of the overlapping consensus [OC] in *Political Liberalism* has provided Taylor with a possible avenue to increase dialogue and an eventual harmonization of cultures. Whereas for Rawls the OC is based on liberal principles that he presumes to be value-free and universally shared by all reasonable peoples, for Taylor the consensus must be based on a universally felt emotion: fullness. He believes that basing the OC on fullness can reduce religious-secular tensions by basing dialogue on a shared feeling of attachment towards what gives meaning to one's life (Taylor 2010, 315). He claims that such a balanced dialogue is almost impossible within the secular modern discourse because any mention of a 'beyond' or of a form of transcendence is reduced to fundamentalism or backwardness (2007). Taylor thus tries to look for a way to circumvent secular discourse and appeal to what he argues is a common need for meaning so that a new kind of dialogue can take place.

Similarly to Rawls, Taylor acknowledges that mistrust toward otherness makes the OC our current reality and the channel that allows for communication with others (Taylor 2010, 5). The Rawlsian OC is however too problematic to be the basis for dialogue, according to Taylor. Not only does Rawls assume that reason can only lead to comprehensive doctrines that value liberal principles[2], it also takes for granted that those liberal principles are in fact value-free. For Rawls, the OC is the best way to establish a sense of cooperation and unity in the modern context, especially with the predominance of individualism, and the catering to the equality of individual freedoms. Yet, for Taylor, the exercise of reason by free and equal individuals can only yield a plurality of values and outlooks on the world. He rejects Rawls's normative claim that plurality should still fall within reasonable comprehensive doctrines and argues that such doctrines are associated with what is of value to individuals: given that not everyone value the same thing, it follows that not everyone would subscribe to the same OC either. Rawls's take on pluralism is that the OC is based on values belonging to the domain of the political, which are therefore freestanding and neutral but that can still relate to citizens' other values within their respective comprehensive doctrines (Rawls 1993, 140).

Taylor points out that the OC is not as value-free as Rawls claims: reason is not a difference-blind standard to accommodate the multicultural reality of modern society, especially since this approach usually favours the culture of the majority (Taylor 1995, 248). In effect, practical reason alone cannot provide an overlapping consensus that could address the tensions caused by religious and moral disagreement and their demands for accommodations because it is based on Western standards that are not universally shared (236). Purely rational grounds cannot adequately account for notions of transcendence. Notions of transcendence are constitutive of a person's identity, which inevitably informs his or her public actions: thus they cannot be relegated solely the private sphere. Taylor believes that the OC must therefore consider the emotional aspect of identity and attempt to provide an adequate and fair understanding of the individual, including its dialogical nature. Indeed, he considers that identity is "negotiated… through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others" (231) and that it is thus constituted in some measure through interactions. The impossibility to define one's identity outside of its context, combined with the modern notion of universal dignity, makes being recognized by the

[2] He says of the liberal conclusions are merely the "free exercise of free human reason under condition of liberty" (1993, 144) (make sure that he really refers to the conclusion of using reason).

state as an authentic individual something that is necessary (225) for one's identity formation.

Taylor seeks a common ground in the realm of emotions and convictions that perhaps could stir up feelings of openness, or a way to get people to feel connected to every other person, to feel that there is something beyond human existence, without being limited by language. He thus turns to the sense of fullness, which he defines as that which brings significance, richness and fulfillment to an individual's life, whether it is based on a transcendent or secular notion.

The Disclosing Power of Art

For fullness to reveal itself as a common ground however, it needs the help of a concept that Taylor borrows from Shelley and the romantic poets. This concept represents "something in nature for which there are as yet no established words", that is to say, it is a "subtler language" (Taylor 2007, 353). In other words, poetry, painting, music, and the shared experiences of art – that is to say subtler languages – convey powerful and deep emotions that words alone cannot accurately describe. Subtler languages are non-discursive, ambiguous, and according to Taylor, they can inspire a feeling that there exists something greater, more significant than the here-and-now.

Whereas Taylor got inspiration from the Romantic Movement to introduce subtler languages, this concept would nonetheless benefit from a comparison with Martin Heidegger's treatment of the work of art and its capacity to uncover what is otherwise inaccessible. I believe that Heidegger's conception of the nature of the work of art and of what it is capable to disclose can point to important issues in Taylor's use of subtler languages.

