

## What's Wrong with Hypergoods

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Charles Taylor fails to distinguish enough between creation and interpretation. What I mean is that he blurs the difference between making works of art, on the one hand, and making sense of or appreciating them and other things, on the other. When he defines man as a “self-interpreting animal,” for example, he must mean this to include our capacity to create, and indeed he has been explicit that interpretation is a matter of “creating” or “inventing” and not just “discovering” meaning. He also describes our linguistic capacity as “not just that by which we produce prose about the things which surround us, but also those by which we make poetry, music, art, dance, and so on.” And when he specifies that a “moral ideal” is “a picture of what a better or higher mode of life would be, where ‘better’ and ‘higher’ are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we ought to desire,” we’ve every reason to assume that such pictures can be the products of creation, or interpretation, or both.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, Taylor recognizes that “aesthetic excellence doesn’t just amount to spiritual or moral depth.”<sup>2</sup> Still, he can be said to tread an ambiguous path between Kant’s separation of creation and moral interpretation, on the one hand, and Hegel’s unification of them, on the other. Because Kant would not accept Taylor’s conception of interpretation as an activity central not only to art criticism but also to ethics, and Hegel would balk at Taylor’s implication that philosophy cannot encompass art since it is art that is the more clairvoyant and so superior mode: “The artist is like the race-car driver, and [the philosopher and critic] are the mechanics in the

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, “Self-Interpreting Animals,” in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 18, 22; “Language and Human Nature,” in *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 235-36; *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, “Charles Taylor Replies,” in James Tully, ed., *Philosophy in An Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 241; see also “The Diversity of Goods,” in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 238; and *Sources of the Self*, p. 512.

pit; except that in this case the mechanics usually have four thumbs, and they have only a hazy grasp of the wiring, much less than the drivers have.”<sup>3</sup>

While I believe Taylor is right to take this “middle way,” I nevertheless think that he needs to move somewhat further from Hegel and closer to Kant by asserting a sharper distinction between creation and interpretation. Taylor is familiar with the notion, fundamental to many religions, that the creation of the world is a kind of gift. Artistic creation is, I believe, similar – the gift here being the inspiration that drives the creation. We call artists gifted, that is, not only because they are lucky enough to have developed certain talents or skills but also because of the inspirations they have received. This is not to say that only creations can be original, for the transformations brought about by interpretation – which, after all, consists of the reformulation of meaning – may also bring novelty. But the interpretive process is still best conceived as combining “evolution” rather than creation or invention with the discovery of meaning, since interpreters may not simply “make stuff up”; on the contrary, they must maintain fidelity towards whatever it is they are interpreting, since only this way can they arrive at an understanding of it. When artists create, by contrast, we speak of inspiration because we want to give the sense that there’s something not-fully-rational going on; indeed, the reason artists tend to have such difficulty explaining why they chose to create in this way and not that is because there’s often no reason, even no choice.<sup>4</sup>

I actually want to go further than this. Because if artists are to receive their inspirations then there needs to be openings through which they may enter, and this requires that some violence be done, forcing (further) open “gaps” between the goods that constitute their identities. This means damaging those goods to some degree and so moving, at least at first, in a direction opposite to the reconciling, integrating one that is the aim of interpretation. I say “at least at first” because creations may – in the long run, after they’ve been interpreted – contribute more to the integrity

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 512; see also *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 479. For Kant and Hegel, see Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), esp. § 1-5 (which, it should be said, is in tension with the minority doctrine advanced in § 49); Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), § 699-747; and Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), especially the introduction to part 1.

<sup>4</sup> See Taylor, “It Is Strange and Wonderful That We Exist,” *Compass* 11, no. 4 (Sept.-Oct. 1993): 21-22. So I agree with Hegel when he describes the “inspiration of the artist” as a “force foreign to him,” a “necessity” that he cannot grasp; see Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (1817), par. 560, quoted in Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 473. Only for me it’s more foreign than Hegel can accept, since it transcends not only philosophy but any and all phenomena; and its inscrutability is a mark not of art’s deficiency but of its potential greatness.

of the whole of goods than any strictly interpretive approach ever could. But the initial, sometimes irreparable damage should not be denied.

Perhaps this is an idiosyncratic conception of creation. The intuition that there's something violent, or at least irrational, about the creative process is widespread, however, and we would fail to give it its due if we conceived of it as but a kind of interpretation. Yes, interpretation serves as a kind of bridge between art and ethics, both because there is interpretation in creation (artists, after all, do not create *ex nihilo*) and because we interpret both artworks and the conflicts of goods in roughly the same fashion, hoping to make sense of them. As Taylor puts it, "the languages of qualitative contrast [i.e. of interpretation] embrace more than the moral."<sup>5</sup> But we must still be careful not to blur the distinction between art and ethics too much. Where Taylor sees them as partly overlapping and to that degree melded together, I would concur but add that there are also these gaps lying between them, and they ensure that their relations often involve conflict. This is something that Taylor misses.

In what follows, I begin by offering an account of why he does so. I then argue that properly distinguishing between art and ethics should lead us to reconceive what Taylor calls "hypergoods," those fundamental, architectonic goods that serve as the bases of our moral frameworks.<sup>6</sup> Because I believe that hypergoods are the products of creation rather than interpretation, and so they are not so much goods as works of art. Indeed that is why, when judged from a strictly ethical standpoint, there will always be something "wrong" with them. After arguing for this, I go on to show what it means for our understanding of certain social practices and movements. Because it seems to me that at least some of those participating are artists rather than (self-)interpreters, for their actions are inspired. And this has relevance for how we should be approaching a number of issues, including those around ordinary life, university debates over the Western canon, and evil.

## I

My argument that Taylor should be distinguishing more strongly between art and ethics proceeds in two steps. First, I try to show that his conception of ethical dialogue, which I conceive as the

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<sup>5</sup> Taylor, "Diversity of Goods," p. 239.

<sup>6</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 20-24, 63-75. Whether or not Taylor thinks *all* moral frameworks are based on hypergoods has been a matter of some debate. See Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 36-37.

exchange of interpretations, is overly adversarial. This leads him to fail to contrast it enough with art because creation, given the degree of irrationality in it, is inherently adversarial. Second, I argue that Taylor's conception of creation is overly dialogical and that this makes it appear more like ethics than it actually is.

I begin with the overly adversarial ethics. Rather than a merely procedural, whether consequentialist or Kantian formalist, ethics, Taylor favours an interpretive form of substantive ethics, one that engages in what he calls "strong evaluation." It consists of "reasoning in transitions," a thoroughly contextual form of judgment that echoes biographical narrative. Through it, Taylor believes, we can achieve the greater lucidity that successful interpretation can bring.<sup>7</sup>

One of the reasons Taylor is dissatisfied with procedural ethics is that it fails to recognize how conflicts often arise between incommensurable goods.<sup>8</sup> Taylor shares this idea with value pluralists such as Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire, and Bernard Williams. He nevertheless differs from them in his belief that incommensurability is synonymous with conflict: to Taylor, incommensurable practices and the goods they express are "incompatible in principle" because they are "partly define[d]" in contradiction to each other.<sup>9</sup> To the value pluralist, goods, or at least their cores, can exist in a "thin" or decontextualized dimension of meaning, one which allows them to be expressed in isolation from each other and so outside of any conflict.<sup>10</sup> Taylor, however, adopts the holism that comes from following Heidegger and Wittgenstein in

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<sup>7</sup> On strong evaluation, see Taylor "Diversity of Goods" and "What is Human Agency?" in *Human Agency and Language; Sources of the Self*, pp. 85-90; "Comments and Replies," *Inquiry* 34, (1991): 237-54, pp. 242-55; *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 52; "The Motivation behind A Procedural Ethics," in Ronald Beiner and William James Booth, eds., *Kant and Political Philosophy* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1993); and "Justice after Virtue," in John Horton and Susan Mendus, eds., *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994). Regarding reasoning in transitions, see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 72; and "Explanation and Practical Reason," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Taylor, "Diversity of Goods."

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, "Rationality," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 141; see also pp. 145-46.

<sup>10</sup> This is an implicit assumption of such stand-alone texts as Stuart Hampshire, *Freedom of the Individual* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975, 2nd ed.); Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Bernard Williams, "From Freedom to Liberty: The Construction of a Political Value" and "The Idea of Equality," both from *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Berlin, "Equality," in *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, 2nd. ed.). Hampshire, it's worth noting, did come to write of goods that are partly defined in opposition to other goods: see his *Justice Is Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 34-35.

recognizing that practical meaning always emerges from, and remains partly connected to, a prereflective background whole.<sup>11</sup> Given this, such meaning is always to some degree “thick.”

