

## 7. Agape and the Politics of Recognition

Building on the conclusions of the previous chapter, where we saw that *agape* persists in modernity by undergoing significant transformations within the social imaginary and by being mediated—often imperfectly—through the institutions and practices of civil society, we now turn to its place within social philosophy more strictly understood. Chapter 6 showed that, despite the pressures of secularization and proceduralism, *agape* continues to function as a moral source that animates motivations, shapes solidaristic imaginaries, and occasionally resurfaces in institutional forms marked by generosity and service. The question that now arises is whether this same agapeic dynamic can illuminate another key field of contemporary political theory: the politics of recognition and identity, where issues of relationality, mutual understanding, and moral transformation stand at the forefront.

Over the past decades, questions of recognition and identity have become central to discussions of social justice, understood not only in terms of the fair distribution of resources but also in terms of the acknowledgement of cultural identities, collective goods, and modes of belonging (cf. Clorinda Vendra, 2020; see also Iser, 2019). The contemporary prominence of these issues owes much to two works published simultaneously in 1992: Charles Taylor's *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (1992a), and Axel Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition* (Honneth, 1992). Their contrasting approaches—one emphasizing dialogical identity and shared goods, the other foregrounding the conflictual and emancipatory dimensions of recognition—have shaped the landscape of recognition theory ever since.

Three decades later, the strengths and limitations of these proposals have become more evident. A central fault line divides accounts that interpret recognition primarily as a field of political and social struggle from those that view it as a means of integration and mutual understanding. Taylor's contribution is generally placed among the

latter, the so-called “optimistic theorists of recognition” (Ikäheimo, Lepold, & Stahl, 2021, p. 6; see also Browne, 2017, pp. 123–142). Yet it is often noted that his short essay, written for a very specific Canadian context, lacks the systematic depth needed to clarify its normative foundations (Ricoeur, 2005, pp. 212–216; Basaure, 2016). As a result, Taylor’s position is frequently read as predominantly interpretive interpretative (Chatellier, 2020, p. 156ff) or descriptive (Bedorf, 2010, pp. 41–44), and is occasionally criticized for lacking a clear justification for the goods it seeks to affirm and protect.

However, if Taylor’s essay is read in continuity with his broader philosophical work—particularly his metaethics, social ontology, and reflections on religion and the moral sources of modernity—a richer picture emerges. Elements that remain implicit in *The Politics of Recognition* become more intelligible: the possibility of moral transformation through relationality, the opening of new horizons in and beyond conflict, and the role of generosity, forgiveness, and strong moral sources in sustaining social cohesion. These themes resonate strikingly with the logic of *agape* explored in earlier chapters and with the ways in which other theorists of recognition, such as Honneth, Boltanski, and Ricoeur, have explicitly incorporated forms of love or gift into their accounts. This chapter argues that *agape* provides the normative background that Taylor’s theory appears to lack when considered in isolation, and that reading his politics of recognition through this *agapic* lens renews its coherence, depth, and contemporary relevance.

### 7.1. Recognition and agape

Recognition as a subject of social philosophy has its origins in Hegel’s dialectic of master and bondsman, in which he inserts consciousness into the social and political arena (cf. Hegel, 1807, pp. 155–165).<sup>175</sup> For Hegel, as for Taylor, others are central to the constitution of our own identity. Far from being an individual enterprise,

---

175 Most studies in philosophy and sociology on mutual recognition generally assume that it is a modern concept and stems from Hegel with influences from Rousseau or Fichte. However, this convention has been challenged in recent years by Risto Saarinen, who argues that “the intellectual roots of the concept and conceptions of recognition are found in classical, medieval, and

recognition has to be mutual, i.e. interpersonal. Nevertheless, as says Taylor, who became notorious early in his career for his commentary on Hegel, “The contradiction arises when men at a raw and undeveloped stage of history try to wrest recognition from another without reciprocating. (...) This leads to armed struggle. And necessarily so, says Hegel” (Taylor, 1977a, p. 153). Thus, embedded in the same dialectic of recognition, which is a struggle of consciousness, is the struggle for social justice, but also the necessity of the negative moment of struggle and conflict.

In recent years, a number of authors have sought to rethink social justice and politics on the basis of social ontology (Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2011). The quest for social justice, the achievement of a just society—that is, the quest for a common way of life in which individuals and groups are treated equally, receive an equitable distribution of resources, or are treated on an equal basis independent of their status—has turned to ethical and political sources that go beyond justice narrowly conceived. In parallel, societies have become more complex, and relationships within them have diversified as knowledge in psychology, and human flourishing have increased: many wrongs are caused to human beings when recognition is lacking and when socio-economic conditions do not allow for proper human development (cf. Rosa, 2013, p. 7). In this context, many authors have found in *love* a normative source that can break disputes centered on economic exchange, fair restitutions or possessive relationships (Nirenberg, 2007, p. 574; see also Mitchell, 2018). In a way is at stake is a “transformed concept of recognition as a criterion of ethics and normative social philosophy” (Siep, 2011b, p. 122).<sup>176</sup>

---

early modern religious sources” (Saarinen, 2016, p. 3). Thanks to his work, there is now even talk of a specific contribution of religion to the politics of mutual recognition (see Ryan, 2022).

