4. Agape as Best Account: Moral Realism, Resonance, and the Weak

We have just closed the previous chapter with the outcome of our first reconstruction of the secularization of *agape*. In its final stages, this process had left us with a multiplicity of moral sources, a consensual attitude of respect for human dignity and human rights, and a historical moment in which humanity realizes that for the first time it can meet the demands of solidarity. However, it is important to note that this description does not fully encompass the current state of affairs. As we reach the end of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor highlights *agape* as a potential solution to the problem we discussed in the second chapter—the tension between our strong sense of solidarity and the absence of clear moral foundations. As we shall see, theism would be the best way to explain the moral motivation needed to undertake an autonomous, lasting, and reliable commitment of solidarity towards the weak. However, this is only a *hunch* for Taylor, which will earn him criticism and misunderstanding. In a way, it is a consequence of his lack of clarity about the ontological claim behind *agape*. To this end, Taylor offers an argument named *Best Account*, which he first uses to give plausibility to moral realism and which he applies by extension to *agape* regarding this particular point of motivation.

Moreover, Taylor's focus on the identity of modern humans has led him to explore questions shared by Critical Theory, which he has engaged with throughout his career. His ideas have strongly influenced the work of Hartmut Rosa. To gain a better understanding of the role of *agape* in fostering global solidarity, we will compare it to solidarity and religious experience in Rosa's resonance theory. This comparison will allow us to clarify why, for Taylor, *agape* entails a transformative moral source grounded in a transcendent relation to the other, whereas Rosa's resonance captures a relational responsiveness that remains structurally immanent. As we will see toward the end of this chapter, Taylor's reflections on Romanticism

provide a key to understanding the difference between *agape* and *resonance*. Additionally, we will address criticisms of Taylor's theism, including the concern that it may be too closely tied to the Romantic experience of epiphany.

4.1. Taylor's theistic hunch at the end of Sources of the Self

At the end of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor takes up the question about the sufficiency of the contemporary mode of articulating goods to satisfy the demands of benevolence: "Do we have ways of seeing-good which are still credible to us, which are powerful enough to sustain these standards?" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 517). Again, *constitutive goods* available to the modern moral subject have multiplied. Added to this, there is a high esteem for human dignity and justice today, reflecting a historical process of increasing moral awareness. There is an "overlapping consensus" regarding our duty towards our neighbor in need, despite all the differences regarding the foundation of this duty:

> "There doesn't seem to be an important conflict here. We agree surprisingly well, across great differences of theological and metaphysical belief, about the demands of justice and benevolence, and their importance (...) So why worry that we disagree on the reasons, as long as we're united around the norms? It's not the disagreement which is the problem. Rather the issue is what sources can support our far-reaching moral commitments to benevolence and justice" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 515, see also 1999c).

As we already know, Taylor states that many positions that advocate for a detached subject from any ontological moral backing also exhibit blindness towards ideals and sources of goodness. Despite these complexities, multiple notions of the ethics of benevolence are inspired by the same parameters of the purest *agape*. Ultimately, there is a shared belief in the goodness and dignity of human beings that deserves to be protected (cf. Taylor, 1989a, p. 517).

The combination of pluralism of goods, source-blindness, and historical exceptionalism results in very high moral demands for solidarity. These demands in turn put strong pressure on the moral subject, who seeks to find his or her identity through self-realization

and authenticity (cf. Taylor, 1992b). What kind of moral source and articulation is most likely to sustain and satisfy these demands? Taylor returns here to the question on moral sources: "the issue is what sources can support our far-reaching moral commitments to benevolence and justice" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 515). The danger of the present situation, where the demands for justice, solidarity, and benevolence are so high and, at the same time, there is a tendency not to ask about the sources of that morality, is that the resources to maintain the moral commitments acquired are lost, provoking what Smith and Laitinen call "the dialectics of high demands and big disappointments" (2009, p. 66): The higher the standards that are set solely on the basis of human dignity, the greater the disillusionment at the realization of man's unfulfilled potential.

Sources of the Self ends with a humble and liberating plea for the recovery of humanity's highest spiritual aspirations and ideals, which have been neglected in the historical constitution of Modernity and forgotten nowadays, according to Taylor. This culminates in an arresting defense of *agape* and theism:

> "I am obviously not neutral in posing these questions. Even though I have refrained (partly out of delicacy, but largely out of lack of arguments) from answering them, the reader suspects that my *hunch* lies towards the affirmative, that I do think naturalist humanism defective in these respects—or, perhaps better put, that great as the power of naturalist sources might be, the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater" (Taylor, 1989, p. 518).

Thus, the humility of his statement comes from an intention not to compete about which source is better; it also comes from recognizing that it is a personal testimony based on his own faith. On top of that comes the humility of admitting that on many occasions religious ideals have been oppressive to human beings in some of their facets and have led to mutilation of human aspects of existence, even to destruction and war. To some extent, the origin of Modernity can be explained as a reaction to such a corruption of the original Christian message. He even acknowledges elsewhere that, in order to reach this level of moral standards, it was necessary "to break with the culture of Christendom for the impulse of solidarity to transcend the frontier of Christendom itself" (Taylor, 1999b, p. 26). Yet Taylor points out that such emancipatory approaches of Modernity have been accomplishing their task of secularizing moral sources

in a way—mostly unnoticed and sometimes even celebrated—that risks choking the spirit. Hence, a question arises: is it necessary to overcome this oppression at the cost of no longer paying attention to spiritual or moral sources? For that reason, Taylor understands his work as liberating, for *Sources* consists of "an attempt to uncover buried goods through rearticulation-and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring the air back into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit." (Taylor, 1989, p. 520)

Although interest in religion, belief and unbelief are present in *Sources*, as well as the Christian notion of *agape*, it is not until the end that Taylor proposes theism and Christian spirituality as a way out of the dilemma:

> "There is a large element of hope. It is a hope that I see implicit in Judaeo-Christian theism (however terrible the record of its adherents in history), and in its central promise of a divine affirmation of the human, more total than humans can ever attain unaided" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 521).

Taylor doubts that the secular formulations of good and its demands are enough to motivate the fulfillment and achievement of its outstanding requests. Taylor's suspicion, his "hunch", is that the religious source is the strongest possible to sustain the ethics of benevolence and solidarity. The problem is not primarily to establish which philosophical schools or mindsets can determine what we ought to do, but rather what can help us carry on with the high commitments of solidarity. In this sense, Taylor finds that moral theism can overcome the frontier of human weaknesses and the limits reached by other moral proposals such as the humanism arising from enlightened Naturalism, the romantic-expressionist reaction or the anti-humanism of Nietzschean inspiration. This is what leads Taylor to articulate his theistic 'hunch' in methodological terms: theism appears, for him, as the Best Account of our moral experience, a point to which we now turn.

4.2. Taylor's Best Account (BA Principle)

Taylor's "hunch" in favour of a theistic argument, however, plays the role of a *Best Account* that can satisfy the practical (moral, social, and political) needs arising from the modern dilemma described

above. There is no primary interest in establishing a reasonable argument for the existence of God or to apologetically defend a creed. Instead, the *Best Account* argument should be understood as the best way, on the one hand, to satisfy the high demands of solidarity and, on the other hand, to do so from a motivation that does not fall into the inadequacies of self-interest, sympathy, or a sense of one's own dignity. As Rorty summarizes: "Taylor thinks that we can no longer be simple realists in our metaphysics or our theology, or about *hypergoods* (…) We cannot be moral realists any longer, yet, he believes, we cannot give up the urge which led to moral realism without spiritual self-mutilation" (Rorty, 1994, p. 199). However, there is indeed room for substantial claims about human nature or the good life in the field of ethics and practical reason in the form of interpretations of meanings, contrary to the tradition of critical theory, for example. At the same time, the *BA Principle*, as a way of arguing, is not without its peculiarities.

To understand the best account character given to theism, it is necessary to connect it with Taylor's *Best Account* argument or *BA principle* (Taylor, 1989, p. 58) found in his moral phenomenology of *Sources*: "What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms which on critical reflection and after the correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives?" (ibid, p. 57). Taylor defends his realist moral position based on his phenomenology of the construction of identity and meaning in the modern era by seeking the account that best helps the self-interpretation of the human being: "What we need to explain is people living their lives" by using terms "that makes best sense of us" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 59, cf. 1985d). In that sense, *Best Account* is not a deductive argument but a methodological principle for practical reasoning.[82] Characteristic of this account is that it has to be "comprehending" (1989a, p. 66) of all aspects that are part of being human; "anthropocentric" (1989a, p. 72) and falsifiable, i.e. considering that this

82 Melissa Lane defines the Best Account as "the principle which is to guide practical reason, both in the selection of sources and in the selection of individual values, or standards" (Lane, 1992, p. 52). She highlights the theistic argument as "a normative argument that only theism is an adequate moral source" (Lane, 1992, p. 46). The normative claim lies within the field of morality around the question of the good life, which in Taylor's perspective concerns the articulation of constitutive goods (cf. Taylor, 1997a).

account can change at any time, as long as new accounts use these terms to explain human lives better:

> "The underlying consideration which makes this argument compelling could be put this way: How else to determine what is real or objective, or part of the furniture of things, than by seeing what properties or entities or features our best account of things has to invoke?" (1989a, p. 68).

Accordingly, Taylor thinks that his moral realist proposal for the articulation of moral goods and the existence of *hypergoods* is capable of satisfying the above-mentioned explanatory demands.[83] At least, much better than any ethical proposals that keep apart the norms that concern the pursuit of universal justice from questions that pertain to the leading of one's own life.[84] Besides, his argument

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83 Olafson (1994) does not. He has difficulties with Taylor's thinking about higher goods and the notion of a compelling moral demand towards solidarity that comes from the world, from our culture of Modernity, rather than from ourselves. However, this is how we would treat Taylor's proposal without taking into account the anthropological and phenomenological bases of his work. Meijer, drawing on Abbey, reminds him that for Taylor it would make no sense to explain moral life without taking into account how human beings perceive goods or the cultural and embodied nature of the human being: "he claims that the most plausible explanation of morality is one that takes seriously humans' perception of the independence of the goods: He believes, therefore, that his moral theory is superior to all forms of projectivism, which explain morality away as meaning imposed by humans on a morally neutral world." Thus, Taylor "posits that the best account of moral life does include reference to transcendent moral sources" (Abbey, 2000, p. 29; see also Meijer, 2018a, p. 71).