Heidegger refers to art as having the capacity to reveal truth: not only does it show the background of a work of art but it also discloses the world that was built out of it. Art can reveal things about the world that we do not know already, which amounts to be a continuous revealing of truth. This "truth" is what he defines as the strife between "earth" and "world" [or between the social, technological, scientific and historical context of a work of art and society's conception of the good] and what it reveals, which would otherwise remain unknown and concealed (Heidegger 1977, 180). Art allows one to get a brief glimpse of Being [or *Dasein*, humans' 'being-in-the-world'], which is the only way that one can encounter it. For Heidegger, the embedded character of humans and their immersion in the world keeps them from being able to see it in any other perspective (1962, 88), and lead them to assume that the way they see the world is the Truth, which however "enframes" Being (1977, 325). Yet, in the strife between 'world' and 'earth' taking place in the work of art (172), it becomes possible to glimpse Being in a different way that has not been put into words yet.

The experience of the work of art for Heidegger is by no means purely aesthetic. Rather, art's role is to bring forth the underlying character of a people, that is to say what exists and what is important. To apprehend art solely from an aesthetic standpoint is to miss its much more significant revealing power: not only can the work of art bring to light the tacit aspect of a society; it can even contribute to changing it. Heidegger's famous sentence "art is a becoming and happening of truth" illustrates this potential present in the work of art (196). However, the revealing power of art only gives one a glimpse of Being and of the world as experienced through the senses instead of through language.

Similarly to Heidegger's account of the work of art, Taylor's use of subtler languages can communicate an alternate way of conceiving the world by revealing this sense of fullness he claims is universally felt. Subtler languages can also allow one to experience that which is tacitly present. Taylor thus sees subtler languages as a way to reintroduce the transcendent into modern

life. For the Romantics, subtler languages called for a turn to such aspects as beauty in an attempt to bring back a notion of the divine but without associating it with traditional ideas of the religious (Taylor 2007, 356). Taylor finds similitude between the aims of the romantics and the modern need for non-discursive languages: both periods react to a world that seem flat, and is defined in mechanistic terms (357). Both seek to recover the aspect of life that could contain the sacred or some notion of transcendence. For the Romantics, however, the role of artistic creation became exclusively aesthetic, seeking to reach a more complete existence by living around beauty, thus reducing the work of art to something to look at and not as a potential to reveal the world to us as Heidegger proposes. Still, through subtler languages and their use of symbols, something could manifest itself, being created and defined all at once (353) without reverting to discourse. The symbol "only gives access to what it refers to" and even that access is never completely clear since "what has been revealed is also partly concealed" (357). A symbol used in art exists as much in the 'subtext' surrounding it as in the symbol itself. This explains why what it represents "cannot be simply detached from the symbol, and be open to scrutiny as the ordinary referents are in our everyday world" (357). What subtler languages provide can be likened to the Heideggerian 'clearing'[3]. They trigger emotions and appeal to aesthetics and the senses to give us a window into that which language on its own fails to capture and convey.

Art, poetry and the festive – or common experiences – are also part of subtler languages. These non-discursive languages operate on emotions and sense perception so that any attempt to analyze, rationalize and describe one's experience remains largely inefficient and is thus temporarily pushed to the background. Such physical or emotional experience emphasizes the inadequacy of the rational part of the brain to render such experience in an accurate manner. Aldous Huxley's characterization of human groups as "a community of island-universe" (1972, 13) emphasizes the infinite gamut of possible experiences an individual can have but also the clear impossibility to truly share such experiences with others in the exact same way one has lived it. Taylor's subtler languages can, not only trigger such experiences of strong emotions and feelings of something beyond, they also serve as keywords, outlining the context for an experience that will probably be similar for most people: Chopin's Nocturne No.20, for instance, will inspire feelings of melancholy or perhaps of longing in the audience, but the emotion experienced in each person will not represent the same thing or person. This illustrates why Taylor emphasizes the complex character of subtler languages; their interpretations of the world cannot be clear.