When it comes to responding to conflict with practical reason, however, Taylor is not as far from the value pluralists as he should be. Consider their conception of the aim of such reasoning. In value pluralism, when an instrumental solution is impossible then we should try to reach a balanced accommodation through negotiation, even though this will mean compromising the goods involved to some degree. Hence the pervasiveness of dirty hands and tragedy in value pluralist politics.<sup>12</sup> Conflict cannot be reconciled, which is the opposite of compromise because synergistic, because this would require further integrating the goods rather than balancing them against each other, and for that they must *already* be integrated to some degree and so parts of a whole; as just noted, however, such a holism is absent from value pluralism. This is why dialogue in value pluralism takes the form of negotiation but not conversation, since it’s the latter which depends on the goods being related organically, the whole being present in each part. For that’s why it makes sense to search within a good for its opponent(s) in the hopes of transforming the whole and so reconciling the conflict.

True, negotiators sometimes converse a bit at first, in order to understand precisely what the other’s demands are, but since the ultimate aim involves compromise these will indeed be received as demands rather than as potentially convincing interpretations of the whole, of the common good. After all, even the most good-faith negotiations consist of adversaries putting pressure on each other.

So negotiation cannot be said to be wholly free of the use of force, which is why it should be situated in between violence and conversation. Violence constitutes one extreme of this continuum because it separates us from our adversaries, tearing holes in the common good. The compromises of negotiation do so as well, but at least its accommodations may then be said to “patch” the holes. When a conversation succeeds, however, this contributes to rather than detracts from the common good, which is why those who converse in response to a conflict

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<sup>11</sup> See Taylor, “Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger,” in Charles B. Guignon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and “To Follow A Rule” and “*Lichtung* or *Lebensform*: Parallels Between Heidegger and Wittgenstein,” both in *Philosophical Arguments*.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Berlin, “Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century,” in *Liberty*, esp. p. 64; Williams, “Politics and Moral Character,” in Hampshire, ed., *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1989), esp. pp. 170-77.

should be described as “striving” (cooperatively) rather than “struggling” together and so identified as “opponents” who are not also “adversaries.”<sup>13</sup>

Taylor has expressed worries about the fragmentation encouraged by a politics which fails to be concerned enough about the common good.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, his conception of practical reason aims for an uneasy mixture of both reconciliation and accommodation – a direct result, I suggest, of his failure to distinguish between conversation and negotiation. Force and dialogue are certainly contrasted: when it comes to conflict, he tells us, as long as the parties remain “this side of violence” then each can be said to view the other “as one who can be, must be, reasoned with.”<sup>15</sup> But no distinction is made between the adversarial and the merely oppositional; to Taylor, those who participate in interpretive, dialogical politics may be said to “strive” or “struggle” as well as to engage in “negotiations” or “semi-agonistic conversation,” with each pair of these words being used synonymously.<sup>16</sup>

The problem with this is that conversation is an extremely fragile mode of dialogue. It is very hard, if not impossible, to listen with an open mind with the hope of transforming and reconciling meaning if one feels threatened because another is pressuring you to compromise. Mix conversation and negotiation together, then, and the best you’ll get is negotiation.

Taylor’s blurring of the two is reflected in his reading of Aristotle’s ethics. On the one hand, Taylor claims that Aristotle “arguably” does not acknowledge the necessity of tragedy since he

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the latter distinction, see my “Opponents vs. Adversaries in Plato’s *Phaedo*,” in *Patriotic Elaborations: Essays in Practical Philosophy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009). And for more on conversation and negotiation and the politics supported by distinguishing them properly, see my *From Pluralist to Patriotic Politics: Putting Practice First* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> See Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, ch. 10; and “Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere,” in *Philosophical Arguments*, pp. 282-86.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 27; see also *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 174.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), pp. 8, 59; “What is Human Agency?” p. 27; “The Hermeneutics of Conflict,” in James Tully, ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 223, 225-6; “The Stakes of Constitutional Reform,” in *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, ed. Guy Laforest (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), p. 146 (where Taylor suggests that “re-defining” Canada is a matter for “negotiations”); and “Response to Bhabha,” in Matthew J. Gibney, ed., *Globalizing Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1999* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 186-87. Distinguishing between these terms would provide Taylor with a response to Neil Levy. Levy complains that because practical reason as Taylor conceives of it cannot cope with people who refuse to listen to “error-reducing” arguments (i.e. people who I would describe as taking an adversarial stance), such arguments cannot be said to have rational value at all; see Neil Levy, “Taylor on Overcoming Incommensurability,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 26, no. 5 (Sept. 2000): 47-61. Taylor would, however, be able to claim that those who utterly refuse to strive together in conversation are, by definition, less rational.

assumes that all conflicts can be reconciled in principle, rationally resolved without compromise.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Taylor endorses Martha Nussbaum's interpretation of Aristotle, which emphasizes the role of luck in his practical thought in a way which implies that there are times when, no matter what we think or do, "we may be forced to make hard choices." Like the previous reading, this one is still monistic in that it maintains faith in the project of formulating a unified theory of ethics; only now there's a recognition that the world in its current state may not be amenable to the theory's application and so making dirty compromises may be unavoidable.<sup>18</sup>

One of the problems with this sort of ambiguity about practical reason is that it can cause us to fail to recognize those conflicts which require conversation rather than negotiation if there's to be any hope of resolution. Take recognition. As Hegel shows in the first stage of his famous dialectic of it, any attempt by one party to obtain recognition from another through deadly force is counterproductive, since if it produces the death of one or both of them then it defeats the purpose. This stage is consequently resolved when the struggle culminates in a primitive form of recognition, in which one party becomes the master and the other the slave.<sup>19</sup> When it comes to the much more sophisticated forms of recognition sought for by many groups in contemporary politics, I would claim that negotiation is similarly counterproductive. Because what these groups want recognized is their uniqueness or distinctiveness within the society, and recognition of this sort simply cannot come from a decision to make some trade-off since it's essentially a matter of sociological truth – and one either learns that something is true or one does not; there's no way to decide to believe in the truth of something as belief just *is* the stance we take towards

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<sup>17</sup> See Taylor, "Aristotle or Nietzsche?" *Partisan Review* 51, no. 2 (1984): 301-6, p. 304. The term "moral loss" is from Bernard Williams, "Conflict of Values," in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For other defenses of this reading of Aristotle, see Karen M. Nielsen, "Dirtying Aristotle's Hands? Aristotle's Analysis of 'Mixed Acts' in the *Nicomachean Ethics* III, 1," *Phronesis* 52 (2007): 270-300; Paula Gottlieb, *The Virtue of Aristotle's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch. 6; and Alasdair MacIntyre, who highlights the significance of Aristotle's doctrine of the unity of the virtues in his *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 3rd ed.), pp. 142, 179-80. MacIntyre further develops the doctrine's implications, especially as it's taken up by Thomism, in his "Moral Dilemmas," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, "Critical Notice: Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness*," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 18, no. 4 (Dec. 1988): 805-14, p. 811. Nussbaum has further articulated this position in her "Why Practice Needs Ethical Theory: Particularism, Principle and Bad Behavior," in Brad Hooker and Maggie Olivia Little, eds., *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000). For more on the matter, see my "[Dirty Hands](#)," in Hugh LaFollette, ed., *International Encyclopedia of Ethics* (Hoboken, NJ and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ch. 4 § A(3).

whatever we suppose to be true.<sup>20</sup> The only form of dialogue that has the potential to bring the desired recognition, then, is conversation, which is nonadversarial. But Taylor offers no criticism of the use of adversarial tactics during the contemporary “struggles,” as he describes them, for recognition; he never suggests, for instance, that there’s something self-contradictory about the very idea of demanding that others recognize us in some way.<sup>21</sup>

That Taylor grants adversity a central role in the search for truth is only to be expected, however, given, say, his claim that “the adversarial procedure of philosophy is very fruitful,”<sup>22</sup> or his belief that argument is a matter of “*contesting* between interpretations.”<sup>23</sup> To which we might add his (only partly facetious) description of his first book as “a vicious attack on, a stab to the heart of, behaviourist psychology,”<sup>24</sup> his use of the zero-sum and so adversarial metaphor of “weighing” for practical reason,<sup>25</sup> his reference to an instalment of his exchange with Richard Rorty as “the *n*th round,”<sup>26</sup> or his approving of the use of “military metaphors” for describing the competition between different languages, a competition meant to include a concern for truth.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Bernard Williams, “Deciding to Believe,” in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956-1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 225. Axel Honneth also makes no such suggestion in his *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). For more on this issue, see my “Exiger la reconnaissance?” trans. Roseline Lemire Cadieux, in Michel Seymour, ed., *La reconnaissance dans tous ses états* (Montreal: Québec Amérique, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, “Reply to de Sousa and Davis,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 18, no. 3 (Sept. 1988): 449-58, p. 452. Commenting on his exchange with the cognitivist Ronald de Sousa, Taylor writes: “At the moment we are even fighting over what we’re fighting over, but that’s par for the course in philosophy.” *Ibid.*, 454. On the roots of this assumption, see Janice Moulton, “A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method,” in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1983); and Michel Foucault on the prevalence of adversarial metaphors in ancient Greek ethics in his *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2: *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), part 1, ch. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 72, my emphasis. On p. 10 Taylor says that, if he’s to “convince” others of his argument, “much of the ground will have to be fought for.”