84 As is the case with Habermas, to whom he constantly makes reference in his work. The differences between Habermas and Taylor are not simply summed up by this different conception of ethics and morality. Indeed, to understand this difference, one would have to understand their different ways of understanding the use of hermeneutics to interpret the meanings that social practices have for actors. Despite both having a common understanding of themselves as liberals (Habermas & Taylor, 2009), Taylor holds a "culturalist", communitarian-closer view, while Habermas contrasts this account with a more objectivist, communicational reason-centered view of social reality (cf. Habermas, 1981, pp. 152–224; Taylor, 1977b). In addition, Taylor adds his own phenomenological approach to understand moral motivation from a hermeneutical point of view, much influenced by Merleau-Ponty, "which leads him to the formulation of his "best account principle," requiring that explanations in the social sciences be based on conceptions that are conceiving from the internal perspective actors" (Rosa,

demands the provisionality and falsifiability of that perspective on moral experience that claims to be the *best*.[85]

Within its *Best Account*, Platonic contemplation of the good, *agape* as inspiration and goal, or moral law found inside the subject calling for the utmost respect for the dignity of every human being could fit as satisfactory to meet the requirements. However, Taylor's commitment leans toward his ontologically realistic, anthropologically centered, falsifiable, and pluralistic depiction of morality.[86]

> "Even outside a theistic perspective, it is quite possible to conceive that the best theory of the good, that which gives the best account of the worth of things and lives as they are open to us to discern, maybe a thoroughly realist one-indeed, that is the view I want to defend, without wanting to make a claim about how things stand for the universe 'in itself' or for a universe in which there were no human beings. A realistic view is perfectly compatible with the thesis that the boundaries of the good, as we can grasp it, are set by that space which is opened in the fact that the world is there for us, with all the meanings it has for us." (1989a, p. 257)

In this quote, moreover, we see that the scope of Taylorian realism is circumscribed to the realm of moral life, with no pretensions about the structure of the nature of things and the universe, to which it relates through human meanings—that is, through the articulation of our moral sentiments… (cf. Taylor, 1985, pp. 62–65) and through

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2019a, p. 690). For Habermas's distinction between the realms of ethics and morality, see (Habermas, 1983, 1991b, pp. 100–118).

85 The falsifiability implied by the *Best Account* is outlined in a very clear way by Joas: "When I articulate my life-experiences I appeal to values without which I cannot express the orientations that guide me. I do not experience these values as having been grafted onto a value-neutral world by me, but rather as existing independently of me. Of course, new experiences or the objections of others can convince me that I have endorsed values which were not worth endorsing. But this transforms the one articulation into another, one that is better for me—it does not lead me to change the level in principle and to adopt a relationship to my experiences other than that of articulation" (Joas, 2000, p. 137).

86 It should be remembered that Taylor's proposal is criticized on its own terms by some commentators who do not see the connection between a realist ontology of non-subject goods and anthropocentric ethics. In Laitinen's view, there are "two layers" in Taylor's approach: "the real engaged, cultural, lifeworldly layer of strong evaluations" and "the layer of ontological sources of morality, which is an ultimately superfluous theoretical construction or fiction" (Laitinen, 2008, p. 6).

an embodied conception of our being-in-the-world (cf. Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015, pp. 91–101). The challenge for any ethical approach is to solve the very dilemma of our times, as we mentioned before: the gap between our moral standards and the sources for meeting the high demands of solidarity. Thus, *Best Account* has to offer a way out of this dilemma, taking into account the problems (human, cultural, social, political, etc.) it faces, offering the best possible explanation of how we got here, the best resources for the self-interpretation of the subjects so that possible solutions to the problems we face can be delineated.[87] In this sense, theistic *agape* emerges as the *Best Account*—not as a metaphysical proof or doctrinal claim, but as the most comprehensive and motivating interpretation of our moral experience, one capable of sustaining the modern demand for universal solidarity.

4.3. The moral maps of Modernity

To understand the function of the *Best Account* argument within Taylor's project, it is necessary to situate it against the broader anthropological framework that underlies *Sources of the Self*: the human being as a self-interpreting, embodied agent who orients herself in what Taylor repeatedly calls moral space. As Meijer notes, Taylor's concern is "the more hermeneutically sensitive issue of what human self-understanding is—or should be" (Meijer, 2021, p. 3). Taylor's *Best Account* can only be grasped once we take seriously Taylor's methodological conviction that any adequate explanation of moral life must reflect how human beings actually "live their lives, how they experience themselves and the world and act in it" (Rosa, 1998,

87 I take this overview from Hartmut Rosa's *Best Account*: "In this sense, and following Charles Taylor, I understand a best account as the attempt, in a given socio-historical situation, on the basis of all available resources (...) and in the light of the "cultural problems" (Weber) pressing in it, from which the questions of interest arise" (Rosa, 2021, p. 166) ["Unter einem *Best account* verstehe ich also in diesem Sinne und in Anlehnung an Charles Taylor den Versuch, in einer gegeben sozialhistorischen Lage auf der Grundlage aller zur Verfügung stehenden Ressourcen (...) und im Lichte der in ihr drängenden "Kulturprobleme" (Weber), aus denen sich die interesseleitenden Fragestellungen" (translated by S.G.)]

p. 73). This requires an anthropology in which agents are constituted by strong evaluations and embedded in cultural frameworks—or *backgrounds*— that prefigure the meanings available to them.[88]

Within this anthropological horizon, Taylor develops a powerful spatial metaphor to describe the background that makes strong evaluation possible: the moral topography of modernity. Human beings, he writes, "exist essentially in moral space by means of a master image, a spatial one" (Taylor, 1988b, p. 301). Moral space is not an abstract construct but a concrete set of cultural, linguistic, and practical horizons that shape how agents articulate goods. Taylor often calls these horizons moral maps. A moral map is a pre-existing configuration of the good—encoded in practices, traditions, narratives, and social imaginaries—within which an agent locates herself and interprets the qualitative weight of her moral commitments. As Taylor explains:

> Our orientation in relation to the good requires not only some framework(s) which defines the shape of the qualitatively higher but also a sense of where we stand in relation to this. (…) We come here to one of the most basic aspirations of human beings, the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see is good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 41,42).

These moral maps reveal a fundamental feature of Taylor's anthropology: the human being as an *embodied agent*[89] whose moral delib-

88 As Taylor himself acknowledges, the apparently diverse nature of his work can be traced back to a single underlying commitment: a philosophical anthropology. "If one had to find a name for where this agenda falls in the geography of philosophical domains," he writes, "the term 'philosophical anthropology' would perhaps be best" (Taylor, 1985e, p. 1). What unifies his reflections across ethics, politics, hermeneutics, and epistemology is a concern with the fundamental structures of human agency—what he elsewhere describes as the "inescapable structural requirements of human agency" (1989a, p. 52), or more succinctly, "the structures of the self" (ibid., p. 19). Taylor's anthropological interest focuses especially on what he calls "the unchanging preconditions of human changeability" (Taylor, 1988a, pp. viii–ix): the basic features of self-interpretation, embodiment, and strong evaluation that persist even amid profound historical transformations. For an account of Taylor's place within, and contribution to, contemporary philosophical anthropology, see (Marcin Baran, 2009; Dunn, 1990, p. 181ff; Rodríguez García, 2020, pp. 57–74).

89 Which has a clear anchorage in phenomenology, (cf. Taylor, 1977, 1985, 1986, 2020, pp. 1–19).

eration is never a neutral balancing of reasons but an effort to orient herself within thick, historically sedimented frameworks of significance. We are subjects who evaluate our moral and ethical commitments from strong standards, determine the relevant dimensions of action far beyond the calculation of possibilities or the greater or lesser rationality; but always within a cultural framework. The interplay of embodiment, cultural framing, and moral aspiration gives rise to the heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory framework of strong evaluations that underlie modern institutions, practices, and subjectivities (cf. Rosa & Kern, 2012, p. 4).

Throughout *Sources of the Self*, Taylor uncovers three major moral maps within the topography of modernity, each with epistemological horizons and foundations: the naturalism born out of the Enlightenment, which uses reason instrumentally and lies at the basis of a liberal model of individual rights and universal moral justification; the expressionism of Romanticism, which aspires to the dissolution of all the tensions of Modernity in a new relationship with inner strength and Nature (cf. Taylor, 1989a, pp. 409–410); and, finally, the theistic map, which stands behind Taylor's *hunch*.

Taylor traces the first two maps with great precision, showing how each articulates *hypergoods*, defines moral motivation, and generates characteristic tensions—what he calls modernity's "gaps, erasures, and blurrings" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 11). The third map, however, remains markedly underdeveloped. Taylor deliberately refrains from offering a full cartography of the theistic moral map, noting that it is, at this stage of his work, more a "question rather than a statement" (de Lara & Taylor, 1998, p. 112). This omission is not accidental. *Sources* is not intended as a work of constructive theology and, as he acknowledges, the articulation of *agape* requires conceptual resources that he had not yet fully elaborated.

This underdevelopment opened the door for criticism. Some commentators took the lack of a detailed theistic map as a reason to dismiss Taylor's hunch altogether (cf. Rosa & Kern, 2012, p. 4). But within Taylor's own logic, theism appears as a viable moral map precisely because it offers a comprehensive and motivating self-interpretation of the human agent—one that may be capable of sustaining long-term commitments of benevolence in a time of moral fragmentation. Still, Taylor emphasizes that theism is not the only possible map capable of grounding such motivations. As he writes, "these

sources are plural, as we saw. But they have in common that they all offer positive underpinning of this kind" (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 515–516).

The question, then, is not whether theistic *agape* is the only map compatible with strong solidarity, but whether it provides the *Best Account* of our moral predicament—one that best explains our current moral commitments, the sources that sustain them, and the historical path that has shaped our contemporary aspirations toward universal benevolence. To evaluate this claim, it would be important to place Taylor's map of *agape* in dialogue with alternative articulations of moral motivation, most notably Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance, whose own analysis of relational responsiveness offers a revealing contrast with Taylor's understanding of *agape* as a transformative, grace-infused moral source. But before undertaking that comparative step, however, we must examine the point at which Taylor makes his strongest claim: whether *agape*, as a moral source, offers a more adequate motivational grounding for solidarity—particularly with the most fragile human beings—than competing secular moral maps.