Yet, like Heidegger, Taylor fears that the aesthetic aspect of art can become a distraction from its more important role or revealing. More specifically, for Taylor focusing on the aesthetic has the risk of leading to a self-conscious turn, where visual art and even poetry tend to merely evoke a feeling without context, thus appealing to empty emotions, which Taylor calls "the essence of the response, without the story" (2007, 355). While at first the experience of

[3] The unexpected, the symbolic, even that which is presented to us as a visceral experience can give us a "flashing glance" of the world that had until then remained concealed behind the enframing language of efficiency (Heidegger 1977, 45). To use Heidegger's own terminology: to glimpse the essence of Being, its concealedness must be unconcealed, which itself is the saving power that conceals Being. In other words, to see past the interpretation of something (Being) into its true representation, one must acknowledge that it can only be viewed as an interpretation and this realization is the glimpse of that thing's true essence, while at the same time an interpretation that keeps that thing from being truly known. In the case of subtler languages, the use of ways other than secular discourse to connect with something beyond human existence emphasizes that this 'beyond' can only be accessed through interpretation and allows individuals to give it the interpretation they find most significant to them.

aesthetics does provide a glimpse of something beyond life, it is nonetheless divorced from practices such as worshipping God, or honouring heroes: in depicting religious scenes for contemplation and meditation or heroes to praise, art replaces our own relation to heroes or saints and becomes the very source of those emotions triggered in us. For instance, in time, using specific songs and melodies will trigger specific emotions and the audience ends up being moved by the music itself, and no longer by that which it depicts because it depicts nothing other than those emotions.

Taylor thus turns to common experiences because he considers that, unlike art, they can remain authentic, while communicating a great deal of the tacit part of the world. Common experiences, or events that are lived within a large group, can escape the discursive and touch every person uniquely, while still providing a common space for solidarity and unity to take root.

The common space from which dialogue can take root is the universally shared sense of fullness, according to Taylor. He claims that experiencing the same intense and elating moment as many others will bring forth a feeling of being in communion with something larger and more important than oneself, which he believes should outline what provides one's life with meaning, thus uncovering one's personal sense of fullness. By allowing for a personal and private interpretation of what that sense of fullness is, Taylor expects that some may turn to a notion of transcendence as the best way to make sense of their experience, but without needing to articulate it within the usual religious or spiritual discourse.

Moving Past The Immanent Order

"The frameworks of yesterday and today are related as "naïve" and "reflective", because the latter has opened a question which had been foreclosed in the former by the unacknowledged shape of the background" (13). In contrast, the modern narrative involves both a courageous entrance into adulthood and a subtraction of illusions (575) where questioning the cosmological order turns faith in a beyond into superstitious beliefs in the supernatural, and suggests a childish need to be looked after by a paternal god. This narrative eventually brings people's awareness to the pure objectivity of the world where individuals construct their own values and live in a world of their own making. According to Taylor, this view dismisses the need for higher meaning as a sign of weakness because of the believer's inability to confront reality without relying on a reassuring higher order.

Thus, he claims that there is danger in an unchallenged humanistic immanence because, as this perspective becomes ubiquitous, the fainter what it covers becomes to us. In addition, when attempts to articulate the divine can only be framed through a language of immanence, distortion and misinterpretation become inevitable. It is therefore Taylor's impression that we live in what he compares to a post-revolutionary climate characterized by the strongly antagonistic reaction towards any serious mention of transcendence because it would directly threaten the secular victory obtained against it (176). As a result, attempting to rehabilitate some notion of transcendence within a language that has discredited it proves nearly impossible.

Taylor finds a secular immanent existence to be very dark. He believes that there lingers a sense of the fragility of meaning, which results in an empty search for an overarching significance: "…as a result of the denial of transcendence, of heroism, of deep feeling, we are left with a view of human life which is empty, cannot inspire commitments, offers nothing really worth while, cannot answer the craving for goals we can dedicate ourselves to" (717). The experience of fullness, Taylor hopes, will circumvent the secular language, which has until then restricted the interpretation of meaning to a secular discourse, and provide the possibility to use

an altogether new language to articulate it. Fullness here takes on the role of the work of art in Heidegger, but on a personal scale: it points to the restrictive character of the current dominating discourse and rejects it as a representative of the Truth; instead, it proposes to portray the world from an entirely new perspective by avoiding the secular discourse and allowing for the articulation of a new language that, by being personal and largely private, avoids imposing one particular interpretation of the world on everyone.