176 Ludwig Siep, who has one of the most comprehensive studies on the concept of *Anerkennung* in Hegel (2014, see also 2010), distinguishes, in addition, another set of proposals concerning the current interpretation of Hegel’s concept of recognition. These proposals understand recognition as a source of social ontology, i.e. see recognition as constitutive of the modern world’s cultural, social and spiritual life (cf. Siep, 2011b, pp. 122–128). He understands the work of Robert Brandom (2011), Robert Pippin (2008) and Terry Pinkard (2010) in this way.

Axel Honneth, Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor. Axel Honneth, Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor—together with Luc Boltanski—belong to this family of approaches. All of them start, in different ways, from Hegelian assumptions; they share the conviction that we become autonomous agents only through interaction with other subjects;<sup>177</sup> and in each case love plays a role in recognition theory: explicitly in Honneth and Ricoeur, more implicitly in Taylor. It is as if these authors were retrieving and updating the early Hegel's explorations of Christian love for contemporary debates on recognition (cf. Taylor, 1977a, pp. 51–64; Hegel, 2015; see also Disley, 2015). At the same time, the persistence of struggles for recognition has led some of them to seek models that do not merely limit harm but also open new possibilities of understanding. Here *agape* appears as a possible source of recognition that can stand in contrast to, or in support of, justice (cf. Boltanski, 2012; Iorio, 2014; Ricoeur, 2005).

It thus becomes possible to sketch a recognition theory with *agape* as its normative basis.<sup>178</sup> Such an account would need, at a

---

177 By contrast, the more Kantian-influenced liberals, such as Habermas, are more limited in their treatment of recognition. For them, recognition is seen in terms of formal respect for the equal dignity of autonomous individuals. However, this more restrictive concept of recognition and, thereby, of justice or solidarity does not go hand in hand with developments within societies, where social esteem, and not only legal recognition, has become increasingly important in debates about recognition. At the risk of generalization, more liberal thinking finds more sympathy in Kantian thinking and in the autonomy of subjects participating in public discourse. On the other hand, the more communitarian thought finds more accommodation in Hegel, in which community and culture is a further degree in the gradual expression of the subject (cf. Honneth, 2018; Kymlicka, 2002, p. 220ff). While the former is clearer in establishing the neutrality of public space in terms of the ethics that underpin subjects' ways of life, the latter is more sensitive to recognizing collective cultures that are important in forming subjects' identities. Behind this small map, one can understand many of the debates around negative and positive freedom, the state's neutrality or the role of civil society in current political philosophy.

178 Further forms of love, such as erotic love (*eros*), are studied by authors such as Adorno as a way of representing relations that cannot be translated into terms of economic exchange or relations of possession and alienation (cf. Adorno, 1951). On the other hand, Derrida bases his understanding of Western politics on the binomial friend-enemy, or love-hate, based on the indeterminacy of *philia*. This indeterminacy would make the fraternal politics on which liberal politics are based structurally weak and may explain the rise of fundamentalist or nationalist movements that promise to seek and find a true sense of

minimum, to acknowledge the role of affect in the construction of identity, the dialogical character of selfhood, and the capacity of *agape* to articulate goods at both the individual and, in a qualified sense, the social level. *Agape* could then function as a criterion for moral, political, and legal action pertinent to certain identity and recognition politics and to the operation of institutions. In this perspective, *agape* stands in a dialectical relation to justice: sometimes replacing it, sometimes assisting it, sometimes opening a new horizon for action. It must offer a way out of violence and misrecognition and finds its particular, though not exclusive, place in contexts of entrenched conflict. These features of an *agape*-based political philosophy take the form of a possible “Best Account”, in the sense developed in chapter 4.

Against this background, we can now consider more closely how some key authors—Honneth, Boltanski, and Ricoeur—integrate forms of love or *agape* into their accounts of recognition, and how their proposals both prepare and delimit the *agapic* reading of Taylor that will occupy the rest of this chapter. The role of love in contemporary theories of recognition can be reconstructed along three main lines: first, disagreement about its scope—whether confined to the private sphere or also operative in social and political relations; second, the varying status accorded to *agape*—whether fact of intimate life, empirically observable affective regime, or symbolic mediation; and finally, the differing relations posited between love and justice—whether complement, alternative, or disruptive excess.