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, “Charles Taylor Replies,” p. 236; the book is *The Explanation of Behaviour* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Taylor, “The Nature and Scope of Distributive Justice,” in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 313; “Language and Society,” in Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, eds., *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas’ The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 32; and *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 111.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor, “Rorty and Philosophy,” in Charles Guignon and David R. Hiley, eds., *Richard Rorty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 158.

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, “Hermeneutics of Conflict,” p. 224. Indeed as far back as 1959 Taylor was referring to the human, and not only natural, sciences as an “army,” and to the terms of philosophical debate as “weapons”: Taylor, “Ontology,”



All these are instances of Taylor's overly adversarial conception of dialogue, of his failure to appreciate that interpretive practical reason at its best is more like conversation than negotiation, more about integrating than balancing, reconciling rather than accommodating.<sup>28</sup> And one result of this is that it leads him to fail to see how far interpretation is from the irrational, even violent process that is creation.

I now want to make this argument in the other direction and show how Taylor's conception of creation is overly dialogical and so too much like interpretation. I begin with his account of the "expression" of art. Like Heidegger, Taylor rejects subjectivist conceptions of expressivism; as he writes, "The human being is...a language animal, a being of culture, a being who invents and creates, but the invention and creation are fruitful only when the inspiration comes from beyond the self."<sup>29</sup> How far beyond? Heidegger's answer seems to be "not very," since he believes that the new worlds created by artworks (a result, he claims, of their making perspicuous the "thing-like" character of things or their inaugurating new ways of life<sup>30</sup>) are ultimately no more than manifestations of the relation between the world and nature. This puts a limit on originality since it means that creation does no more than reveal something that was already present, an "earth" that is never fully disclosable because "essentially self-secluding."<sup>31</sup> So creation in this view does no more than unconceal (*aletheia*) and negate forgetfulness. It certainly involves struggle – to Heidegger, works are a "strife" between world and earth in which concealment (untruth) and unconcealment (truth) are brought together – but it does not seem to

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*Philosophy* 34, no. 129 (Apr. 1959): 125-41, p. 136; and "Phenomenology and Linguistic Analysis," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 33 (Supp.), (1959): 93-110, p. 110.

<sup>28</sup> Taylor shares this ambiguity with Heidegger, for whom "the basic meaning of *logos* [is] gathering and togetherness ... [But] gathering is never a mere driving-together and heaping up. It maintains in a common bond the conflicting and that which tends apart ... By uniting the opposites [it] maintains the full sharpness of their tension." *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 134.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, "Human Rights, Human Difference," *Compass* 12, no. 3 (July-Aug. 1994): 18-19, p. 19; see also "Language and Society," p. 34; and *Sources of the Self*, chs. 20-24.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger offers Van Gogh's painting *A Pair of Shoes* (1886) as an example of the former and the building of an ancient Greek temple as an example of the latter: see his "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 35-37, 41-50. In "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1991, new ed.), p. 523, Michael Oakeshott follows Kant in asserting a diametrically opposite view: "As I understand it, the poet is not saying anything at all about 'things' (that is, about images belonging to a world of discourse other than that of poetry)...In short, when you know what things are really like you can make no poems."

<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art," p. 47. As J.M. Bernstein puts it, for Heidegger the earth stands as "a non-historical principle of transcendental opacity, a principle of reserve." Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 119

include the violent, partly irrational struggle that I want to associate with creativity. Indeed, though Heidegger virtually defines the work of art as the “fighting of the battle” between world and earth, he ultimately conceives of this in oppositional but not adversarial, much less violently adversarial, terms. Because while “world and earth are essentially different from one another” they “are never separated,” and this means that the “rift” (*Riss*) which he says lies between them is not at all what I would call a gap, one that goes all the way through, changing the topology. For

the conflict is not a rift (*Riss*) as a mere cleft is ripped open; rather, it is the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other. This rift carried the opponents into the source of their unity by virtue of their common ground. It is a basic design, an outline sketch, that draws the basic features of the rise of the lighting of beings. This rift does not let the opponents break apart; it brings the opposition of measure [i.e. world] and boundary [i.e. earth] into their common outline.<sup>32</sup>

Taylor’s conception of art is simultaneously more Romantic and more Modernist than Heidegger’s. It’s more Romantic in the significance he gives to the role of the artist in the creation of a work: the artist actively brings a work to articulation by expressing meaning through his or her “personal index,” and this is a matter of making and not just discovering, of constituting rather than simply revealing or disclosing. So creation is an activity that is at least partly driven by the power of the individual doing the creating.<sup>33</sup> However with Heidegger, as Taylor points out, creation is an act driven by the power of language rather than of humans, one that brings the cosmos rather than the self to expression, and it does so more as a matter of discovering than of making.<sup>34</sup>

Taylor is more Modernist in that he is able to recognize how its form of creativity consists of something other than “epiphanies of being.” Following Baudelaire, Taylor describes Modernist artists as reaching beyond or outside of nature<sup>35</sup> by invoking a fragmentation of

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<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” pp. 49-50, 55, 57, 48-49, 63.

<sup>33</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, chs. 20-24.

<sup>34</sup> See Taylor, “Heidegger, Language, and Ecology,” in *Philosophical Arguments*, pp. 116-20.

<sup>35</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 458.

experience, one that comes from the juxtaposing of images or even worlds.<sup>36</sup> Modernist “interspatial epiphanies” emerge through the space between the words or images, the force field that they set up between them.<sup>37</sup> While this doesn’t seem to me to quite capture how these spaces “consist” of gaps, since I equate the latter with genuine nonbeing, Taylor is nevertheless well aware that art as so created cannot be understood in expressive terms,<sup>38</sup> and he has even pointed out how its relation to morality is problematic.<sup>39</sup>

For some reason, however, Taylor seems to think that Romantic creativity, which is thoroughly expressive and so highly (but not wholly) interpretive, is the more standard type. Hence his claims that art is the paradigm of expressive activity, that our expressive powers are “most fully realized” in artistic creation, and that “to know this is to know something about the characteristic perfection of man” (a man who, you’ll recall, is defined as a self-interpreting being).<sup>40</sup> Here Taylor appears to exclude Modernist creativity altogether, creation being virtually equated with expression. This is expression, moreover, which includes activities that have nothing to do with art. For example, Taylor points out that “There is a range of our facial expressions and stances which are expressive in the strong sense, because they are essentially concerned with the disposition to manifest our feelings: expressions of joy and sorrow, a stance of dignity, reserve, intimacy, etc. It is these that I want to take as paradigm examples, along with works of art and the words we utter, of what I am calling ‘expressive objects.’”<sup>41</sup> One consequence of this is that Taylor feels little need to distinguish the identities, the selves, of especially creative individuals from those of people who live their lives more interpretively, more dialogically.<sup>42</sup> But making this contrast is especially important when it comes to those who engage in “mystical” forms of creativity, wherein the inspirations are often said to enter through

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<sup>36</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 462.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 476-77.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 467.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 422, 441-47.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, “Language and Human Nature,” p. 236.

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, “Action as Expression,” in Cora Diamond and Jenny Teichman, eds., *Intention and Intentionality: Essays in Honour of G.E.M. Anscombe* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979), p. 77; see also “Heidegger, Language, and Ecology,” pp. 107-9.

<sup>42</sup> On the latter see, for example, Taylor, “What is Human Agency?”; and “The Dialogical Self,” in Robert F. Goodman and Walter R. Fisher, eds., *Rethinking Knowledge: Reflections across the Disciplines* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995).

the artist's "divided," rather than integrated or cohesive, self.<sup>43</sup> Such people, we should recognize, are just not like the rest of us. Taylor, however, conceives of "the self" in general as having a "moral topography" that's best described through the use of spatial terms such as within/without and above/below, there being no mention of the cracks, spaces, holes or gaps that might lie between its parts.<sup>44</sup> And this leads him to confuse the ethical quest for authenticity, the dialogical, interpretive practice of developing ways to be true to one's self, with the creation of art: "self-discovery involves the imagination, like art. We think of people who have achieved originality in their lives as 'creative.' And that we describe the lives of non-artists in artistic terms matches our tendency to consider artists as somehow paradigm achievers of self-definition."<sup>45</sup>

This confusion comes not only from overlooking mystical creativity but also from limiting the bounds of the Modernist sort. For example, despite noting that we "live in the aftermath of modernism," Taylor appears to restrict it to our "cultural world."<sup>46</sup> Non-cultural practices may be creative but only, it seems, in the expressive sense. Thus does Taylor describe our personal, self-developmental practices as "narratives" and our social ones as constitutive of a "social imaginary," with both of these terms mixing creative as well as interpretive elements.<sup>47</sup> In so doing, Taylor makes creation in general appear as more interpretive than it actually is.

The same can be said as regards Taylor's conception of religion. Because if we accept that creative inspiration has a transcendent source, making it a kind of gift from God,<sup>48</sup> then we can

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), pp. 27, 89.