4.4. The Best Account for the sake of the weak?

Taylor's hunch in favor of *agape* emerges at the end of *Sources of the Self* through a judgment about what has been lost along the path of the *secularization of agape*. What is missing is not only the capacity to motivate towards the good of the other. Rather, Taylor is worried that modern altruism—shaped by high demands and increasingly detached from deeper moral sources—places a heavy burden on moral agents. When benevolence becomes an obligation unsupported by strong motivational foundations, it risks backfiring, dialectically producing disappointment, moral fatigue, misanthropy, and even forms of resentment that can turn despotic. Taylor notes that the weakening of our connection to moral sources easily leads to distortions: solidarity may be pursued to alleviate guilt, to feel morally superior, or as a kind of self-satisfaction. Nietzsche saw this clearly. As Taylor summarizes his warning:

> "Morality as benevolence on-demand breeds self-condemnation for those who fall short and a depreciation of the impulses to self-fulfillment, seen as so many obstacles raised by egoism to our meeting the

> standard (…) Only if there is such a thing as *agape*, or one of the secular claimants to its succession, is Nietzsche wrong." (Taylor, 1989a, p. 516).

Thus the central question becomes whether we possess moral sources strong enough to sustain the contemporary demands for solidarity—demands that weigh not only on public opinion confronted with images of suffering, but especially on those engaged in political activism, humanitarian work, and social advocacy (cf. Asad, 2015).[90] Taylor doubts that the moral maps that emerge from the evaluations and articulations made by naturalism or neo-Nietzscheanism revolt are capable of the kind of "self-affirmation" and long-term commitment required for such engagement (cf. Taylor, 1994b, see also 1993). When these maps fail, there is a danger of redirecting frustration into political pathologies: scapegoating, extremism, or moralized aggression toward those identified as blocking universal beneficence. As Taylor warns: "the bad, the failure is now identified with some other people or group. My conscience is clear because I oppose them, but what can I do? They stand in the way of universal beneficence; they must be liquidated" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 516).

90 Taylor is especially concerned with the motivation of those who carry out the solidarity action: "The solidarity can't be just managed from on high, but must be something people really identified with" (cf. Taylor, 2007, p. 692). Johannes Müller, for his part, emphasizes the same questions, but formulated by the poor who expect a response to injustices: "Where can I get the strength to endure the troubles and hopelessness of daily life? How can I persevere today and tomorrow? How can I remain human in the midst of suffering and injustice?" (Müller, 2023, p. 69) [Woher nehme ich die Kraft, die Sorgen und Ausweglosigkeiten des täglichen Lebens zu ertragen? Wie kann ich heute und morgen weitermachen? Wie kann ich inmitten von Leid und Ungerechtigkeit menschlich bleiben? (translated by S.G)]. In the case of both Taylor and Müller, the answer is unconditional love to our neighbor. In Müller's case: "Ultimately, it is the experience that there is something in the midst of all helplessness and darkness which is hardly to be hoped for, namely unconditional love of the neighbor, whatever his situation and fate may be. Yet from this experience grows courage and hope against all discouragement. Once again, it is the poor in the Gospel who seem to be particularly capable of receiving and giving this experience" (Müller, 2023, p. 71) [Es ist letztlich die Erfahrung, dass es inmitten aller Ohnmacht und Dunkelheit etwas gibt, was man fast nicht zu erhoffen wagt, nämlich die bedingungslose Liebe zum Nächsten, was auch immer seine Situation und sein Schicksal ist. Aus dieser Erfahrung aber erwachsen Mut und Hoffnung wider alle Hoffnungslosigkeit. Es sind einmal mehr die Armen im Evangelium, die besonders befähigt zu sein scheinen, diese Erfahrung zu empfangen und zu schenken (translated by S.G)].

The point of Taylor's critique is clear: when religion is eliminated as a moral source—or when only secularized fragments of *agape* are retained—modern moral frameworks struggle to embrace the weakest and most vulnerable with unconditional love.[91] The agent would be left with no other reference than his own discernment, his own feeling—good or bad—his own detached reason, and the pressures of the social framework in which he lives. It is precisely the unconditionality of love that undergoes problems. Taylor dramatizes the issue with a provocative question:

> "Is the naturalist affirmation conditional on a vision of human nature in the fullness of its health and strength? Does it move us to extend help to the irremediably broken, such as the mentally handicapped, those dying without dignity, fetuses with genetic defects? Perhaps one might judge that it doesn't and that this is a point in favour of Naturalism; perhaps effort shouldn't be wasted on these unpromising cases. But the careers of Mother Teresa or Jean Vanier seem to point to a different pattern, emerging from a Christian spirituality" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 517)

Thus, an essential aspect of *agape* as the *Best Account* for addressing the dilemmas of beneficence in modernity is its distinctive capacity—unlike other constitutive goods—to sustain a responsiveness that truly embraces the weakness and vulnerability of the Other. *Agape* not only brings the subject back into direct contact with the good, but simultaneously places her before the face of the Other, as evidenced by the exemplary figures Taylor invokes. Of course, commendable and even admirable beneficent attitudes can arise from other moral maps. Yet human beings require more than the recognition of a duty or a pattern of altruistic action: they need, as Taylor insists, "holding that the motivation which powers it is in some ways higher, more noble, more admirable" (Taylor, 2011c, p. 298).

Right motivation, according to Taylor, cannot be achieved only through moral images based on human improvement —just through

91 In Taylor's response to Skinner's critique of his moral predicament (Skinner, 1994), he makes it clear that in Nietzsche's case, it remains to be seen whether "the death of God" leads to a fuller shaping of human value than before: "what kind of affirmation can one make? I don't want to prejudge this. I have a hunch that there is a scale of affirmation of humanity by God which cannot be matched by humans rejecting God. But I am far from having proof" (Taylor, 1994b, p. 224). We will return to discuss this issue in chapter 8.

better reasoning, refined compassion, more efficient action, or psychological purification. For Taylor, a *background* vision is needed "because it brings true harmony, corresponds to our real self, brings about a unity and harmony between human beings which answers one of our deepest longings—and so on through a wide range of alternatives" (Taylor, 2011c, p. 298). *Agape* provides precisely such a framework: it gives meaning to the world, restores relationality with the neighbor, and recovers "the rich human experience of desiring or craving to be in contact with something greater than ourselves" (Braman, 2000, p. 230). *Agape* brings with it the transformation of the subject and the world, as we shall see. Nevertheless, to paraphrase Taylor himself, *agape* frees us from a "picture that held us captive" (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015, p. 1; Taylor, 1995c, p. viii) that separate human beings to be "in contact with what they see as good, of crucial importance, fundamental value" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 44). That is, *agape* frees us from images, maps and frameworks that distance us from the world, from transcendence, and from the suffering of others.

This reflection leads Taylor to ask which foundations best support the immense philanthropic demands of our civilization. The limitations of alternative moral maps suggest that "the imperatives we set for ourselves should therefore be offset by a vision of the human being as something remarkable, admirable, despite all its defects and shortcomings" (de Lara & Taylor, 1998, p. 112). The Christian, creatural vision of the human—grounded in God's love—offers such a foundation, even if it does not diminish our modern moral anxieties (cf. Taylor, 2023). For this reason, he himself admits that, "far from having a proof" (Taylor, 1994b, p. 224) he is not neutral in this matter: "the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 518).

It is worth highlighting that, at the end of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor understands *agape* as much as grace, as well as opening up to an incarnationalist theological perspective, in relation to what we saw in the introduction (cf. Redick, 2018):

> "The original Christian notion of *agape* is of a love that God has for humans which is connected with their goodness as creatures (though we do not have to decide whether they are loved because of their good or that they are good because they are loved). Human beings participate through grace in this love. There is a divine affirmation of the creature,

> which is captured in the repeated phrase in Genesis 1 about each stage of the creation, 'and God saw that it was good'. *Agape* is inseparable from such a 'seeing-good'" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 516).

According to Taylor's *hunch, agape*, a framework that finds inherent goodness in every creature, would prove stronger in satisfying the demands of universal benevolence that we all share. *Agape*, as a moral source and source of motivation, would be a better account for its greater explanatory scope of human nature: not only would it be the account that provides the best sense of how people make their moral commitments, but also of how the agent can engage with the pain of the other in an engaging way. In that sense, it may be able to meet the demand of modern standards of universal benevolence and by its potential to leave no blind spots, as may occur by admiring only the dignity and worth of humanity. Moreover, it would go further than any other proposal. The Good Samaritan was able to go beyond his culture's consensus on neighborly love by seeing in the man lying on the road a human being with dignity. This claim, however, has not gone unchallenged. The idea that *agape* constitutes the *Best Account*—and especially that it offers a motivational advantage over secular alternatives—has been the object of significant debate, to which we now turn.

4.5. Some critics against Taylor's theistic argumentation

The argument for theism as a necessary complement to the high moral demands of Modernity, which begins as a *hunch* at the end of *Sources of the Self*, has been strongly contested. Taylor admits its weakness but insists on its appropriateness in the face of the dilemma posed by the facts: "Theism is contested as to its truth (...) but no one doubts that those who embrace it will find a fully adequate moral source in it" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 317). Nonetheless, especially in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, the argument of *agape* as *Best Account* has often been misunderstood or rejected, even though Taylor has repeatedly clarified its scope and methodological intention (cf. Taylor, 1991b).

Critics typically raise two broad kinds of objections. The first concerns the methodological and ontological legitimacy of using a theistic perspective as a *Best Account* in ethics. Here, some argue

that Taylor's move from phenomenology to theology is too quick or insufficiently argued: Meijer describes it as a "rapid move uphill" (2018a, p. 76); Skinner famously calls it "whistling in the dark" (1998, p. 58); Baker sees in it a kind of "transcendental apologetic" (2000); Olafson critiques it as a mere "phenomenological fiat" (1994, p. 194), suggesting that Taylor simply posits theistic *agape* as superior without ontological justification; and Kitchen asserts that Taylor "seems to parody his own conception of practical reason" (1999, p. 49).

Yet such objections miss the methodological status of Taylor's proposal. His aim is not to defend a doctrinal or metaphysical theism, but to argue that theism—understood as a lived moral and spiritual orientation—offers one of the most plausible interpretations of our contemporary moral predicament. As we mentioned before, *Best Account* is a methodological principle guiding practical reason, the selection of values, and the articulation of the good: the question is which framework best explains our experience of moral motivation and our aspiration to universal solidarity. Taylor's moral realism is not metaphysical but anthropological and phenomenological: it concerns the terms that "make best sense of our lives" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 57). This means that theistic *agape* figures not as a deduction but as a hermeneutic hypothesis—falsifiable, provisional, and always revisable in light of competing accounts. It is not a matter of defending normative theism but of defending theism as plausible map to transit within modern moral topography, helped by phenomenological and hermeneutical parameters laying behind moral realism as *Best Account*. It is therefore a mistake to interpret Taylor as smuggling in a covert ontological claim that violates his own methodological commitments. His argument remains within the space of interpretation, not metaphysical proof.