Hence, if it can be adapted to any person's own sense of fullness, Taylor believes that openness to a kind of transcendence could once again be an acceptable outlook. Unlike Heidegger, Taylor is looking for recovering a specific aspect of the world that has been rejected. Yet this recovery is not a return to a more or less distant past but a re-interpretation that can be palatable to the modern context. Taylor's own take on Rawls' overlapping consensus takes account of crucial aspects of life in a pluralistic society. Establishing commonly held rules and values linked to the practical aspect of living together, and defining them through public reason as Rawls proposes, fails to mitigate tensions that are likely to arise between a secular context and notions of the good that are informed by notions of a beyond. Unlike Rawls, Taylor does not believe that one can bracket one's background when entering the public space. Indeed, Taylor claims that the emotional concept of fullness represents whatever gives meaning to each person's life but it also provides a common ground that he claims is broad enough to include every person's interpretation of that fullness.

Subtler languages make it possible to create symbols through which something can be made available in an indirect way. They emphasize the world-making character of language that poets tap into. Symbols open the way to a perception of the world that Michael Polanyi calls the "tacit" where one has knowledge of something in a way that one cannot explain with language (1966, 4). The infinite, God, or expressions of deep feelings cannot be expressed directly: only by associating words to them, in naming them, can they be communicated. Since, for instance, Spirit cannot be physically demonstrated, the use of the word 'spirit' constitutes itself a symbol that makes possible the encounter with such a notion by giving it a name. In providing new symbols with which to approach the world, subtler languages can thus create new meanings (Taylor 2007, 756).

The festive – or common experiences – is a part of subtler languages that can take one closer to an experience of the religious. Taylor looks at early Christian and pagan cultures, where rituals and spiritual practices constituted the way to worship and where the body and its importance in worship was characteristic of one's faith. Today, he sees that the collective has been downplayed and the practices that once were part of a communion with God through one's 'neighbour' have ceased to hold the same meaning and have changed in their essence as a result. A disembedding of the religious justification and the corresponding actions has occurred, for instance, turning actions of benevolence, into rules devoid of their original context. Instead, such acts are institutionalized and justified by reason, disconnecting laws and ethics from anything greater (Cayley 2005, 742). Modernity thus builds a whole edifice to strengthen the move away from lived experiences and turning towards 'code fetishism' (Taylor 2011, 353). Yet, Taylor believes that revaluing experiences and practices can help make possible a new encounter with the transcendent. He believes this revaluation can occur by bringing the festive to the fore. Through feasts, pilgrimages, and large gatherings outside of the everyday life of individuals, they can get in touch with something deeper or higher than themselves. Hence, the festive can take many shapes, ranging from gatherings with some religious undertones such as World Youth Day to more profane ones such as concerts or raves, each event giving a sense of tapping into

something 'beyond'. "What's happening is that we are all being touched together, moved as one, sensing ourselves as fused in our contact with something greater, deeply moving, or admirable, whose power to move us has been immensely magnified by the fusion" (2007, 482). The festive, going past modernity's individualizing tendency, can offer people a reconnection with some sense of community and belonging. Regardless of the religious undertone that may be involved in such gatherings, the festive is a way to have transcendence erupt into one's life, even when living in immanence (518). How this experience of transcendence is interpreted is once again particular to the individual, according to their view of what moves them – or their own sense of fullness.

The Failure of Fullness

Taylor seeks to prompt solidarity in a society where self-construction and individualism are central. He looks to the implicit and constitutive aspect of language to speak to the very central human desire to connect with others. Thus, fullness is a point of departure because, not only does he see it as a universal feeling, he believes it can be vindicated through anyone's own convictions without denying other people's. What Taylor suspects is that groups or peoples whose convictions differ can still feel solidarity towards one another because of the shared feeling that there is something giving meaning to one's life. Fullness may therefore present a solution to the otherness that is omnipresent in multiculturalism. Whereas multiculturalism does not favour one culture over others and emphasizes a turn inward and towards hermetism, fullness could allow for a common ground from which diverse and mutually unfamiliar cultures can begin a dialogue.