<sup>44</sup> See Taylor, "The Moral Topography of the Self," in Stanley B. Messer, Louis A. Sass, and Robert L. Woolfolk, eds., *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory: Interpretive Perspectives on Personality, Psychotherapy, and Psychopathology* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p. 300. E.J. Hundert's "Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self," *Political Theory* 20, no. 1 (Feb. 1992): 86-104 criticizes Taylor for overlooking the divided self in his account of Augustine. And Nicholas H. Smith's *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 101, points to a tension between the unifying narrative conception of self-development articulated in part 1 of *Sources of the Self* and the later recognition of the modernist fragmented self. Taylor, I suspect, would make the hasty judgment that divided selves are simply pathological: see *Sources of the Self*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, pp. 62-63; see also p. 65.

<sup>46</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 482.

<sup>47</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 47-52; and Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, p. 183. In *A Secular Age*, pp. 322-52, 357, 362-68, 375, 398, 450, Taylor even refers to "cosmic" and "denominational" imaginaries.

<sup>48</sup> Taylor might be read as doing precisely this given his endorsement, against Hegel and Nietzsche, of the Christian notion of grace: see *Hegel*, pp. 493-94; and *Sources of the Self*, pp. 447-55. See also Stephen Mulhall, "Sources of the Self's Senses of Itself: The Making of a Theistic Reading of Modernity," in D.Z. Philipps, ed., *Can Religion Be Explained Away?* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 146-51.

see why those such as Northrop Frye have claimed that religion and art are one and the same.<sup>49</sup> We've already remarked upon how Taylor refers to artworks as "epiphanies," spiritual manifestations, to which we can add his decision to close his chapter on Modernism in *Sources of the Self* with a citation from Wallace Stevens: "The major poetic idea in the world is and always has been the idea of God."<sup>50</sup>

Consider Christianity. Taylor has asserted that Mother Theresa's charitable works are subject to moral reasoning like other goods.<sup>51</sup> But this would cause us to miss the inspired, violently creative aspects of Christian *agapê* and so Mother Theresa's "greatness"; it could even lead us to misjudge her as simply "bad."<sup>52</sup> What I'm suggesting is that we should not be trying to understand the struggles of saints in strictly strongly evaluative, interpretive terms, since to do so is to make the mistake of assuming that they are "persons" like the rest of us. If only because of their ability to inspire others, it should be evident that they are not.<sup>53</sup>

Taylor's transcendence, we might thus say, just isn't transcendent enough. As he defines it, transcendence consists of going for "some good beyond life."<sup>54</sup> This is a highly Thomistic conception, one compatible with the idea that grace can underpin virtues of a certain kind, namely the "theological" ones (faith, hope, and charity), and that these can complement, indeed perfect, the "natural" everyday ones.<sup>55</sup> But this seems to me to be only half right. True, one might argue that interpretive ethics expresses, even if only implicitly, a hope that we can move

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<sup>49</sup> See *Northrop Frye's Notebooks and Lectures on the Bible and Other Religious Texts: Collected Works*, vol. 13, ed. Robert D. Denham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 493.

<sup>51</sup> See Taylor, "Diversity of Goods," pp. 234-37.

<sup>52</sup> As Christopher Hitchens does in his *The Missionary Position: Mother Theresa in Theory and Practice* (London: Verso, 1997). On these categories, see my "Good, Bad, Great, Evil," in *Patriotic Elaborations*.

<sup>53</sup> Mikko Yrjönsuuri criticizes Taylor's account of St. Francis on similar grounds: "Reconsidering the Need for Selves," in Arto Laitinen and Nicholas H. Smith, eds., *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Charles Taylor* (Helsinki : Societas Philosophica Fennica, 2002), pp. 94-95. For Taylor's conception of personhood, see his "The Concept of A Person," in *Human Agency and Language*; and *Sources of the Self*, part 1.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy," in Maria Antonaccio and William Schweker, eds., *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 27; see also "Spirituality of Life – and Its Shadow," *Compass* 14, (May-June 1996): 10-13, p. 13; "The Immanent Counter-Enlightenment," in Ronald Beiner and Wayne Norman, eds., *Canadian Political Philosophy: Contemporary Reflections* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 386-88; and *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp. 57, 60, 65.

<sup>55</sup> Iris Murdoch goes so far as to identify Taylor as a (neo-)Thomist: *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (New York: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1993), pp. 151, 290.

towards a perfectly unified and so transcendent Good. Since we never have a full grasp of the “whole of goods,” no single argument ever proving globally superior,<sup>56</sup> we require faith that the reconciliation of a given conflict will contribute to rather than detract from the integrity of the whole – a faith, one might say, which is a necessary assumption of the very act of reasoning interpretively.<sup>57</sup> But the idea that transcendence can simply complement ethics misses something. Consider God’s instructions in the Bible to those who would be Nazarites and separate themselves off from the everyday in order to pursue the holy, to devote themselves completely to Him. When their period of service is finished, they are told that they must offer a sacrifice for their sin (Num. 6:13-15), one that, as the Talmud suggests, is due to their having cut themselves off from what we may identify as the domain of the good.<sup>58</sup> So holiness, in this conception, means going beyond not just life but also the good.

Or consider Kierkegaard’s account of transcendence as requiring a “suspension of the ethical.”<sup>59</sup> It too implies that some harm, some damage, is going to be done and so that transcendence, at least at first, consists of transcending not only life but also the good. To conceive of it otherwise would be to dull this paradox somewhat and so to miss the point of the story of the binding of Isaac. God’s command that Abraham sacrifice his son suggests that it’s possible for there to be a division between God and ethics, one that is nevertheless overcome to an extent when He ultimately revokes the order – but only “to an extent,” since though the Lord may provide (Gen. 22:14) the revocation does not, indeed cannot, erase all of the damage done. This should be evident even if we take a Pauline reading of the story, one that emphasizes Abraham’s faith that either he won’t have to go through with it or, if so, that the story will

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<sup>56</sup> See Taylor, “Rationality,” 149. In his “Comparison, History, Truth,” pp. 150-51, Taylor begs the question when he admits that there’s no answer in principle to the charge that some new interpretation is still not in some sense partial or ethnocentric. For at the same time he claims that if the new interpretation is more inclusive then it necessarily brings gain and so to some degree overcomes ethnocentrism. But *is* the new interpretation more inclusive?

<sup>57</sup> Our belief interpretive practical reason’s efficacy can thus be said to imply a belief in God. I think Taylor must appeal to it if he’s to respond adequately to Neil Levy’s complaint that, as interpretive practical reason can advance arguments as dimensionally but never globally superior, it cannot overcome relativism. See Levy, “Taylor on Overcoming Incommensurability,” pp. 58-59.

<sup>58</sup> See *The Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Nazir*, ed. Isidore Epstein, trans. B.D. Klien (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 2b-3a.

<sup>59</sup> See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling in Fear and Trembling / Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

nevertheless end with a triumphant resurrection.<sup>60</sup> Because we need to be aware of just how exceptional is Abraham's faith, as Kierkegaard implies when he calls him as a "knight of faith." Abraham is simply not like the vast majority of the faithful for whom the story's violence is inescapable; after all, the man appears intent on murdering his son. Since most of us have a less than perfect faith (if even that), some irreparable damage is going to be done no matter how things turn out – just think of how the experience must have affected Isaac's relationship with his father (the Bible remains characteristically silent about this). For doubt seems inseparable from the faith of most; one might even say that it is doubt that makes it faith rather than certainty; as Miguel de Unamuno once declared: "a faith that does not doubt is a dead faith."<sup>61</sup>

Taylor is well aware that transcending life can compromise human flourishing, yet he still concurs with René Girard that it's possible for transcendence, when not "imperfectly oriented," to take place wholly without violence. For example, as part of his critique of what he calls neo-Nietzschean, anti-life positions, Taylor suggests that "the only way *fully* to escape the attraction towards violence lies somewhere in the turn to transcendence, that is, through the full-hearted love of some *good* beyond life."<sup>62</sup> So although he can admit that dedication to God may involve "something beyond morality,"<sup>63</sup> he still doesn't accept that it can also take us beyond the wider category of "the good" or "the ethical." Thus would he close the paradoxical, only partly complementary schism that lies between religion (and by implication art) and ethics. However this seems to me to be a utopian, if admirable, ambition, one which rests on a mistaken sense of how the two can, and generally do, relate.

There's a parallel difficulty with Taylor's account of William James's favoured variety of religion, one that arises from a confusion of mysticism proper with "personal religion." The latter is indeed, as Taylor points out, a form of devotion which, in its emphasis on the "experience" and "feelings" of the individual, may be considered a species of Romantic expressive

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<sup>60</sup> See Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1993), ch. 12.

<sup>61</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, *The Agony of Christianity in The Agony of Christianity and Essays on Faith*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, "Immanent Counter-Enlightenment," p. 399 (my italics); see also "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy," p. 27; "Spirituality of Life – and Its Shadow," p. 13; "A Catholic Modernity?" in James L. Heft, ed., *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 28-9; and *A Secular Age*, p. 639.