A second set of critiques focuses on the ethical plausibility of *agape* and its supposed advantage in generating a durable and strong bond of solidarity with the weak. In *A Catholic Modernity?*, a lecture that follows *Sources of the Self* and marks the transition to his major work *A Secular Age*, Taylor speaks of *agape* as "unconditional love". The advantage of Christian love, according to Taylor, is that it provides a better answer to the dilemma of solidarity in modernity, that is, whether human beings are really capable of such unconditional love. Taylor states that one path out of the dilemma is provided by Christian spirituality, described "either as a love/compassion which

is unconditional, that is, not based on what you the recipient have made of yourself; or as one based on what you are most profoundly, a being in the image of God." Moreover, such love is possible only if people open themselves to the love of God, which, Taylor adds, "means in fact, overstepping the limits set in theory by exclusive humanisms" (Taylor, 1999b, p. 35).

However, *agape's* "unconditional love" is questioned by some authors, such as Ian Fraser (2005), for whom this type of "unconditional love" is an extreme position, as it would demand from any individual a faith that demands supererogatory acts, in the terms we saw in the first chapter. Moreover, being *agape* an extreme position and, therefore, discriminatory against other motivations towards altruistic action, it would deny the very moral pluralism that Taylor defends: "At one stroke then, those of us who do not open ourselves up to God are incapable of 'unconditional love' whereas those who do are" (2005, p. 242). He thus goes so far as to distinguish Taylor's unconditional love from altruism.

On the one hand, Fraser argues that psychological and sociological research shows that most people do not help others following a Judeo-Christian concept of neighborly love: "on the whole there is little evidence among studies on giving to support Taylor's contention that a truly benevolent act is only possible if you open yourself up to God" (2005, p. 242). Moreover, unconditional Christian love for the other would not be an end in itself but a means to an end, which is none other than to attain God's love and benevolence. Fraser, moreover, questions the need to base neighborly love entirely on the other, without giving oneself any "worth realised in you just as an individual" (Taylor, 1999a, 35). This would contrast, for example, with the altruistic potential of a person with reconstructed self-esteem, as in the case of battered women: it may be that their belief in their rediscovered dignity and commitment to women's rights is based on experience and may not be grounded in *agape*. Finally, Fraser would criticize the whole motivation towards practical beneficence from unconditional love because these religious motives often undermine the autonomy of the individual: "If our good actions are evidence of God's love in the world then those actions are being directed by another and not by the person carrying them out" (I. Fraser, 2005, p. 248).

However, Fraser's criticisms may be too unfair at times and contradict Taylor's claims in *A Catholic Modernity?* (1999b). First, the "hunch" is explicitly tentative and falsifiable; it does not claim that theistic *agape* is the only coherent basis for solidarity. Taylor repeatedly acknowledges the secular foundations of modern benevolence and recognizes that contemporary society exhibits unprecedented levels of concern for human dignity. Furthermore, Taylor admits that "high ethical and spiritual ideals are often interwoven with exclusions and relations of domination" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 518). Even a Christian benefactor, like a non-Christian, can have his or her motivation transmuted and act out of contempt for others, as has so often happened in history. Second, Fraser misunderstands the theological logic of *agape*'s unconditional love. *Agape* is not a supererogatory demand that burdens the agent, nor is it primarily motivated by the desire to gain divine favor. Rather, *agape* is grounded in being loved, not in seeking reward. Taylor's analogy, following Abbey, is parental love: it is "not conditioned by the child's achievements but is given simply by virtue of who the child is" (Abbey, 2006, p. 171). Similarly, Christian love for the neighbor is unconditional because it responds to the neighbor's creatural goodness—not because the agent seeks divine recognition.

Finally, Fraser would not understand Taylor's moral realism when he claims that the articulation of *agape* would undermine human autonomy in favor of a kind of heteronomy. It would not even do justice to Taylor's understanding of the subject who believes today (cf. Taylor, 2003, 2007b). It would not even do justice to the defense of political autonomy he makes through his critiques of negative libertarianism or political atomism in his more communitarian writings (Taylor, 1985f, 1985c). Far from undermining agency, *agape* aims to free the subject from disengaged and self-enclosed forms of agency characteristic of some modern moral maps.

4.6. Is agape (just) a romantic inspiration?

The preceding criticisms raise a further question that touches not only the normative force of Taylor's theistic proposal but also its very phenomenology: if *agape* is offered as the *Best Account* of moral motivation, is it nonetheless shaped—perhaps decisively—by

a Romantic paradigm of experience? This concern has been voiced by several commentators who detect in Taylor's account of moral sources a Romantic structure of epiphany, expressivity, and subjective attunement. The worry is not merely genealogical. It goes to the heart of whether Taylor's articulation of *agape* preserves a genuinely transcendent moral source or whether it risks collapsing into an aestheticized, inward-looking form of inspiration.

Some critics argue that Taylor's moral topography and his defense of theism bear the imprint of Romanticism because of the weight he gives to religious and aesthetic experience based on the epiphany of reality and *subtler languages* as a privileged access point to moral and spiritual meaning.[92] In this view, Taylor's understanding of *agape* would reflect "a manifestation which brings us into the presence of something which is otherwise inaccessible, and which is of the highest moral or spiritual significance" (Braman, 2000, p. 225), yet one that resonates closely with Romantic expressivism: "a celebration of our own powers of creative articulation" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 429), overcoming action as a the only scope of morals, and suggesting "a transaction between ourselves and the world" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 482). Romanticism thus seeks "the search for moral sources *outside* the subject through languages which resonate *within* him or her, the grasping of an order which is inseparably indexed to a personal vision" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 510).

Seen in this light, *agape* might be interpreted as a Romantic epiphany of the inner self: an eruption of expressive inwardness that

92 Taylor speaks clearly of epiphanies in *The Language Animal*, at least as understood in Aesthetics from the Romantic period onwards. Epiphanies in art would function as a means by which, through the work of art, the subject opens up to the source behind the work, to the plan of all reality. That we find ourselves before a source is manifested in the fact that the epiphanic experience provokes changes in us. "The epiphanies of art increase/intensify our attraction to, commitment to, admiration of, longing for, the realities they disclose. The current runs in both directions: the artist constructs the symbol which allows disclosure, but the reality also changes us, revivifies something is us, just as contact with nature revitalizes us. Such epiphanies frequently strengthen our sense that the objective reading is the right one, that the force comes to us from "outside", in the sense that it is beyond our powers to produce it" (2016, pp. 249–250). Elsewhere he states: "Epiphanies in this sense don't just add to our knowledge, they inspire us; catching a glimpse of these connections powerfully moves us; the current between us and nature flows once more. We are in the domain of resonance" (Taylor, 2019b, Cf. 2024).

alleviates subjectivist isolation and reconnects the agent to a perceived moral whole. That would change the very scope of Taylor's concern about the lack of articulation of the good. As Rorty puts it: "So, in the end, the tension Taylor sees is not between universalistic private morality and private expressivity, but rather between a sense that we are alone and a sense that we are not" (Rorty, 1994, p. 200; see also I. Fraser, 2005).

Morgan (1994) similarly argues that Taylor's interpretation of grace diverges from classical theism, for it is refracted through Romantic and expressivist lenses visible in *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1992b) and *Varieties of Religion Today* (2003b). If so, *agape* becomes less a normative divine command and more a phenomenology of inward, resonant openness—its normative content remaining on the immanent side: "Hence, the theistic moral source does have content—in terms of justice, beneficence, and freedom, but that content is always a human response to a divine impact. The content is a human articulation of the meaning of the relation to God" (Morgan, 1994, p. 63). Under this interpretation, *agape* risks losing its propositional, cognitive, or ontological content and becoming instead a theologically colored Romantic epiphany.

Mulhall sharpens this critique by claiming that any contemporary form of theism must "give a central place to the concept of grace" while also avoiding reliance on any "human-independent ontic logos" (Mulhall, 1996, p. 146). Yet this second requirement exposes a deeper tension internal to modern identity itself. If, as Taylor argues, the modern self is "buffered"—experiencing itself as autonomous, self-interpreting, and insulated from external ontic orders—then the demand to dispense with a transcendent logos risks collapsing the divine into the horizon of the subject. Mulhall therefore poses the uncomfortable question: "does not this entail that all contemporary conceptions of God are inevitably person-relative, and thus reduce God to a subjective construct?" (ibid; see also Smith, 2002, pp. 233–234). In this light, *agape* might appear less as an ontological moral source than as a reformulated expression of Romantic interiority clothed in theological language.

Taylor, however, rejects both horns of the dilemma. He refuses a return to the premodern model—what we called in Chapter 3 the *first slippage*—in which the hierarchy of theological virtues imposed an external ontological order upon natural capacities. But neither

does he confine *agape* to a purely Romantic epiphany. In his replies to critics, Taylor acknowledges the epistemic primacy of experience in modernity, yet insists that religious experience cannot be reduced to inward epiphany. Taylor accepts the epistemic primacy of experience in Modernity. Experience may begin in the subject, but it always demands articulation through shared languages, communal symbols, and patterns of life. Religious experience is never merely private; it resonates within a horizon of meaning. Taylor would claim that any experience of God is not reducible to the inwardness of an individual view but at least has resonate in it.[93]

Moreover, as he also reminds Morgan, "one mustn't confuse the epistemological level with the substantive one" (Taylor, 1994b, p. 228). One may experience a righteous and punitive God, but this is by no means the true image of God. Hence the importance of language and shared experiences with one's own group to articulate the experience and also to articulate the good. However, concerning the question about the lack of normative content of *agape*, he succinctly dispatches the matter by saying that "I don't think that my account of religious faith rules out any substantive view, up to the most 'transcendent' and non-human-centred. Indeed, I don't think my view is all that human-centred" (Taylor, 1994b, p. 228).