While Taylor is aware that a plurality of values exists within individuals and across cultures, he however does not agree that these values are inevitably incompatible. In *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, Taylor claims that a 'transvaluation' may be possible among values that appear incommensurable and thus could "open the way to a mode of life, individual and social, in which these demands could be reconciled" (1994, 214). He gives for example the former claim that public order and popular rule could never work together but that democracy proved to be a solution to such contradictions. Some values might disappear as a consequence of these 'transvaluations' but it does not change that for Taylor, it is possible to get the best of both worlds with a third option.

With fullness as a common ground from which to feel connected to others, Taylor believes there is no need to solve or mitigate tensions between values, beliefs or practices; an OC that considers feelings of fullness to determine what has special significance to someone is a way to inspire solidarity by appealing to common emotions. A reconnection to the transcendent based on Taylor's "catholic modernity" and its expression in fullness aims to open one to the religion of others. If one assumes that everyone feels the same kind of attachment to one's own fundamental convictions, one can see some familiarity in what may at first seem like unbridgeable differences.

Taylor defines fullness, as a unifying concept that does not have to be based on transcendence and that does not spring from a unique source. Rather, his conception of the values, beliefs, or strong evaluations behind fullness aim at getting around any of its particular incarnations, and focus on its commonalities. Fullness is felt when something makes one's life seem richer, more complete, or meaningful: it is nothing other than the very attachment and association of identity with one's significant convictions and it carries no other justification. This deep attachment to the source of one's own feeling of fullness aims to be Taylor's starting

point for beginning a conversation with people whose convictions are different and perhaps conflicting with our own but who nonetheless feel a similar attachment.

In *A Catholic Modernity*, Taylor strongly suggests that all human diversity – whether religious or atheistic – is constitutive of the great path towards God. For him, the "catholic principle" means that there should be "no widening of the faith without an increase in the variety of devotions and spiritualities and liturgical forms and responses to incarnation" (1990, 15). Incarnation is "the weaving of God's life into human lives" (14), where the divine can be experienced with others. Consequently, there cannot be only one proper way to worship God: on the contrary, for Taylor, if a church should broaden its inclusion of new members, it implies that the ways to connect with the divine should also broaden. Thus the 'Church' would no longer be distinguished by a list of practices and rituals but would represent the collection of the many paths to God. Indeed, "what really matters is the continuity, and not the new paths broken" (2007, 765). Thus, what the full variety of itineraries accomplish can only come to light if we "… see the unity of the church as stretching into eternity across all time" (765). *A Catholic Modernity?* posits that Catholicism and modernity can join under openness, namely by supporting and making possible the countless pathways to transcendence that Taylor envisions arising from giving a more important place to subtler languages.

Fullness is expected to "capture the very different ways in which each of us … sees life as capable of some fuller, higher, more genuine… form" and for Taylor "the positions we may adopt have no finite limit" (2010, 315). Fullness is an umbrella term to designate an individual's object of belief, whether informed by the higher or the existing order. Nonetheless, in Taylor's description of a new, opened, and diverse transcendent, there seems to be little room for unbelievers, except in the brief mention that the experience of subtler languages via common experiences would satisfy the convictions of believers and unbelievers alike and of everybody in between the two positions. Indeed, it is Taylor's position that the richest life is one that includes a love of life and a love of what is beyond life. His discussion of fullness proposes a way to possibly reconnect with the mystery – or in other words with a notion of the beyond – in a way that will not be limited by secular discourse. The goal of the reconnection with transcendence will then be to bring back this richer picture of life in a way that can be acceptable to modernity, which means that the individuals who do not look to the transcendent to articulate their notion of fullness will either come to their senses – the constitutive language of transcendence being intelligible now – or they will remain on the sidelines with their poorer vision of life and experience of the world.