<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 270.

individualism and so aligned with the ethics of authenticity.<sup>64</sup> But mystics, again, are, just like the saints mentioned above, not ordinary persons. For one thing, the ecstasy that is their goal is not in any ordinary sense an “experience” – it’s not a sensory, interpretive phenomenon arising from the dialectical fusion of the self’s horizon with that of whatever it’s perceiving.<sup>65</sup> After all, as the word’s etymology implies, ecstasy is about attaining “no-self,” and so it cannot be reconciled with an ethics that strives for self-authenticity. James’s positive evaluation of psychopathology as well as his discussion of the divided self should have alerted Taylor to this tension at the heart of James’s preferred stream of “devoutly humanist” religion.<sup>66</sup> Yet Taylor fails to acknowledge it, and this carries over into his discussion of the potential relationship between James’ favoured religious practice and those that of a more communal sort. To Taylor, the two “ought ideally to complement each other.”<sup>67</sup> However recognizing the inherent tension between them should lead us to see this as a more utopian than viable ideal. The same should be said, and for the very same reasons, of Taylor’s assumption that creation is, in principle, wholly compatible with, indeed a species of, interpretation. It’s because I believe the reality is otherwise that I have argued we need to sharpen his distinction between art and ethics.

## II

Given all of this, I now want to claim that what Taylor calls hypergoods should be identified as artistic rather than ethical. As Taylor defines them, hypergoods are “goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about.”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, “the highest good is not only ranked above the other recognized goods of the society; it can in some cases challenge and reject them, as the principle of equal respect has been doing to the goods and virtues connected with traditional

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<sup>64</sup> See Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 6-16, 20-21, 79-107.

<sup>65</sup> Denys Turner, for one, feels it necessary to reject the term “experience” for referring to mystic’s union with God in his *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 1-8. Moshe Idel, however, does not hesitate to use it in his *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1988), chs. 3-5.

<sup>66</sup> See William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 1982), pp. 6-7, 22-5, 127-88, 340, 386, 413.

<sup>67</sup> Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, p. 16.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 63.



family life, as Judaism and Christianity did to the cults of pagan religions, and as the author of the *Republic* did to the goods and virtues of agonistic citizen life.”<sup>69</sup> Hypergoods, then, are not only architectonic as they can also call for the supersession, hence negation, of certain goods outright.

One result, of course, is conflict. What Taylor calls the Aristotelian “comprehending” strategy, which would have us grant all goods their appropriate place, is said to be not an option since “we are plainly too far gone in our recognition of hypergoods.”<sup>70</sup> Yet Taylor still claims that it is, in principle, possible to reconcile hypergood-driven conflicts:

greater lucidity can help us to see our way to a reconciliation. If I may give expression to an even farther-out hunch, I will say that I see this as the potential goal and fruit of articulacy. We have to search for a way in which our strongest aspirations towards hypergoods do not exact a price of self-mutilation. I believe that such a reconciliation is possible.<sup>71</sup>

Evidently, Taylor has not completely abandoned Aristotle’s monism.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Taylor claims that this reconciliation can be brought about rationally, by the interpretive form of practical reason that drives substantive ethics.<sup>73</sup>

This is why much of his writing has come to consist of an interpretive critique of naturalism, that family of approaches present in philosophy, psychology, social science, and elsewhere which aims to model the study of man on the natural sciences. Originally, Taylor strove to demonstrate its limitations scientifically and epistemologically, this being the aim of his *The*

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-7; see also Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 319. Taylor describes himself as “fiercely committed” to this view in the “Introduction” to his *Human Agency and Language* and his *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 12. Paul Ricœur, however, is among those who do not share this commitment, as is implied by his claim that the heterogeneity of hypergoods constitutes the *tragic* moment of modern life: “Le fondamental et l’historique,” in Guy Laforest and Philippe de Lara, eds., *Taylor et l’interprétation de l’identité moderne* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), pp. 33-34.

<sup>72</sup> So it comes as no surprise that his book co-written with the pluralist Hubert Dreyfus goes no further than asserting a position that is agnostic between pluralism and monism: *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), ch. 8. Note that the “pluralism” of this chapter’s title comes from recognizing irreducibility, not incompatibility; it’s the latter which supports the kind of pluralism I’m referring to here.

<sup>73</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 72-75.

*Explanation of Behaviour, Human Agency and Language* and *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. But as he himself has acknowledged, the arguments in these books have not been very effective at convincing those to whom they're directed. And so "the sense of futility when one fails to carry conviction against what seem ultimately absurd views" has led Taylor to the interpretive project of articulating the moral ideals underlying naturalism, the goods that constitute its identity, goods which have been hidden by its advocates' methodologies.<sup>74</sup> Only their commitment to a certain identity, Taylor believes, can have generated such powerful resistance to his arguments. Hence his work on developing an account of the genesis of the modern self, books such as *Sources of the Self, Philosophical Arguments*, and *A Secular Age*.

But it was, I suspect, around the time that he made this move that Taylor recognized that the naturalists he was criticizing were not affirming ordinary moral ideals or goods but hypergoods.<sup>75</sup> This meant that articulating their identity, an endeavour that leads directly to a rational assessment of its ideals and the attempt to reconcile the conflicts they may engender, would be far more difficult than he had originally thought.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the fundamental role those ideals have played in modernity has led him to shift from developing interpretations that both describe modernity's goods and propose radical transformative solutions to their conflicts, which is what he did in his early, socialist-humanist writings,<sup>77</sup> to simply description.

So Taylor's hermeneutics is not, as Ronald Beiner claims, inherently conservative. Beiner's argument that it must be, given its refusal to abstract and develop transcultural theoretical standards, is a Canadian echo of the charge levelled many years ago in the German context by

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<sup>74</sup> Taylor, "Introduction," in *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>75</sup> It may be that Taylor did not even have the concept of hypergoods before this time. No mention is made of them, for example, in his "Diversity of Goods," which was originally published in 1982, although there is a reference to the idea of a "master value" in his "Why Do Nations Have to Become States?" in *Reconciling the Solitudes*, p. 45, originally published in 1979.

<sup>76</sup> Taylor would surely reject Richard Rorty's claim that "all instances of persuasion, of oneself or of others, [are] equally cases of the 'arbitration of reason'." Debates about astrophysics, how to read Rilke, the desirability of hypergoods, which movie to go to, and what kind of ice cream tastes best, are, in this respect, on a par." Rorty, "Taylor on Truth," in Tully, ed., *Philosophy in An Age of Pluralism*, p. 29.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Taylor, *Pattern of Politics*; "The Agony of Economic Man," in Laurier LaPierre *et al.*, eds., *Essays on the Left: Essays in Honour of T.C. Douglas* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971); "Socialism and *Weltanschauung*," in Leszek Kolakowski and Stuart Hampshire, eds., *The Socialist Idea: A Reappraisal* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); and "The Politics of the Steady State," in Abraham Rotstein, ed., *Beyond Industrial Growth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

Jürgen Habermas against Hans-Georg Gadamer, and it is equally misguided.<sup>78</sup> True, hermeneutics consists, at least initially, of trying to make sense of a confusing or conflicting text or situation, of understanding it as it is. But doing this well will immediately suggest reforms, since “understanding is inseparable from criticism” – only by transforming a context in a way that brings about the reconciliation of its conflicts may we say that genuine understanding has been achieved.<sup>79</sup>

As Taylor conceives of our challenge, then, it’s not impossible to reconcile the conflicts engendered by the naturalist’s hypergood; it’s only that he himself (among many others) has so far been unable to come up with the necessary interpretive solutions. As he puts it: “How to reinterpret [hypergoods], and how to make them compatible with the other goods to which we cannot renounce allegiance, particularly those implicit in our historical practices? To answer this would be to say something of real use. This task is, alas, well beyond my powers.”<sup>80</sup> It is because of his recognition of the presence of hypergoods in modernity that Taylor’s critical edge has become dulled, limited to showing how a number of intellectual approaches (not only the naturalist ones) have caused us to miss, even deny, goods that are important parts of who we have become in the modern West. As a result, these conflicts are things that, for the time being, it seems we are just going to have to put up with. Regarding politics, for example, although Taylor has argued that purely procedural conceptions of justice are inadequate, he has occasionally accepted stand-alone versions of them, presumably because he believes that those affirming the hypergood underlying them will simply not be reconciled to substantive alternatives. His embrace of a procedural liberalism for English Canada is a case in point, Taylor having gone no further than calling for room to be made for more substantive versions of liberalism strictly as regards the country’s Québécois and aboriginal minorities.<sup>81</sup> And even within Quebec, when it

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<sup>78</sup> See Beiner, “Hermeneutical Generosity and Social Criticism,” in *Philosophy in A Time of Lost Spirit: Essays on Contemporary Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); and Habermas, “A Review of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*,” trans. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy, in Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, eds., *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990).