Even so, the resemblance between Romantic epiphany and the experience of theistic grace is undeniable. Romanticism conceives epiphany as a moment of reconciliation with the Plan of Nature, disclosed through *subtler languages* that allow reality to speak in symbolic or affective registers. Yet its ontological commitments remain deliberately indeterminate (cf. Taylor, 2016, pp. 235, 214). The

93 This would, in fact, be Taylor's main reproach to William James' description of religious experience: "The experience can have no content at all if you can't say anything about it" (Taylor, 2003b, p. 28). He does agree with him that authentic religion is very much a matter of individual experience, but it cannot be understood entirely as an event independent of shared language, culture, corporate, ecclesial or institutional reality. For Taylor, taking culture into account or not makes a fundamental difference in understanding Modernity and its expression in each area of study. For instance, an accultural study on the spiritual experience of human beings in Modernity means, on the one hand, thinking of the loss of beliefs and traditions as a liberation, when it may not be so. And, on the other hand, it means concealing both the loss of the vision of the good and the possibility that Western Modernity may be sustained by its original spiritual vision (cf. Taylor, 1995d)

emphasis falls on the subject for whom the epiphany occurs: the revelation of being is inseparable from the creative, expressive languages in which the subject articulates it. What is revealed is not a normative order to be imitated—a fixed model of perfection—but a direction of growth in which both nature and human self-expression are jointly oriented.

By contrast, within the theistic moral map, grace is not only an experiential "impact" but also a participation in an ontological reality independent of the subject. Grace is received as an incarnate presence in creation, one that resonates within the agent through embodied experience. This marks a crucial divergence from Romantic epiphany: while both involve powerful disclosures that reshape self-understanding, *agape* is rooted in a metaphysical affirmation of creation's goodness rather than in the expressive dynamics of the subject alone. Such a notion of grace—already anticipated in the introduction—is articulated more fully in *A Secular Age*, as we shall see in due course.

This distinction becomes clearer when Taylor revisits the question in *Resonance and the Romantic Era* (2019b). He argues that strong evaluations—whether in response to a Beethoven sonata or the devoted service of an MSF volunteer doctor—presuppose a sense of moral significance that cannot be reduced to preferences or feelings. Both experiences share the fact that they do not arise from biological needs. Nor can both be reduced to a weak evaluation, such as saying that I prefer daisies to roses or that *Mohnkuchen* makes me nauseous. Both the aesthetic experience and the moral consideration behind the example of Beethoven's piece or the admiration for those who give themselves to others share, as strong evaluations, a notion of a fulfilled, successful or a meaningful life. Yet while Romantic resonance captures the power of experience, it leaves unanswered what Taylor calls the "underlying story": the ontological and narrative account of what these experiences point to. Romanticism remains within expressive human meaning; it does not sufficiently articulate what lies beyond. As Taylor explains:

> "We respond to the poetry of Hölderlin or Wordsworth with a conviction that there is a crucial human fulfillment or realisation in recognizing our relation to nature, and recovering it. But this conviction is different from beliefs we might have about a possible underlying story. It is grounded in the power of the experience, whereas the underlying

> story has to draw on beliefs about the universe, God, the Life Force, or human depth psychology, or whatever, which have other grounds, other sources, other bases" (Taylor, 2019b).

Taylor willingly identifies himself as "a hopeless German romantic of the 1790s" (Taylor, 2010b, p. 320), and he acknowledges that Romantic experience—described as *subtler languages*— is one possible avenue of religious life in our time (Taylor, 2020a, p. 34). Yet he also distinguishes the Romantic impulse toward altruism from *agape*. The fundamental difference between a general stance based on romanticism and Taylor's moral realism lies in the robustness of the ontology behind the latter. Both modes are driven by feelings of compassion for the other that eventually overcome the egoism of the calculus of self-interest. But unlike *agape*, the romantic does not live the demanding force of the feeling of solidarity within an imaginary in which the impulse is experienced as a force of love that comes from beyond the agent, but as an expressive force within the subject itself.

For our interest, *agape* remains Taylor's *Best Account* for satisfying our great demands for solidarity even in the face of proposals based on romanticism, precisely because of its peculiar ontological commitment. This dual structure will become even clearer if we contrast Taylor's account with Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance—a framework deeply shaped by Romanticism but developed without Taylor's ontological commitments. It is to this comparison that we now turn.[94]

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94 Taylor's influence on Rosa's approach is clearly evident, not only in the way he makes use of the BA Principle or in the reference to self-interpretations and the construction of one's own identity in a given culture in the quote above, but it can be found throughout his work, as we shall see below: the idea of a relationship with the world, the openness of the subject to this experience, even his notorious concept of resonance (cf. Corrêa, Peters, & Tziminadis, 2021). In fact, his doctoral thesis was an attempt to reconstruct Taylor's philosophy up to that time from the central idea of an articulation of the moral sources that underlie the relationship between the Self and the World (cf. Rosa, 1998). Rosa is, then, a profound connoisseur of Taylor's work. This is not surprising since the connections of interests between Charles Taylor and Critical Theory are well known and the influences are mutual, as Rosa himself has identified (2019; for the influence of Charles Taylor on Critical Theory see also Goldstein, 2018; Cooke, 2021; Smith, 2021). Rosa also wrote in the special issue of the famous

4.7. Agape and Resonance

Building on this, we have so far presented Taylor's moral realism as the best account of how human beings understand the meaning of their lives. As we said, Rosa has recently resorted to this same argument put forward by Taylor to defend the plausibility of his social theory (cf. Rosa, 2021, p. 167, 2022a, pp. 207–208). Rosa presents his proposal, involving his own definition of the concepts of *acceleration*, *alienation* and *resonance*, as the explanation with the most explanatory potential to approach the experiences, fears and hopes of the post-modern human being through the lens of the cultural problems of our time.

As we have seen with Taylor, one of these problems is the high demand for solidarity that exists in our time and the lack of articulation of the moral sources that can satisfy the high demands of solidarity. However, Rosa is generally less concerned with the normative calibration of moral sources and more focused on problems related to leading one's own life and the subject's relation to the world. Although Rosa uses the *Best Account* principle in its first variant, that is, that which seeks the acceptance of a moral or social theory, what we are going to study is the theory of resonance as the *best account* in the second of its meanings, that is, to provide an adequate explanation for altruistic action. For this purpose, we will use the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan, to which we will apply both his theory of resonance and Taylor's moral realism, in order to compare the explanatory potential of both perspectives. Moreover, this comparative approach will allow us to address an element that we have missed in Taylor's moral realism, namely, a phenomenological account of the way in which the moral articulation of constitutive goods motivates and leads to a particular type of action based on *agape* as a moral source. So that we can even ask whether there is any kind of action that is in any way obligatory when transiting on such a moral map.

We assume that *resonance*, which constitutes the center of his sociology of relation to the world, is a good *competitor* to Christian *agape* as a moral motivator, inasmuch as it involves elements of the

leading *Journal of Critical Theory, Philosophy and Social Criticism*, which was dedicated to Charles Taylor in 2018 (Bohmann, Keding, & Rosa, 2018).

experience of the world and of the moral articulation of constitutive goods shared with Taylor's moral realism. The idea of *resonance* itself leads Taylor's reader to think of Taylor's influence.[95] With this musical metaphor, which refers to the response of musical instruments when they are played by something external to them and with which they harmonize and echo, Rosa attempts to reconstruct the relationship of the modern subject, alienated, enclosed, disenchanted with the world around him/her.

The interest in the return of the subject to its relationship with the world and the need to be concerned with questions around the "accomplished life" (*gelingendes Leben*, Rosa, 2016, p. 72, cf. 2017) is similar to Taylor's. Moreover, his theory constitutes a novelty in critical theory,[96] part of the "affective turn" in it (Mussell, 2017, p. 13),[97] making incursions into the field of ethics, moving away from

95 Jürgen Goldstein sought to read Taylor's work from the perspective of critical theory through the concept of resonance as used in Taylor's work: "The interweaving threads of Charles Taylor's vast oeuvre converge towards a common vanishing point: that of resonance. Unlike other approaches, this represents both the question and the prospect of an answer to that epochal alienation which Taylor identifies as a modern crisis of affirmation: the meaningful interrelation between human beings and their surrounding world appears to be disturbed. As a concept of reality subordinate to rationalized and strategic interests has become dominant, humanity is growing increasingly mute when it comes to devising an adequate linguistic expression of what is essential for a good life. Our moral language and scopes of freedom wither away and ring increasingly hollow, often expressed in the emergence of a diffuse "malaise of modernity." Taylor's work is dedicated to the diagnosis of this malaise, while also attempting to identify therapeutic responses" (J. Goldstein, 2018, p. 781).

96 For Rosa, the need to theorize social reality arises from crises and the sense that something is not right *(dass etwas nicht stimmt).* For this reason he places himself within Critical Theory, considering the description of reality goes hand in hand with its critique, as well as new proposals to give shape to alternatives for the future (Rosa, 2021, p. 178).

97 The openness of Critical Theory to the complex world of feelings and psychology has also been described as "a turn to the concrete (...) to real-life" (Costa, 2017a, p. 3). This affective world has also been explored, for example, by Jaeggi and his critique of *Lebensformen* (Jaeggi, 2014) or by Amy Allen (2020), advocating an immanent critical theory based on the notion of transference in psychoanalysis. Hartmut Rosa also participates in this movement, exploring and expanding the "space of reasons" through feelings and forms of good life (cf.. Costa, 2017a, p. 12). In any case, behind this movement is the insight that the concern for a fair society is not only about establishing rules around equality

the strict formal concept of separation of ethics and morality like the one of Habermas. Taylor himself welcomes this new trend within Critical Theory in Rosa's work. However, in *The Ethical Implications of Resonance Theory*, Taylor still criticize critical theory's excessive focus on agency in the realm of moral-political thought, neglecting issues to do with identity and articulation of goods.[98] Taylor points to a lack of "openness" to the other and a lack of "patience" at the expense of so much attention focused on agency, giving little space to emotions in the construction of common life (cf. Taylor, 2019c, p. 74, 2017b, pp. 736–737; see also Münch, 2017). The exclusion of feelings from social critique and the "lack of passivity" has to do with skepticism towards utopian proposals and the possibility of their failure.[99] We also find openness to the other and more patience with the normative in resonance theory. However, it may not be enough, given the lack of ontological commitment.

But let us take a closer look at the definition of *resonance*. *Resonance*, in short, is a relational concept, as is *agape*. *Resonance*, as Rosa defines it, is presented in phenomenological form:

> "Resonance is a kind of relationship to the world, formed through af←fect and e→motion, intrinsic interest, and perceived self-efficacy, in which subject and world are mutually affected and transformed.
> Resonance is not an echo, but a responsive relationship, requiring that both sides speak with their own voice. This is only possible where

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and so on, but also, to a certain extent, about the way people live their lives. Taylor himself welcomes this new trend within Critical Theory in Rosa's work.

98 In a sense, he is repeating the same critique he make to Richard Dworkin's separation of substantive from procedural (Taylor, 1992a, pp. 94–95).