On the one hand, if the unbeliever finally acknowledges the transcendent, because it can resonate in him as a result of the new articulation and the resulting openness to the infinite, then Taylor's 'catholic modernity' does not need to be as broad as first appears: fullness does not have to be articulated within the non-believer's trajectories since the lack of faith was merely facilitated by an inadequate articulation of transcendence. On the other hand, if the unbeliever remains untouched by what is beyond life, then Taylor's 'catholic modernity' would also have to include the outlooks of the unbelievers since their very existence is included within the works of God: God having created humans with an independent mind, their faith or lack thereof was willed by God and therefore are both valid. Thus the varieties of fullness that correspond to various ways to worship could be seen as constitutive of all the many paths toward God in eternity (which makes the differences among them irrelevant). What this suggests is that either non-believers are in fact latent believers and only need the proper discourse to acknowledge this, or they are misled but are still, in their very existence, demonstrating God's existence. In the

latter case, all positions in the spectrum between belief and unbelief are valid and consequently fullness can be found in everything from fundamental belief to strict immanentism, thus making "fullness" a very weak basis from which to begin a dialogue and inspire good will towards the 'other'.

With fullness, Taylor wants to define the overlapping consensus as a feeling that everyone has, while bracketing the object that leads individuals to have that very feeling. Thus, one can wonder whether the idea that everyone has a notion of fullness is reason enough to feel more open to other people's beliefs and to feel closer to them. It is more likely that what causes divisions, mistrust and sometimes fear between cultural or religious groups is not a failure to understand that the devotion of the 'other' is just as sincere and heartfelt as one's own, even if the objects of devotion differ. Rather, the tensions lie in the objects for which a strong connection is experienced, which can seem baffling or threatening to others, despite this common feeling of attachment towards it. Even if the religious fundamentalist and the secular immanentist both feel a sense of fullness towards their conviction, their respective convictions are so fundamentally different that sharing a similar feeling seems a weak factor to feel sympathy and openness for one another's position. Rather they might feel baffled by the other person's attachment towards some notion one finds strange, misled or simply wrong.

Such a broad and non-descript conception as fullness cannot serve as a starting point for openness between drastically opposite positions. Fullness is too general a ground to get one past radical differences and beliefs that seem unacceptable to others. While Taylor attempts to bridge the gap across fundamental convictions, the extreme positions themselves are that which is problematic and they make his attempt to find a notion that will encompass every position between those extremes too vague and therefore so broad that they lose any meaning.

Taking Example from Heidegger

Taylor's presumption that experiencing subtler languages will lead to only one kind of result – a sense of fullness that roots itself on a broad notion of transcendence – is to ignore their open-ended character and to assume that such experiences can only bring forth the sense of fullness Taylor seeks. As subtler languages, Taylor preferred common experiences to visual and literary arts: he felt that the latter could be too easily manipulated to trigger a specific emotion, leaving out any deeper messages to inspire this emotion, while the latter can evoke emotions in a more authentic manner. However, his relying on the occurrence of only one emotion [fullness] suggests that even this subtler language can be inauthentic and used to manipulate emotions.

A better perspective to consider subtler languages is to look to the Heideggerian conception of the work of art to understand their full potential, a view that Taylor seems to have gained appreciation for in some of his more recent work. In *A Secular Age*, he attempts to articulate and impose a uniform interpretation to a common experience. Nevertheless, in the Report from the Bouchard-Taylor Commission[4], Taylor and Bouchard's recommendations seem to move closer to possibly achieving openness to the 'other' without turning to discourse. "Un certain degré de stabilité politique et de cohésion sociale peut bien sûr être atteint par l'institutionnalisation de règles collectives justes et efficaces, mais l'effet de ces denières ne pourrait qu'être renforcé par ce que l'on peut appeler une éthique du souci de l'autre, qui invite à

[4] I refer here to the 2008 Report from the *Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences*, written by the two co-chairs Charles Taylor and Gérard Bouchard.

l'empathie et au décentrement[5]" (Maclure, Taylor 2010, 138). The laws within a state and its institutions are not enough for Taylor to inspire solidarity in society. While turning to an overlapping consensus may be a good start towards achieving solidarity, it is however not the only necessary element. The community must play a crucial role in promoting openness, both as a political actor and in its particular cultural instances.

Thus, in their recommendations at the end of the Commission Report, Charles Taylor and Gerard Bouchard have emphasised the need for more frequent and more positive interactions between cultures within a society. Cultural minorities should have an increased presence in the public sphere and should increase their political participation; there should be more interaction across cultures, through festivals and other gatherings; and the media should show more cultural diversity (Bouchard, Taylor 2008, 266). The point of the exercise would not be to iron out or undermine differences but rather to reveal that "other" as surprisingly familiar. Bouchard and Taylor hoped that in time would result a weakening of the unease and suspicion felt towards other cultures in favour of some commonalities so that cultural or religious groups look at each other with curiosity, rather than with fear or anger.