<sup>79</sup> Taylor, “Understanding and Ethnocentricity,” in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 131; see also p. 124. Taylor asserts that interpretive substantive ethics can be “revisionist” in his “Motivation behind A Procedural Ethics,” pp. 354-57. For a good account of Taylor’s contributions to social criticism, see Smith, *Charles Taylor*, ch. 7. On the radical potential of interpretive practical reason, see my *From Pluralist to Patriotic Politics*, ch. 3 § IV.

<sup>80</sup> Taylor, “Justice after Virtue,” p. 43; see also *Sources of the Self*, p. 521.

<sup>81</sup> See Taylor, “Shared and Divergent Values,” in *Reconciling the Solitudes*; and “Politics of Recognition,” pp. 244-48. It’s because I believe that anglophone Canadians are not, in fact, in the grip of a hypergood that I have criticized Taylor for having wrongly endorsed the division of the country into seemingly irreconcilable “solitudes.”

comes to questions surrounding religion (though not nationalism) and the state, Taylor has come to advocate an “open secularism,” a model which owes a great deal to John Rawls’ so-called “political” liberalism.<sup>82</sup>

But Taylor is wrong to think that hypergood-driven conflicts can be rationally reconciled, even if only in principle. Hypergoods are not merely incommensurable with their enemies and so partly defined against them; they also, as we’ve seen, tend to call for their supersession, their utter rejection. And when they do so, I suggest, it is in a fundamentally violent, irrational way. Because in “taking what was previously an ideal and branding it a temptation,”<sup>83</sup> they tear open a space in the moral fabric, separating themselves off from those they are rejecting. So the conflict cannot be said to take place within the context of a common good and this means not only that there’s no way for the conversationalist to search within a hypergood for its opponent but also that the respect of one’s adversary necessary for the toleration and good faith of the negotiator is absent. Practical reason, in other words, is helpless.

As Taylor has suggested, part of rationality requires affirming a “presumption of respect” as regards foreign cultures or civilizations: any way of life adhered to by many people for a long time must surely be morally valuable and so have something to teach the rest of us.<sup>84</sup> With hypergood supersessionism, however, the *point de départ* is the abolition of some predecessor, a culture that is already known, indeed intimately so. Instead of respect, then, we get the “pitiless criticism,” as Taylor himself puts it, of an enemy, one designed to “ruthlessly” set aside at least some of its goods.<sup>85</sup> The citizens of an agonistic polity are fascinated by what are but shadows on

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See my *Shall We Dance? A Patriotic Politics for Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), pp. 32-37.

<sup>82</sup> See Gérard Bouchard and Taylor, *Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation. Final Report of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences* (Quebec: CCPARDC, 2008); and Jocelyn Maclure and Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). For criticism, see my “[Critique des ‘accommodements raisonnables’](#).” Bernard Gagnon has claimed that Taylor’s position represents a radical turn in his thought, but I think that it merely brings to the fore the place he has always given to political neutrality. See Gagnon, “Du communautarisme à la neutralité libérale: un tournant radical dans la pensée politique de Charles Taylor,” *Politique et Sociétés* 31, no. 1 (2010): 127-47; and, for example, Taylor, “Neutrality in the University,” in Alan Montefiore, ed., *Neutrality and Impartiality: The University and Political Commitment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>83</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 65.

<sup>84</sup> See Taylor, “Politics of Recognition,” pp. 251-56; and “Comparison, History, Truth,” pp. 156, 164.

<sup>85</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 67-68.

a wall; pagans, ignorant of the one true God, are evil idolaters; traditional family life, being inegalitarian, is wholly corrupt; and so on.

Or consider, once again, Christianity. As James Carroll describes, it was born out of a supersession of Judaism: “the resolution is that the old Israel is superseded by the new Israel. Implicit in supersession is a fact fraught with implication for the future – that the old Israel no longer has any reason to exist. In effect, the old Israel, by rejecting Jesus, has forfeited the right to be part of the new Israel, which defines itself now as the ‘true Israel.’” Hence the historical denigration of Judaism by many Christians, the pendulum having swung continually between two basic forms of dismissal. One originates with Saint Ambrose and continues on to William of Turbeville, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and beyond: according to it the very existence of Jews is an affront that calls for them to be either converted or eliminated. The other, advanced by Augustine and the popes that followed him, allows that Jews may survive but never thrive since they have been appointed the role of witnesses to the prophecies concerning Christ. Either way, as Carroll points out, Judaism is held in contempt: the “New” Testament is considered a fulfilment of the “Old,” and the events of one era are used “to ‘trump and trounce’...those of another. Fulfillment like this,” Carroll explains, “was abolition itself.”<sup>86</sup>

To Carroll, behind this history lies but “a religious misunderstanding,” and Taylor, as we might expect, also claims that Christianity has no need of a depreciatory conception of Judaism.<sup>87</sup> Presumably, then, both share a belief in the efficacy of arguing on behalf of that minority, alternative Christian tradition, the one advanced in the theological writings of those such as Abelard and Nicolas of Cusa. According to it, supersessionism is but a “temptation,” one that could, indeed should, be overcome.<sup>88</sup>

But this is too quick. There has been more than a misunderstanding going on; the “unevangelical horror” that was the Inquisition was not, as Taylor puts it, simply a “mistake.”<sup>89</sup> Rather, there is something *inherently* irrational about pursuing Christianity as a hypergood, at least when it comes to those goods that it sees itself as having superseded. The reason, I suggest, is that the violence of supersessionism was essential to its *creation*. Because hypergoods are

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<sup>86</sup> Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews. A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), pp. 133, 148.

<sup>87</sup> Carroll, p. 250. See Taylor, “Comparison, History, Truth,” p. 164; and *A Secular Age*, p. 851 n. 72.

<sup>88</sup> Carroll, p. 141; see also pp. 148, 573-616.

<sup>89</sup> Taylor, “A Catholic Modernity?” p. 37.

artworks. Taylor himself alludes to what I see as their noninterpretive origins when he distinguishes them from ordinary goods on the grounds that they do not come to us through our having been “brought up in certain practices”; rather, they “transcend all practices,” some even “transcend the things of this world.”<sup>90</sup> Regarding Plato’s hypergood of rational self-mastery, for example, Taylor calls on us to recognize the “aspiration to transcendence” behind it.<sup>91</sup> Surely this should apply to Christianity as well.

So my claim is that we need to recognize at least two distinct ways of affirming the religion. One, which as we have seen constitutes the dominant tradition so far, is as a superseding hypergood; those who take this route do so because they hope it will bring further creativity.<sup>92</sup> That this entails violence, I have already suggested. The other, Carroll and Taylor’s preference, consists of pursuing the faith dialogically, of carrying it out much as a critic approaches a work of art, that is, in the hopes of making sense of it, of reconciling it with other meanings, including those of other faiths, present in the world. It goes without saying that, given the history, there are very good reasons for urging Christians to follow Carroll and Taylor’s path. The problem, however, is that “reasons” are just not the kinds of things that those who have already opted for creation over interpretation find compelling.

Because when it comes to the conflicts between hypergoods and the goods they wish to supersede, interpretive practical reason just cannot cope. Consider the conflict between the Enlightenment hypergoods and those of theism, for instance, or those based upon the organicism and emotionalism that Romanticism inherited from Aristotelianism. Does it not seem extremely intractable, indeed so much so that we should be unsurprised that Taylor’s various hermeneutical attempts to convince Enlightenment naturalists that their moral thought is “utterly misguided in its very essence,” “shallow,” “inconsistent,” and “incoherent” have failed to have their intended effect?<sup>93</sup> It is because “interpretive plausibility is the ultimate criterion” that Taylor believes

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<sup>90</sup> Taylor, “Justice after Virtue,” pp. 34, 35; see also *Sources of the Self*, p. 73.

<sup>91</sup> Taylor, “Critical Notice: Martha Nussbaum’s *The Fragility of Goodness*,” p. 812.

<sup>92</sup> Hence, for example, Pope John Paul II’s comparison of the Catholic Church to “a great work of art”: “[Address to the Cardinals of the United States](#),” 23 April 2002. The connection between supersessionism and creativity is identified in Harold Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 2nd ed.); and Bloom has invoked it as regards the relation between Christianity and Judaism in his *Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005).

<sup>93</sup> Taylor, “Charles Taylor Replies,” p. 250; “What is Human Agency?” p. 26 (in “Comments and Replies,” p. 242, Taylor specifies that he means “shallow” to apply only to those utilitarians who draw on naturalism to make their case,

what's required is but "more convincing argument and with finer moral discrimination."<sup>94</sup> As he once asked, "What if someone doesn't 'see' the adequacy of our interpretation, does not accept our reading?" and his good hermeneuticist's answer was "more of the same" – i.e. "We have to show him through the reading of other expressions why this expression must be read in the way we propose."<sup>95</sup> But what if our interlocutors are not "reading" but "creating"? What if, that is, they're just not listening, and indeed cannot do so if they are to attain the creativity they so desire? Obviously frustrated, Taylor has asked of proceduralist utilitarians: "Why don't they just relax and admit that goods are plural, and save themselves all these strained arguments?"<sup>96</sup> The answer, I suggest, is that they affirm theoretical rationality and benevolence as hypergoods, and they do so because they are artists – and of a kind that makes them immune to sensible interpretive argument.