99 This is also expressed from Marxism by Terry Eagleton as he interpreted the thought of Ernst Bloch. For Eagleton, the error of Ernst Bloch, perhaps the Marxist philosopher who has most attempted to incorporate sentiment into political and social thought, may be seen in his reluctance to even think about the possibility of the failure of projects to make a better world. Perhaps because he was too caught up in sentiment and Romanticism, too little open to a utopia that transcends the limits of the immanent world and to a history that can only be read as successful at the End of Time: "Hope, to be enduring and well-founded, needs to be dearly bought, whereas one problem with Bloch's universe is that the place is awash with the stuff. It is visible everywhere you look, in this folk tale or that mythological image, this piece of arcane wisdom or that inspiring configuration of space. In this sense, hope is too pervasively immanent in reality; yet it is also too transcendent, too little of this world" (Eagleton, 2015, p. 110).

> strong evaluations are affected. Resonance implies an aspect of constitutive inaccessibility.
> Resonant relationships require that both subject and world be sufficiently "closed" or self-consistent so as to each speak in their own voice, while also remaining open enough to be affected or reached by each other.
> Resonance is not an emotional state, but a mode of relation that is neutral with respect to emotional content. This is why we can love sad stories" (Rosa, 2019b, p. 174, cf. 2016, p. 298)

To study this definition, we can examine the four movements that Rosa presents in *The Uncontrollability of the World* (Rosa, 2020, pp. 32–37): *being affected*, *self-efficacy*, *adaptative transformation* and *uncontrollability*. The first moment is the moment of shock, which coincides with the *af←fection* of the original definition. It is an interpellation of the world or the object to the subject experienced by the subject when he/she is internally reached by this movement. Hence, *af←fection* contains an arrow pointing towards the "a", towards the subject. The second moment is what Rosa calls *self-efficacy*, which is the moment of response. This is presented as a bodily reaction, such as having goose bumps or experiencing a shiver. Such reactions, then, are empirically observable. But phenomenologically, what is of interest is that the response is a reaction to an external impulse that challenges us, in the form of going out to meet that which moves us. Therefore, *self-efficacy*, which coincides with the *e→motion* of the definition of resonance, indicates an outward direction, indicating the output of the subject towards resonance with the world.

Transformative adaptation constitutes the third movement. For Rosa, it is the transformative element present in some experiences of which the subject can say that they have turned him/her into another person. Thus, in the experiences of resonance, in any of its spheres (cf. Rosa, 2016, p. 331ss) we do not remain the same, even if the effects of transformation vary. It presupposes a certain openness and a certain closedness: we must be open enough—like a violin or a guitar—to let ourselves be touched and modified; and, on the other hand, we must also be closed enough to be able to respond with our own voice and in a self-efficacious, free, autonomous way.

Finally, *uncontrollability* refers more to a condition of the resonance experience itself. By *uncontrollability* (*Unverfügbarkeit*) is understood the impossibility of predicting what will be the origin of the *af←fection* that shocks us, what will be the direction of the *e→motion*

with which it responds or what will be the sense of the transformation. Rosa adds that the resonance cannot be accumulated, stored or increased. One cannot seek for *resonance*, one can only try to have the adequate internal disposition. Nor is the will of the Other in the human encounter to engage with us in a relation of resonance controllable (Rosa, 2020, p. 43).

4.7.1. Resonance and the Good Samaritan

We will now apply these four movements to the Gospel passage of the Good Samaritan which, as we saw in the introduction, explains the practice of neighborly love based on *agape*. The purpose is to see if resonance theory can account for the phenomenology of the moral articulation that takes place in the encounter between the Good Samaritan and the wounded man on the roadside. Thus, in a first analysis we find the four moments of resonance. The movement of shock and *af←fection*, appears in the fortuitous encounter of the Samaritan with the wounded man on the roadside: "But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight" (v.33). The moment of *e→motion*, of intrinsic interest, of response and *self-efficacy* is present both in the moment when he felt compassion, and in the helping action itself, which the Gospel presents with a tone of spontaneous, almost uncalculated generosity that gives the tone of gratuitousness and the supererogatory character of the response: "He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him" (v.34).

Moreover, the action of the Good Samaritan shows how he risks his life by breaking the legal precepts and customs that prevented an ordinary Samaritan from caring for a Jew (cf. Bailey, 2008). The third moment, that of *transformation*, is found in that the Samaritan is no longer a Samaritan. He is now the *neighbor* to the wounded man through his mercy, as the text states. He retains his identity as a Samaritan but raised to a different status by the encounter with *af←fection* and *e→motion*, incited by the sight of the wounded man. The effect of the transformation is socially subversive and affects the entire story, for this *change* in identity inaugurates a new kind of relationship between the Samaritan and the wounded man, leaving

behind the old social divisions. Finally, *uncontrollability* is found in the very description of the scene: in the contingency of finding a Samaritan walking on his way; even the supererogatory reaction of the Samaritan cannot be established by law, nor the reaction of the wounded man by the roadside or the innkeeper. It is not even possible to foresee the resonant reaction of the scribe to whom Jesus originally addressed this parable or the response of many readers of this Gospel may have even today when they come across this text.

However, a series of difficulties arise that cast doubt on whether *resonance*, as a possible moral source for altruism, is the best possible explanation. In the first place, it is clear that the Samaritan is living a moment of *resonance*. But the truth is that it is not a harmony with the world, inasmuch as the wounded and suffering person, left out and in misery, is not in a situation that allows him to be in a condition of *resonance*. Even if he were to experience the transformation of identity as the Samaritan does, he does not do so in conditions that allow him to experience an *adaptive transformation*, in the sense that the change in his identity or the improvement of his life situation is not explained by *af←fection* and *e→motion* involving him as the agent, at least as it appears from the original text. That is why we cannot be sure that there is an experience of harmony with the world in the Samaritan's *resonance*. Harmony with the world cannot be assured from the pain of the man lying on the road.

On the other hand, the *e→motion* of the Samaritan, in the form of a feeling of compassion, is indeed a bodily experience. However, it is hard to imagine that the encounter with the wounded man provokes a feeling of positive *resonance* with the world. Perhaps compassion as *e→motion* would be accompanied by indignation, even repulsion. Moreover, it is hard to imagine that a bodily reaction alone would explain the moral motivation for the helping actions that follow. For moral action we need some kind of moral articulation with some kind of ideal or *constitutive good*, operating in the background, be it that of human dignity, be it that of Judeo-Christian neighborly love, as it is in the context of this rabbinic dispute in which Jesus' narrative is framed. This idea of an ontological meta-level beyond that of the causal elicitation of the helping action and beyond the bodily feeling or response would come to replace the disharmony with the world of the wounded person in the world as the counterpart of the Good Samaritan.

In short, the greatest difficulties in understanding *resonance* as a concept of normative scope in the moral field and, specifically, as a moral source capable of being the best possible explanation of altruistic morality, capable, at the same time, of satisfying the demands of modern benevolence are, on the one hand, the difficulty in understanding *af←fection* as including the man in need and, on the other hand, the lack of an articulation of a moral good.

4.7.2. Addressing two difficulties

Before focusing on the moment of *af←fection*, let us focus on the second difficulty, since it is central to the assessment of *resonance* as a possible source of moral motivation. As we have already pointed out, the fact that Rosa's concept of *resonance* does not fully describe what happens in a caring relationship stems from the lack of articulation of a moral good, that is, from the exclusion of ontology in his theory. In fact, it is a deliberate choice by Rosa to differentiate himself from Taylor's moral realism and his theistic *hunch*, despite the overlaps of both theories on anthropological and phenomenological issues. According to Rosa, Taylor's theory asks about

> "the (anthropologically) generalisable, universalisable or even transcendental (and not infrequently: pre-social) conditions and aspects of the human world relationship, whereas I am decisively concerned with examining and establishing its social character and thus also its variability and changeability" (Rosa, 2016, p. 70).[100]

Rosa, therefore, does not follow Taylor in his *hunch*, perhaps because the mere intuition of an ontology underlying *agape* makes him think of an essence or human nature whose affirmation would go beyond his commitment as a critical theorist. After all, critical theory

100 ["Ein grundlegender Unterschied zwischen dem von mir hier unternommen Versuch und den diskutierten Ansätzen der Phänomenologie und der philosophischen Anthropologie liegt nun allerdings in dem Umstand begründet, dass jene Theorien in aller Regel nach den (anthropologisch) generalisierbaren, universalisierbaren oder gar transzendentalen (und nicht selten: vorsozialen) Bedingungen und Aspekten der menschlichen Weltbeziehung fragen, während es mir entscheidend darauf ankommt, ihre gesellschaftliche Prägung und damit auch ihre Variabilität und Veränderbarkeit zu untersuchen und herauszustellen" (translated by S.G.)]

takes as its point of departure a post-metaphysical stance that strongly separates the spheres of value. That is to say, for a critical theorist such as Habermas, there are no longer superior truths; or rather, we are no longer in an era that allows for integral worldviews that are capable of framing a fusion of cognitive, evaluative and normative perspectives. However, despite the fact that Rosa breaks with critical theory in the realm of ethics, he does not do so in the realm of ontology. Though the concept of *resonance* is both descriptive and normative, it does not refer to a concrete ontological reality. Rather, resonance appears as an emotional, valuational and cognitive capacity (*Fähigkeit*) of subjects with respect to themselves and their body and the world. It is in that regard also akin to romantic epiphanic experiences.