While the Commission Report displays a more practical approach than Taylor's discussion of fullness in *A Secular Age*, it is however not entirely divorced from his idea of collective experience and subtler languages. Taylor believes that with the flexibility within civil society, where exposure to and interaction with the other can take place, the isolating concept of "otherness" would eventually dissolve and leave space for dialogue to occur. While tensions among various cultural or religious groups can be managed with rules, lasting solutions can only occur with a feeling of solidarity towards one another (Taylor 2010, 320). With solidarity and openness, Taylor believes that not only a dialogue but also a fusion of horizons can occur, which can improve the overlapping consensus and likely provide the possibility that a solution for conflicting values will be found in time (1994, 214). Taylor's later articulation of his overlapping consensus focuses on providing a fertile environment that would allow exchanges and interactions to take place and where people from all cultures, moral backgrounds, or religious affiliations could learn more about themselves and one another hence dissipating misgivings and mistrust felt toward minorities.

Thus, at the end of the Report, Bouchard and Taylor recommend that this space of conversation should emerge both in civil society and through the state. To counter the lack of visibility of ethnic minorities and the resulting focus on their otherness (2008, 251), the co-chairs propose a few alternative avenues that could help mitigate feelings of otherness: the portrayal of immigrants and minorities as a constitutive and essential part of Quebec's historical heritage (258), the broadcasting of projects featuring members of the ethnic minorities to increase their visibility (266), the improvement of the process of recognizing diplomas acquired abroad, and encouraging the regionalization of immigration (268). Moreover, to further encourage intercultural contact, Bouchard and Taylor propose the implementation of programs that would broaden intercultural educational practices such as mentoring, tutoring, or even exchange programs; cultivate intercommunity action and; promote regional tourism to ethnic minorities living in urban centers (269).

Taylor makes no explicit mention of Heidegger and the role of the work of art when he describes the common grounds that can initiate the type of dialogues he seeks. Yet in his later

[5] "A degree of political stability and social cohesion can of course be achieved through the institutionalization of collective rules that are fair and efficient, but the effect of those rules could only be reinforced by what might be called an ethics of concern for others that invites empathy and decentering" (my translation).

work he puts more emphasis on open-ended interactions between ethnic groups, on spontaneous and community-based exchanges, and on understanding the other through exposure: features that, it can be argued, suggest a clear acknowledgment of the importance of creativity and of experience. While in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* Taylor still hopes to find an overlapping consensus, he however places more emphasis on the dialogue that could lead to one, rather than on a universal concept that aims to allow for dialogue. It is in discussing the dialogue itself that Taylor seems to turn to Heidegger.

Heidegger's discussion of the work of art describes the effect it has on a population and the way it symbolizes and communicates the identity of a society. It is an object that has arisen out of society itself through the exercise of its members' creativity: what shape it may take is unpredictable at the outset, and experiencing it will give outsiders an insight into a culture, and will represent a richer identity for the members of said culture. For Heidegger a work of art is not merely the production of a physical artwork: it must embody the culmination of a group's culture, history, convictions, concept of the good, rules, narratives and imagination. Art occurs when it reveals something previously concealed from the world, something that results from a blend of tradition, history, and convictions, through the use of non-discursive language. Taking Heidegger's notion of the revealing character of art and applying it to other non-discursive [or subtler] languages, such as interactions and exposure to other cultures [which can also be defined as common experiences], could not only render more familiar a group previously referred to as 'other', but it could also reveal traits that inspire mutual sympathy and good will. The revealing power of art thus could improve self-knowledge and knowledge of the other by revealing that which had until then remained unknown, ignored or hidden.