### III

Conceiving of hypergoods in this way should affect how we understand certain social practices and movements, since it implies that there will be times when they arise from creation rather than interpretation. I want to offer some examples of where I believe Taylor has overlooked this in the case of modern North Atlantic societies.

#### i

The first consists of the affirmation of ordinary life, the moral framework according to which "the central point of human existence and human fulfillment is to be found in the life of production and reproduction, or work and the family, or labour and sexual love."<sup>97</sup> Taylor shows how it originated with the Reformers' attack on the hierarchies associated with monastic life and other such glorified "higher callings." It was still considered a form of holiness, however, since, just as in Rabbinic Judaism (although in a different way), ordinary life was to be lived so as to

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including, of course, the school's founders); "Language and Society," p. 30; and "Motivation behind A Procedural Ethics," p. 349.

<sup>94</sup> Taylor, "Introduction," in *Human Agency and Language*, p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p. 17.

<sup>96</sup> Taylor, "Charles Taylor Replies," p. 251.

<sup>97</sup> Taylor, "Hermeneutics of Conflict," p. 227; see also *Sources of the Self*, p. 211.

glorify God.<sup>98</sup> Taylor thus interprets it as straddling the “boundary between the transcendent and the life-centred” and so as causing that boundary to dissolve “in the ambivalence of a twilight zone.”<sup>99</sup>

Taylor seems aware of a tension here. As he writes, the integration of Christian *agapê* with an ethic of ordinary existence is “not always an easy union, naturally.”<sup>100</sup> However the strain seems to disappear altogether upon ordinary life’s secular transposition, a process that began when it became fused with the philosophy of disengaged freedom and rationality during the seventeenth century. By the end of the eighteenth, there no longer seems to be any room for *agapê* and it’s even possible to identify a sometimes fiercely antireligious naturalist variant of the ethic.<sup>101</sup> So do the new secular proponents of ordinary life come to criticize their Christian forebears for not having sufficiently fulfilled life.<sup>102</sup>

But there would no need to abandon talk of ordinary life’s transcendent dimension and, along with it, the tension between this dimension and its more worldly aspects if we recognized the importance of creativity to this new, ostensibly secular way of life. Doing so would also put into question Taylor’s association of ordinary life with the world of the “anti-hero,” wherein self-display and the “incomparably higher” are shunned.<sup>103</sup> Because heroes are not only those who have defeated great adversaries; as even the glory-obsessed militarist Machiavelli knew, creativity is another route to greatness.<sup>104</sup> What I’m suggesting is that Taylor’s detaching of ordinary life from the pursuit of honour and glory is overdrawn, for there’s nothing ordinary about heroes – even the “merely” creative (as distinct from martial) sort.

What would be some examples of self-display and creativity in ordinary life? If one thinks of the practices around romantic love and procreation, it’s hard to avoid the extravagance of many weddings or the popular belief that couples must be monogamous. The latter, given our

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<sup>98</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 221.

<sup>99</sup> Taylor, “Spirituality of Life – and Its Shadow,” p. 11; see also *Sources of the Self*, p. 217.

<sup>100</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 258.

<sup>101</sup> Taylor tells this story in *ibid.*, chs. 14-17.

<sup>102</sup> See *ibid.*, ch. 19; Taylor, “Spirituality of Life – and Its Shadow,” p. 12; and “Closed World Structures,” in Mark A. Wrathall, ed., *Religion after Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 64-65.

<sup>103</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 24. Taylor does, however, also assert that ordinary life can “appropriate its own forms of heroism” in *Modern Social Imaginaries*, p. 103.

<sup>104</sup> See Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, ed. Bernard Crick, trans. Leslie J. Walker and Brian Richardson (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 266 (preface to bk. 2).



sex drives, serves for some as a violent addition to the already difficult challenge of combining their concern for personal authenticity with participation in a deep and lasting intimate relationship; as Freud once put it, “one does not venture to declare aloud and openly that marriage is not an arrangement calculated to satisfy a man’s sexuality, unless one is driven to do so perhaps by the love of truth and eagerness for reform.”<sup>105</sup> Laura Kipnis is evidently someone so driven, for although her critique of “modern coupledom” recognizes that “falling in love is the nearest most of us come to glimpsing utopia in our lifetimes,”<sup>106</sup> she nevertheless overlooks the possibility that it may constitute a form of creativity. Indeed, her call for giving free reign to unfettered sexual desire is itself made out of a concern for not only our carnal satisfactions but also creativity.<sup>107</sup> And she herself admits that the ostensibly creative adultery that she so favours requires marriage for its very existence,<sup>108</sup> to which I would add that the enduring love that romantic love is meant to inaugurate can itself serve as the basis for yet another creative project, that of raising children. For isn’t there a sense in which every parent is an artist?<sup>109</sup>

Regarding work or production, Taylor appears to miss the creativity and hunt for glory underlying many capitalist practices. Following Albert Hirschman, Taylor emphasizes the modern rise of *le doux commerce*, according to which business activity is said to exhibit “polished” and “gentle” mores and in this way replaces the aristocratic honour ethic, with its stress on glory won in military pursuits.<sup>110</sup> But surely glory can also come from success in a competitive marketplace. That is to say, the “quiet virtues” that “encourage business,” those which Alexis de Tocqueville identified with “American honour,” are just not as far from aristocratic honour or “martial valour” as he assumed; Tocqueville was simply wrong to think that the American businessperson’s boldness is limited to “commercial speculations,” that it has nothing to do with defeating the competition.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Quoted in Laura Kipnis, *Against Love: A Polemic* (London: Pantheon, 2003), p. 102.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>107</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 9, 49-51, 59, 106, 114-16, 165.

<sup>108</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>109</sup> To recognize children as “gifts” is to see them as at least partly the products of creation. This has implications for the ethics of genetic engineering, as Michael Sandel has perceptively argued in *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>110</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 285; and *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>111</sup> See Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, trans. Henry Reeve, Francis Bowen and Phillips Bradley (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 235-37. In support of my claim, consider Michael E. Porter’s classic

Of course the innovative aspects of entrepreneurship also point to a creative dimension, the openings for which are sometimes made possible by the devastation wrought during capitalist economic crises.<sup>112</sup> To Taylor, the market economy constitutes an extrapolitical field of “purely secular action,”<sup>113</sup> and he has also pointed out how, for many, the very category of “the economic” in modernity assumes that it can operate as a unified self-regulating system.<sup>114</sup> But this ignores the anything-but-systematic, violently chaotic aspects of its operations, those that I would associate with what economists have come to call its “creative destruction.”<sup>115</sup>

So there is glory, because there is creativity and competition, in “ordinary” life. No surprise, then, that just as the poets of the ancient world immortalized its warriors, those such as Baudelaire and Stan Rogers sing the praises, and the tragedies, of the heroic “unexceptional” individual of today.<sup>116</sup> And just like the ancient hero, the modern one is divided, there being a gap between her interpretive ethics and the creativity that makes her so great.<sup>117</sup>

## ii

The question of the canon as it pertains to university curricula is another subject regarding which Taylor has recommended we follow a presumption of respect, this time towards works produced within foreign or minority cultural traditions. His advice is directed not only at the ethnocentric among us – those, for example, who assume that nothing can possibly match the tradition of Western theoretical philosophy – but also at those he identifies as “neo-Nietzscheans,” many of whom claim that foreign works have been excluded from our canon solely because of power or

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management text, *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance* (New York: Free Press, 1998, 2nd ed.), which emphasizes the attaining and maintaining of “domination” in the market.

<sup>112</sup> I discuss this in the context of the violence associated with the “spatialization” effects of modern market practices in my “On the Minimal Global Ethic,” in *Patriotic Elaborations*, § II.ii.

<sup>113</sup> Taylor, “Liberal Politics and the Public Sphere,” p. 272; see also *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp. 92-99.

<sup>114</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 286.

<sup>115</sup> The term originates with Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1987, 6th ed.), pp. 82-85.

<sup>116</sup> See Baudelaire, “On the Heroism of Modern Life,” in *The Painter of Modern Life: And Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1965), pp. 116-20; and listen to Rogers, “Working Joe” and “Lies,” both on the album *Northwest Passage* (Dundas, ON: Fogarty’s Cove Music, 1981).