On the other hand, we can extract some of the considerations that will distinguish *agape* from *resonance* through the various places in *Resonance* that, to our understanding, speak of moral altruism and its relation or not to ontology. First, Rosa speaks of the "ethically binding gaze" (*ethische verpflichtende Blick*, 2016, p. 120) following the ethics of Emmanuel Lévinas (1983, 1985). Rosa starts from the passivity of the gaze and the conception in our culture that the soul and the essence of the human being can be touched through the gaze. Thus, an experience such as that of the Good Samaritan can be described as the product of a basic relationship of experiencing and processing the world through the encounter of two corporealities, emotions and the relationship to the Other. Thus, in this case,

> "the eyes function, in a way, as the empathy points in the interpersonal encounter: to see the suffering, the distress, the vulnerability in the eyes of the 'other' means somehow—and here I leave the path of Levinas' philosophy—to feel and sense it oneself" (2016, p. 120).[101]

Indeed, Rosa echoes Levinas in his phenomenology of the Other insofar as the self is entirely passive in its original relation to the Other. Both Rosa and Levinas emphasize that responsibility arises

101 ["Die Augen fungieren dabei gleichsam als die Empathiepunkte in der zwischenmenschlichen Begegnung: Das Leid, die Not, die Verletzbarkeit im Augen des >Anderen< zu sehen bedeutet in gewisser Weise -und hier verlasse ich die Spur der Philosophie Levinas'-, sie selbst zu spüren und zu empfinden" (translated by S.G.)]

from this face-to-face with the Other.[102] Nevertheless, for the subject, according to Resonance Theory, the encounter with the Other does not entail the recognition of a superlative relation of being owned by the Other's face.[103] In resonant relations, there is no hierarchical ontological ordering between the subject and the Other, as Levinas establishes. Instead, resonance is a relational concept in which, taking the metaphor of music, two bodies react and respond to the vibrational impulses of the other: "Resonance is not an echo—but a response relationship; it requires that both sides speak with their own voice, and this is only possible where strong values are touched" (Rosa, 2016, p. 297).[104] On the other hand, the Other—be it another subject or the world—appears ontologically blurred in Rosa, as it does not lead to seeing God or transcendence behind the Other.

Secondly, religion as an experience, as presented in *Resonanz*, is detached from the gaze of the Other. While the gaze of the Other is a bodily way of entering into relation with its pain and ethical engagement with it, religious experience is part of the "vertical axes of *resonance*", called upon to generate lasting relations between the subject and the world (cf. Rosa, 2016, pp. 435–514). Of course, both situations are part of the same openness to the world and the same basic experience described under the term of *resonance*, which can be presented in various ways. Hence, religious experience for Rosa is not fundamentally directed towards the relationship with God, but again, his interest is in the relationship with the world. Paraphrasing

102 "The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility" (Lévinas, 1989, p. 83).

103 "The Other is higher than I am because the first word of the face is "Thou shalt not murder." It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me. However, at the same time, the face of the Other is destitute; it is the poor for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all. I, whoever I may be, as the "first person," I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call. The mastery of the Other and his poverty, with my submission and my wealth (…) are presupposed in all human relationships. If it were not, then we would not even say, before an open door, "After you, Sir!" It is an original "After you, Sir!" that I have tried to describe" (Lévinas, 1985, p. 88).

104 ["Resonanz ist kein Echo—sondern eine Antwortbeziehung; sie setzt voraus, dass beide Seiten mit eigener Stimme sprechen, und dies ist nur dort möglich, wo starke Wertungen berührt werden" (translated by S.G)].

William James, he says that "the ultimate stance on religion is about the basic experience of relating to the world at large" (Rosa, 2016, p. 436, cf. 2017, pp. 46–51; see also W. James, 2002).[105] He also stresses with Martin Buber that the function of religion is to ground the proto-confidence in the world's capacity and readiness to respond (Rosa, 2016, pp. 439ff, 87, cf. 2011, 2022b, 2023; Schumacher, 2022; see also Buber, 2017, 2021). Therefore, religion, in general, is seen as a great promise (*Verheißung*) of *resonance*, in the sense that the core of religiosity is "the existential need for response" (*existentielle Antwortbedürftigkeit*) of the human being and the promise of resonant fulfillment that lies in its quest (Rosa, 2019c).

However, Rosa adds that the pursuit of the good life, even when it is concerned with suffering and alienation, cannot be rooted in some human essence or nature. Somehow there is an exclusion of ontology in his proposal, and therefore of *agape*. Hence, Rosa's disappointment when he refers to *A Secular Age* as a necessary and expected clarification of Taylor's *hunch* in favor of theism, as a possibility to better draw the contours of the moral map of theism and *agape*:

> "Nevertheless, Taylor's book (to make a long story short), when one reads it as a reconstruction of the third source and thus as a supplement or extension of *Sources of the Self*, is ultimately rather unsatisfactory. No clearly contoured map emerges; the course of argumentation is often erratic; it is noteworthy that the book is composed of several fragments written at different times. From this perspective, it is particularly disappointing that there is no systematic reference to the paradigms elaborated in the *Sources of the Self* and their contradictions and conflicts" (Rosa & Kern, 2012, pp. 5–6)[106]

Rosa, therefore, comes close to *agape* in that he manifests a phenomenology of the encounter with the neighbor based on passivity

105 ["In der Haltung zur Religion letztlich um die Grunderfahrung der Weltbeziehung überhaupt geht"(translated by S.G.)].

106 ["Dennoch bleibt Taylors Buch (um es kurz zu machen), wenn man es als Rekonstruktion der dritten Quelle und damit als Ergänzung oder Vervollständigung der "Quellen des Selbst" liest, letztlich eher unbefriedigend. Es entsteht keine klar konturierte Landkarte; der Argumentationsgang ist oft sprunghaft; es ist dem Buch anzumerken, dass es aus mehreren, zu verschiedenen Zeiten entstandenen Fragmenten zusammengesetzt ist. Bedauerlich ist aus dieser Perspektive vor allem, dass keine systematische Bezugnahme auf die in den "Quellen des Selbst" herausgearbeiteten Paradigmen und ihre Widersprüche und Konfliktlagen erfolg" (translated by S.G.)]

before the Other, the preservation of one's own subjectivity and the emergence of strong evaluations, even if these do not lead to the postulation of a moral source such as God and His love. Finally, however, if we compare Rosa's "ethically binding gaze" and Taylor's theistic best account, perhaps the Canadian's proposal is "better" in the sense that it manages to explain more.

As we have seen, the potential of *agape* as a *Best Account* to solve or compensate for the dilemmas that modern high standards of beneficence have to face lies in the unconditionality of *agape*. *Agape* would be able to motivate solidarity when the media doesn't speak about the pain of the distant others anymore, for example. *Agape* would be able to motivate when the defense of our ideals leads us to the contradiction of wishing or doing evil to Others. *Agape* would allow us to continue with a task when we do not get a positive response or are given nothing in return, not even affection or gratitude. Then again, *agape* would also be able to help our neighbor even when he or she does not reflect in his or her face anything attractive that would make us resonate with the world.

Besides, *agape* can explain the troubles we have found in the four movements present in the Samaritan's resonant experience. Let us look at the first difficulty, the one that deals with the moment of *af←fection* and the lack of *echo* and harmony between the Samaritan and the wounded person. This is what Otto Fuchs has referred to as *negative resonance* or *negative dialectic of resonance*. By *negative resonance*, he means the type of experience of people in distress, oppression and misery which can be described in relation to resonance experiences. When he appeals to the negative dialectic, he refers to the clash that occurs between plenitude of the resonant person and the lack of resonance suffered by the sufferers:

> "So it is about the resonance of and towards the non-resonance of people in distress, oppression and misery, not (only) about the affluent class and the alienations it brings. And such resonance hurts us and sets out our satisfaction. *And* the resonant lamentation and accusation also dislocates the relationship with God. So it is important to explicitly define in the resonance process the resonance that brings one's own resonant happiness into turbulence with the suffering lives of people who cannot experience resonance. Also, so that one's own resonance experience does not occur at the expense of these people. At the same

> time, such solidarity may bring the special relevance experience of literally being allowed to be necessary" (Fuchs, 2017, p. 135).[107]

Fuchs notes that this description of the *resonance* process is missing in such circumstances. If in the resonant relation the subject experiences itself in a process of exchange in which the self and the world become mutually constitutive and sensitive, according to which the self thus finds, so to speak, a constitutive echo in its relations with the world (cf. Rosa, 2011, p. 18), this is an echo that in a relation such as that of the Samaritan with the wounded man is not to be found.

Agape as a moral source seems to be able to facilitate such an echo and solidarity with that hallmark of need, even of appeal and calling. In a way, it can be postulated as the *best account* possible explanation that the movement of *af←fection*, which we saw that it can hardly come out of the wounded, comes out of *agape* as a moral source, which is somehow embodied in the figure of the person helped at the roadside. In fact, we can find something alike in the Gospel passage of Mt 25:36–40, which somehow explains how divinity takes the place of the suffering and oppressed:

> "'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

Thus, when one thinks of an experience of *resonance* embodied in the wounded person on the roadside, it is possible for the anguish and pain of the other to resonate in the agent, although the movement and action to which the experience of this negative *resonance*

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107 ["Es geht also um die Resonanz der und gegenüber der Nicht-Resonanz von Menschen in Not, Unterdrückung und Elend, nicht (nur) um die Wohlstandsschicht und um die Entfremdungen, die diese mit sich bringt. Und solche Resonanz schmerzt uns setzt Zufriedenheit außer Kraft. Und sie bringt in der räsonierenden Klage und Anklage auch das Gottesverhältnis aus den resonanten Fugen. Es ist also wichtig, in den Resonanzvorgang die das eigene Resonanzglück in Turbulenzen bringende Resonanz auf das leidvolle Leben von Menschen, die keine Resonanz erfahren können, ausdrücklich einzudefinieren. Auch damit sich die eigene Resonanzerfahrung nicht auf Kosten dieser Menschen ereignet. Dabei ist es durchaus möglich, dass eine solche Solidarität die besondere Relevanzerfahrung bringt, buchstäblich notwendig sein zu dürfen" (translated by S.G.)].

moves cannot be based on fulfilled life of the suffering person. On the contrary: compassion moves toward sympathy for the achieved life of the Other, or rather, for the failed life and the commitment to make it achieved on the part of the helper. The interest of the action is to achieve a fulfilled life, for both.

So, despite the strength of the metaphor behind *resonance* and the rootedness of its phenomenology behind the real experience of many people, the ontology behind it is too schematic, unable to reach the limit set by the "negative dialectic". In our understanding, this lack of ontological commitment is explained by the romantic basis of the experience of resonance. Indeed, Rosa himself acknowledges that his concept of resonance has a romantic component that is as attractive as it is nostalgic and ineffective if the constitutive aspects of alienation are forgotten or denied:

> "Insofar as the basic concern of Romanticism is to reconcile these very opposites and divisions, resonance can be understood as a Romantic concept—it opposes the objectifying concepts of the world of rationalism aimed at calculation, fixation, domination and control" (Rosa, 2016, p. 293).[108]

Hence, although moral philosophy or metaethics do not form a central part of his reflection, it would seem that he remained with a conceptualization of them more typical of romantic expressionism. He seeks a reconciliation of reason and emotion, morality and ethics, subject and world, nature and spirit. It separates itself from the scientific-rationalist conception that treats the world as an object, as Taylor does (cf. Rosa, 2011). It also includes a concern for the pursuit of the good life as part of social reflection. But he does not allow himself to make ontological commitments that go beyond the nostalgic experience of unifying the separate. Maybe, as Armin Nassehi states, perhaps one of Rosa's greatest critics, says, the resonance proposal is "too romantic" and therefore,

108 ["Insofern es das Grundanliegen der Romantik darstellt, eben diese Gegensätze und Trennungen miteinander zu versöhnen, lässt sich Resonanz als ein romantisches Konzept verstehen—es stellt sich den verdinglichenden Weltbegriffen des auf Berechnung, Fixierung, Beherrschung und Kontrolle gerichteten Rationalismus entgegen" (translated by S.G.)]