In order for art to effectively reveal the diversity of ethnic or religious identities in a pluralist society, it is imperative to take a page from Heidegger's discussion of the coming to be of the work of art and preserve spontaneity and unpredictability: if one were to impose content and form to a work of art, it would not be the important revealing tool that Heidegger describes. The striving of "earth" and "world" and its subsequent revealing allows for unexpressed yet significant aspects of a group's identity to come to the surface, which can deepen an individual's identity and touch the stranger experiencing it in terms of his or her own language. For this reason, there needs to be a space where creativity and imagination can thrive and generate new ways to bring forth the subtext of a culture or an ethnic group into the everyday: only then, by being exposed to the product of a people's inspiration, can humans learn from themselves and from others. In contrast, framing creativity, imagination, art and other subtler languages within an expected outcome, is to challenge forth inspiration and creativity in the shape of ordering. In other words, seeking predictability in experiencing the other can only strengthen what individuals already know about themselves and others, and they can never move past this outlook because it is what they consider true.

Thus, what is crucial is that there exists a space for the free expression and exploration of identity and of one's vision of the world without seeking to 'enframe' it by explaining, predicting or ordering it. Taylor's assertion that experiencing subtler languages leads to one outcome – that is to say experiencing a sense of fullness – demonstrates how it denies the revealing potential of art and of other outlets to creativity and imagination. Nonetheless, while the experience of subtler languages, art, or creativity can be used to alleviate tensions between cultures or religions, assuming that the same outcome could be obtained in similar societies denies the uniqueness and complexity of societies and of their constitutive groups. Using subtler languages as a formula with the expectations to reach the same result will ultimately fail. First, one would

have to articulate these experiences, flattening and distorting them with the oversimplifications that discourse necessitates: subtleties are lost in systematization. Thus this space of free expression and of experience of subtler languages and art must remain tentative, uncertain, risky and authentic, that is to say unique, in order to communicate identity and narratives, in all its complexity. What is necessary is for the state to ensure there is a space for free expression in civil society, but it must refrain from any official articulation of it. In time, the result of the free expression will inform and influence the discourse in civil society, which will in turn affect the political discourse but it needs to be done on the civil society's own terms.

Introducing an Arendtian Risk

The heterogeneity of the pluralist state increases the likelihood of tensions between various cultural or religious groups. Rawls and Taylor both believe that finding a common ground among these various groups could serve as a possible starting point from which a more harmonious and cohesive society could be built. Unlike Rawls, however, Taylor moved away from a focus on reason and its conclusion about the Good, and towards emotions – or more specifically, the emotion he claims results from a shared experience of something beyond particular concerns. His recent turn away from his contention that experiencing a specific subtler language like a common experience leads to a sense of fullness does not discard subtler languages as such but rather gives them more latitude to open the way to dialogue. Subtler languages, as Taylor proposes in *Laicité et Liberté de Conscience* and in the Report, have a crucial role that evokes a Heideggerian understanding of the work of art, that is it allows the subtext surrounding identity to come to the fore, to be accessible and thus to convey the inarticulate part of identity to those experiencing it. Hence, people can learn from others and from the non-discursive articulation of one's own background as well. What carries forward in both of Taylor's discussions on subtler languages is the need for a space where they can come about freely so they can convey what defines a people, a belief or a tradition.

Thus, while Taylor is right in *A Secular Age* when he claims that the communication and building of a community on the basis of mutual exchange needs a common space, he is however mistaken when he considers that what occurs through subtler languages in such a space can be predicted. Taylor tries to stay away from articulation when he introduces subtler languages in *A Secular Age*, but he makes a mistake when he determines what specific emotion would result from being subjected to common experiences. Naming what the experience is [his sense of fullness] and proposing to use it as an overlapping consensus is another mistake. With the Report on reasonable accommodations however, Taylor makes a better use of subtler languages and claims that by living together and interacting more often, while showing one's identity, notions of the Good, values and narratives through these subtler languages, various groups will in time form a collective imaginary that will strengthen its bonds. However, I believe that, for such open dialogue to occur, it is important that the state does not interfere in its occurrence in any other way than in providing the context in which it can take place. Inter-faith or inter-cultural dialogues must happen on their own terms and not through the mediating and distorting state apparatus. I contend that, similarly to Arendt's concept of action, the dialogue that Taylor seeks, in order to prove lasting and bonding across cultures, not only must reflect the character of the space made available for it, it must also be spontaneous, identity-defining and self-asserting. While emotions do influence politics, their articulation must remain outside of the polis.

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