<sup>117</sup> I’m trying to make a point with my use the strictly feminine pronoun here, namely that at least some aspects of modern heroism should be contrasted with ancient heroism’s sexism. As Gordon Downie sings in a song that’s partly about creativity: “all of my heroes are women.” Downie, “Figment,” from the album *Battle of the Nudes* (Toronto: MapleMusic Records, 2003).

ill-will. Taylor thinks that this position, too, is guilty of a failure of judgment. Simply assuming that a foreign work is equal to our best without having truly engaged with it is patronizing as well as homogenizing; it not only leads to a failure to assert high standards but it also detracts from diversity and so undercuts the whole point of the canon.<sup>118</sup>

I certainly don't wish to deny that ethnocentric and patronizing attitudes have played a role here. Still, it seems to me that another motive is also often present, a creative one that Taylor misses. Regarding the practitioners of theoretical philosophy, for example, I would suggest that their rigid adherence to its methods serves as a source of creativity.<sup>119</sup> Taylor has shown how proceduralist theorists draw upon the moral source of autonomy as a hypergood, and to this he adds the worry that, given how demanding the modern standards of justice and benevolence are, this source may not be strong enough to maintain them.<sup>120</sup> But whereas many moderns are indeed experiencing a malaise of sorts, proceduralists, not to mention human rights activists, do not appear to be lacking in zeal. Given Taylor's claim that the realization of an epiphany is a paradigm case of contact with a motivating source,<sup>121</sup> this suggests that their hypergood is epiphanic, that it is serving as a genuine source of creativity. And this means that calling on proceduralists to abandon their approach in favour of an alternative is much like calling on the members of a particular school of art to accept the techniques of another school; one may certainly do so, but not out of a belief that it would be particularly rational or moral. I would say the same of naturalists, which is why, again, I have suggested that Taylor's attempt to convince them to change their ways will never make much headway.

A parallel claim can be made as regards the philosophers of difference, who Taylor describes as having "their own complex of underlying epistemological and moral motives."<sup>122</sup> More than anything, they have made a hypergood of Nietzschean voluntarism, "the freedom to impose orders, unconstrained by the natural."<sup>123</sup> This is why he calls them neo-Nietzscheans and it is why he criticizes their brand of irreligiosity for its tendency to focus on the negation of life,

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<sup>118</sup> See Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," pp. 254-55.

<sup>119</sup> As I claim in my "Loving Wisdom," in *Patriotic Elaborations*, § IV.

<sup>120</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 515.

<sup>121</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 425.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>123</sup> Taylor, "Logics of Disintegration," *New Left Review*, no. 170 (July-Aug. 1988): 110-16, p. 113.

even to celebrate violence. But though this may be true of some of them, in making such a sweeping dismissal Taylor is once again being too quick – and not only because of all the violence that has been perpetrated in history by religious believers.<sup>124</sup> Because Taylor also misses the possibility that the fundamental motivation of difference philosophy is creative rather than interpretive and so ethical. For example, I think he’s wrong to suggest that Michel Foucault gave us an account of his “own ethical position” when “he talked about an ‘aesthetic of existence,’ and about making one’s own life a work of art.”<sup>125</sup> Foucault’s reluctance to speak of “freedom” and “liberation” does not, as Taylor claims, “spring from his equating these with the liberation of nature,”<sup>126</sup> a Romantic ethic; rather, it arises from Foucault’s wish to assert a form of creativity, one that should not be equated with the good of liberty.<sup>127</sup> It is because Taylor misses this sort of thing that he ends up claiming that difference philosophers defend some “deviant”<sup>128</sup> form of the highly interpretive ethic of authenticity when what they’re actually advocating is not an ethics at all, but a creative aesthetics.

### iii

On the flip-side of the coin of creation we find destruction. Regarding modern evil, Taylor has identified it with either the extreme rejection of bourgeois virtues in favour of honour and glory or as the result of the failure to sustain ethical standards.<sup>129</sup> With respect to the latter, he invokes

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<sup>124</sup> Stephen K. White reminds Taylor of this violence in his *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 67-69.

<sup>125</sup> Taylor, “Logics of Disintegration,” pp. 114-15. See also Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” Afterward (1983) to Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, 2nd ed.), pp. 236-37; Taylor, “Taylor and Foucault on Power and Freedom: A Reply,” *Political Studies* 37, (1989): 277-81, p. 281, where Taylor goes so far as to suggest that denying the applicability of the moral ideal of freedom to Foucault’s position amounts to “obfuscation”; and Taylor, “Concluding Reflections and Comments,” in Heft, ed., pp. 114-16.

<sup>126</sup> Taylor, “Logics of Disintegration,” p. 115.

<sup>127</sup> This is how I interpret the creative alternative that Foucault proposes to the “author function” in his “What Is An Author?” trans. Josué V. Harari, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), esp. pp. 105, 119. Unlike Heidegger, who as we saw above offers an overly interpretive account of creativity, one that invokes a strife in which opponents remain together as part of a unity, Foucault recognizes that what’s often required is a separating violence, for “adversaries do not belong to a common space.” Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>128</sup> Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 65.

<sup>129</sup> He does the former in *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp. 180-82. Regarding the latter, he has written: “I think these two developments, higher standards and unprecedented gruesomeness, are paradoxically and perversely connected.” Taylor, “Comparison, History, Truth,” p. 161; see also “A Catholic Modernity?” pp. 30-34. Richard E. Flathman has pointed out how Taylor’s notion of evil is inherited from the theological tradition which identifies it

Dostoevsky's account of how people with high ideals sometimes convert their disappointment due to human shortcomings into hatred and contempt.<sup>130</sup> But can this explain evil in its most radical sense? Taylor identifies Nazism with nationalism in hypergood form. This means that though he associates the movement with a certain type of millenarianism,<sup>131</sup> and though he has characterized the Nazis' rationale for persecuting their enemies as "usually so absurd and irrational that it comes closer to mania than to reason,"<sup>132</sup> he nevertheless still believes that it is, in principle, possible to use reason to show them that they are wrong. To Taylor, the Nazis' acceptance of the ban on the murder of conspecifics, which is what led them to label their enemies as inhuman in order to justify their treatment of them, reveals that they, in however warped a fashion, still inhabit the moral world with the rest of us. Since they do not hold to some radically foreign first premise, such as that it's okay to exterminate people, Taylor believes that we can show them that their policy is "unconscionable on premises which both sides accept, and cannot but accept."<sup>133</sup>

But the Nazis did not accept the premise in question. Because their racism was more a matter of distinguishing a certain variety of human being than of identifying some as inhuman. Here, for example, is the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels:

The excuse [lackeys of the Jews] give for their provocative conduct is always the same: the Jews are after all human beings too. We never denied that, just as we never denied the humanity of murderers, child rapists, thieves and pimps...[T]he Jews must be removed from the German community, for they endanger our national unity...There is only one effective measure: cut them out.<sup>134</sup>

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with the absence of good qualities rather than as a quality in its own right: *The Philosophy and Politics of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 79.

<sup>130</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 451-55.

<sup>131</sup> See, for example, Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp 177-78.

<sup>132</sup> Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," p. 35; see also p. 53.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36. Accordingly, Taylor questions the possibility of absolute evil in *A Secular Age*, p. 646.

<sup>134</sup> Joseph Goebbels, "[The Jews Are Guilty!](#) [1943]," trans. Randall Bytwerk, in Bytwerk, ed., *German Propaganda Archive*. Much earlier, in 1925, Hitler repeatedly referred to Jews as a "people" (*Volk*) in his *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1943), bk. 1, ch. 11.

This suggests that the Nazis hated Jews not because they considered them inhuman but because they took them to be humans of a particular, despicable sort. Perhaps, then, evil is something altogether “other,” something that, we might say, is driven by “hyperbads” which are beyond the bounds of even Taylor’s overly expansive conception of ethics. Indeed I would go so far as to claim that evil is not only impossible to argue with but also dangerous, even wrong.<sup>135</sup>

#### IV

So Taylor fails to restrict the bounds of ethics sufficiently, to distinguish it enough from either the potential greatness of certain forms of creativity and religion or from the evil of destruction. This is what prevents him from recognizing how the conflicts involving hypergoods are driven by creative rather than interpretive ends and so why they cannot be reconciled by practical reason. And since hypergoods play such a significant role in the modern identity, it seems we must also reject Taylor’s assumption that, by laying that identity fully out before us, by retrieving all of the goods that have been hidden, rejected, or disempowered by the various narrow, reductive approaches, he has helped set the stage so that “the real positive work, of building mutual understanding, can begin.”<sup>136</sup> Or must we? Because while it may indeed be true that hypergood conflicts cannot be reconciled by reason, does this necessarily mean that their reconciliation is impossible? I don’t believe so. For it seems to me that, in presenting these conflicts in such a majestic fashion, Taylor may have helped prepare the way for solutions of another sort: for reconciliations driven, not by interpretation, but by creation. The artists created hypergoods; perhaps, then, they can save us from them. There is still reason for hope.

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<sup>135</sup> As I suggest in my “Good, Bad, Great, Evil.” Among the examples of evil that I offer there is the figure of Merseult in Albert Camus’s *L’Étranger*. Taylor, it’s worth noting, has described the character as “unrealistic.” From the interview “Charles Taylor,” in Marcos Ancelovici and Francis Dupuis-Déri, eds., *L’archipel identitaire: Recueil d’entretiens sur l’identité culturelle* (Montreal: Boréal, 1997), p. 35; my translation.

<sup>136</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, p. 196.