> "it fails because of the fundamental strangeness of the Other. It fails to demonstrate an alterity in the consciousness of ego. It suffers from the distance it wants to overcome. It fails because successful life can only be imagined as closeness, only as something that cancels distance, only real understanding" (Nassehi, 2016, p. 147).[109]

If the concept of *resonance* can be better understood from the moral map of romanticism, then the theory of *resonance* would seek a reconciliation of reason and emotion, morality and ethics, subject and world, nature and spirit. As does Taylor, Rosa reacts against a world of closed structures and truncated relationships (cf. Rosa, 2011, p. 18). He also includes a concern for the search for the good life as part of social reflection (cf. Rosa, 2012, p. 412, 2010a, p. 52, see also 2009). But it does not allow himself to assume ontological commitments that go beyond the attractive and nostalgic experience of unifying what is separated.

Although the phenomenology behind resonance, its negative counterpart and *agape* are similar, the encounter with the Other requires stronger bonds than feeling, sympathy or romantic unification of human experience (cf. Taylor, 2016, pp. 204–216). Even, it

109 ["Es scheitert an der prinzipiellen Fremdheit des Anderen. Es scheitert daran, Alterität im Bewusstsein von Ego nachzuweisen. Es leidet unter der Distanz, die sie überwinden will. Es scheitert daran, dass man sich gelungenes Leben nur als Nähe vorstellen kann, nur als etwas, das Distanz aufhebt, nur wirkliche Verständigung" (translated by S.G.)]. Nassehi discusses the indispensability of creating an apology for *Weltfremdheit* in order to be able to recover those who are left out of the "fusion fantasy" of resonance. Hence, therefore, an opposite approach to that of Rosa. Nassehi, like Taylor, points to an increasingly widespread malaise that is present in the dilemma to which Taylor points: the mismatch between the demands of society and the entrapment of the individual in the routines of everyday life (cf. Nassehi, 2021; Taylor, 1992b). The solution to getting out of this state of excessive demands is a change of perspective: admitting the complexity of society, working on the smaller units that make up the structure of society. In any case, the first step is to admit the strangeness with the world that generates this kind of dilemma, such as solidarity. Taylor looks to sources that we have left behind with Modernity but are part of the construction of modern high standards of morality and social engagement. In a sense, they share the strangeness of the world, though in Taylor it will be provoked by sources that are "beyond life" (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 7–8), in the transcendent. But at this moment, Taylor's path goes, however, by getting to explore the moral map of theism and *agape*, that is, by an openness to transcendence and to the meanings beyond life that we give to our moral commitments.

needs something beyond the phenomenology of strong evaluation. What it needs is the source to which that evaluation points. Some kind of ontological bond that, as Taylor postulates (albeit in a fuzzy and tentative way), *agape* can offer, for it can better explain both the way the subject lives his moral life, and the situation of the Other. *Agape*, then, endows ethical responsibility with a much broader ontological basis than concern for one's own realized life or fit in the world. Taylor's moral realism is not about adhering to a set of static truths, but about establishing a dynamic mode of relationship with a powerful source for living life and making moral decisions. This relationality with the moral source and also with the individual object of help is found in Charles Taylor's treatment of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

4.8. The Good Samaritan in Charles Taylor's account of agape

The Samaritan shows us that his generous and selfless behavior towards the wounded Other on the road is not fully explained by the experience of resonance, by a feeling of harmony and echo with the world. It is certainly possible to explain philanthropy from an *ethically binding gaze*, but the lack of ontological commitment to resonance translates into weakness of motivation to undertake such a heroic act of generosity as that of the Samaritan. We must enter a different dimension in which the relationship with the world needs foundations that are both beyond it and within it.

This is rather the potential of *agape* vis-à-vis the resonant experience: it shows the ontological subjection that is transcendent and, at the same time, internal to the being of the world, to the inherent dignity of any individual. Indeed, the Samaritan's reaction refers to a response from the transcendence to the violence of the world: "The Samaritan's action is part of God's response to the skewed serve the robbers have lobbed into history" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 277). The encounter with the wounded can be the occasion for rebuilding a linkage of human relations animated by *agape*. The new relation will not be based on previously established social codes and practices but it "inaugurates (potentially) a new relation of friendship/love/charity with this person" that "cuts across the boundaries of the permitted

'we's' in his world" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 738). *Agape* defines in essence the origin of the source of motivation and the love of neighbor itself, placing the love of God and benevolence at the center of Christian faith (Taylor, 2007b, p. 680). Thus *agape* "is both path and destination" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 604) making it difficult to detach the source of motivation from the motivation itself toward love of neighbor.

Moreover, in the story of the Good Samaritan it is possible to find a justification of the dignity of every human being. The parable tells us that the object of altruistic action is anyone who meets us on the road and is in need, especially those who are outside the social relations in which we are immersed, thus breaking any self-interest created, without expecting any kind of equivalence in response (Taylor, 2007b, p. 158,246,277).[110] The Good Samaritan is also moved by compassion and mercy, a feeling embodied in the "bowels" (*splangnizesthai*), and, at the same time, moral, since he identifies with the same feelings shown by Jesus in various places in the New Testament (Taylor, 2007b, p. 115)

Agape is, in short, relationality. It is a moral source of altruism with a high explanatory potential. To begin with, it explains the relational links with the transcendent dimension and the search for wholeness, something that in the narrative of *A Secular Age* has been lost with modernity and its drive toward rationality and institutionalization. But, at the same time, it seems to better fulfill the requirements of the *best account* principle: it is capable of responding to the high demands for solidarity of our time; although it has its origin in grace—and this is an important point, for in a sense the formal cause of the compassionate movement lies outside the world –, its explanation is centered on the protagonist's construction of meaning. In that sense, it is *anthropocentric*; it is encompassing of human nature and provides explanations for the needs of practical reason in the face of the moral demands of an articulated moral source and response to the emergencies of the world. By its nature, *agape* is gratuitous and decentered and has no room for moral superiority. It is free from the calculation of results or the possible receipt of a *quid pro quo*.

110 The Parable of the Good Samaritan can be understood as a paradigmatic text marking the demand for solidarity with the neighbor throughout the history of the Christian West (Breitsameter, 2010; Gregory, 2008; Waldron, 2003). The authors to whom Taylor refers to the meaning of this parable are Ivan Illich (2005a) and Paul Thibaut (2003).

Being affected by *agape* as shown in the parable, the subject (the Samaritan) is transformed after feeling bodily compassion and helping the wounded person without calculation. But the social reality is also transformed by the creation of new relationships, by overcoming the social limits of origin, class, race, gender, or status and by counteracting the pain created by unjustified violence with the Samaritan's supererogatory dedication, beyond what is rationally expected. In this sense, we can say that *agape* begins with a *Thou-perspective*, born of the interpersonal encounter, to build from there a *We-perspective* based on relationality.

The Samaritan's action, which involves a genuine gratuitousness since he not only endangers his capital, but also his own life, opens a space for the hope of a universal equality among all human beings, which elevates any conflict situation and transforms it to reach a new horizon where conflicts are overcome. An important aspect of *agape* as a *best account* is, therefore, that in comparison with other possible constitutive goods—whether articulated or not—it allows the moral agent to welcome the weakness of the Other to an extent that does not seem possible with other modes of articulating the good and that it does so in such a way as to make the commitment acquired without self-indulgence, calculation, disappointment or deviation, at least in its purest version.

The defense of *agape* as the *best account* for motivation toward solidarity and action goes hand in hand with an accusation that neither naturalism, utilitarianism, romantic epiphany or the revolt against the resignation of Christianity proposed by Nietzsche can provide an unconditional response to the needs of the helpless neighbor (cf. Taylor, 1994b). Eliminating religion as a moral source, as Taylor understands it, or remaining with a secularized version that retains only some aspects of *agape*, does not provide a better response to the demands of solidarity, however much some of the moral theories developed since modernity are responsible for the high moral standards we have today.

As we have seen, understanding the Good Samaritan's motivation from both resonance theory and the Taylorian view of *agape* allows us to verify the explanatory potential of both types of motivations. However, one of the questions that has remained unanswered is whether the phenomenology of the Good Samaritan's moral articulation of *agape* leads to a particular type of action and what it would

be. Certainly, the Good Samaritan did the unexpected in a generous and abundant way, helping the needy without limit, entering into the category of supererogatory actions from the moral categories of his time and showing us an example of motivation from *agape*. But Taylor's theory does not provide us with an answer to a distinctive type of action or a set of actions that can be understood as mandatory from this perspective. In a way, our suspicion that Taylor's moral realism is not a prescriptive moral theory, focusing only on moral motivation and an understanding of moral agency as human moral experience, is confirmed.

In any case, the good Samaritan plays an important role in the description of *agape*. as Taylor says, "something crucial in the history of the Samaritan gets lost" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 742) leaving little room for *agape* spontaneity and gratuitousness. The modern world tends to order reality with rules, disciplines and organizations that accommodate its dread of contingency and its estrangement from the other. The process of secularization of *agape* not only multiplies the moral sources present in modernity, accompanied by an increase in the demand for solidarity and a weakening of the capacity to articulate moral goods. An anthropology and a moral order are also born from a social imaginary that complicates the emergence of the *agape-network*, the new forms of social relationships based on a transformation of the existing ones based on gift, generosity, forgiveness and the creation of new horizons.

As we have seen in chapter 3 and will see in the next, Taylor uses historical genealogies, both of modern identity and of secularization, in large part, to justify his own moral realism and to validate ontological pluralism and the diversity of current options (White, 2000, p. 52; Seibert, 2018, p. 92). But also to find out how we have lost the experience of the Good Samaritan and what are the current conditions for such an experience. Thus, after looking at a new historical reconstruction of Taylor in chapter 5, this time focusing on neighbor love and charity as a social practice, we will look at places where the transformative power of *agape* finds its place in the present, focusing on the politics of recognition and charitable organizations in chapters 6 and 7.