---

collective friendship (Derrida, 2005). Lévinas clearly stated the broad claims of love in ethics, politics and ontology, which can be expressed in the phrase: “Love must always watch over justice” (Lévinas, 1998, p. 108, see also 1985). Maybe Žižek is one of the authors working hardest to recover the relevance of *agape*-love in political philosophy. For him, Christian charity is a principle that breaks with the logic of justice: “Christian charity is rare and fragile, something to be fought for and regained again and again. Even among Christians, confusion about its nature abounds. For that reason, perhaps the best way to define it is to proceed *a contrario*: to start by focusing on precisely those apparently Christian orientations which today threaten the proper Christian stance” (Žižek, 2001, p. 118). For Žižek, Christian love serves as the emancipating principle that makes it possible to break with the established patterns of relationships in the social order (cf. 2001, pp. 120–121; see also Žižek et al., 2005; Reeder & Finkelde, 2014, pp. 262–265).

In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Axel Honneth reconstructs “struggles for recognition” as stages in the development of social life, distinguishing three spheres—interpersonal love, formal rights, and social esteem—corresponding to three structures of recognition: love, rights, and solidarity (Honneth, 1992, pp. 148–211). Conflicts in each sphere drive emancipation: struggles for acknowledgement of one’s subjectivity, for the expansion of rights, and for the recognition of particular ways of life. Within a broadly Habermasian framework (Habermas, 1990), Honneth extends liberal theories of justice by giving more weight to the lifeworld and to the forms of suffering experienced by those whose claims are invisible from the perspective of the public sphere (N. Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Laitinen, 2015).

However, Honneth draws a clear line between *agape* and solidarity. *Agape* belongs primarily to the intimate sphere of family and friendship; it does not, in his view, constitute the social networks that structure modern societies. *Agape*

“doesn’t constitute social networks in modern societies, which are constitutive for those societies. Because the emotional or personal resources from which these constitutive networks arise, by which they are constituted or, let’s say, produced, they are different, they are, as I said, either arising from love in the more narrow sense, or coming from solidarity, or coming from law as another specific form of social integration, but they are not arising, as I would see it, from *agape*” (Iorio & Campello, 2013, p. 253).

At the societal level, solidarity and legal respect provide the dominant forms of recognition. *Agape* may function as an ethical motivation for global solidarity or anonymous self-giving, but this presupposes individuals socialized in Christian contexts (Iorio & Campello, 2013, p. 254). When Honneth acknowledges ethical theories that place friendship, care, or neighbor-love alongside justice, the dialectic between justice and love remains largely motivational:<sup>179</sup>

---

179 The tension between justice and good has been treated from an ontological perspective by Emmanuel Levinas through *Totality and Infinity* (1979), in which the perspective of moral responsibility is structurally linked to the intersubjective encounter with the face of the other. These considerations, which would be the basis of the most elementary facts of social life according to Levinas, are radicalized by Derrida (2005). For him, the phenomena of morality would have two distinct sources or orientations: the perspective of equal treatment and the perspective of care for the other. While the former

“As solidarity forms a necessary antithesis to the principle of justice in that it endows it with the affective impulses of mutual sympathy in a particularistic way, so, on the other hand, care represents its equally necessary antithesis since it complements it with a principle of unilateral, completely disinterested assistance” (Honneth, 2000, p. 170).<sup>180</sup>

Love, therefore does not acquire an explicit ontological status within the order of the good that could ground a broader horizon of rights. In our view, the complementarity of justice and love, understood as the basis of mutual sympathy and care, which Honneth presents dialectically, can only be understood if love acquires an ontological status within the order of the good. However, while Honneth certainly grants a role to *agape* as a moral source and situates it, in a way, as an element prior to the formation of the community and its rules, he fails to articulate the potential that the articulation of its meaning can have for the recognition of a broader horizon of rights.

Luc Boltanski, by contrast, approaches *agape* from a pragmatic sociological perspective. Starting from the observation that violence and injustice are often overcome not by justice but by exceptional acts of love, he argues that such gestures, though rare, deserve systematic attention (Boltanski, 2012, pp. 18–27). Behind social actions lie “regimes” or “models of competence”: ideal imperatives or moral horizons that orient agents’ behavior. Justice and love thus appear as quasi-metaphysical frameworks that shape the meaning and scope of actions. Boltanski distinguishes regimes of peace and dispute, organized either within equivalence or outside it (Boltanski, 2012, pp. 68–78). Against these, he identifies a regime of *agape*, revealed when ordinary people resist mere submission and criticize the status quo of social relations.

---

is proper to liberal states and the social practice of justice, the latter arises from the encounter with the other through friendship. Axel Honneth has seen in this reference to friendship, care, or neighborly love that is at the basis of the asymmetrical obligation to the other as an alternative to justice as equal treatment as understood in the Kantian tradition (Honneth, 2000, p. 153ff).

180 [“Wie die Solidarität insofern einen notwendigen Gegenpol zum Grundsatz der Gerechtigkeit bildet, als sie ihn auf partikularistische Weise mit den affektiven Impulsen der wechselseitigen Anteilnahme ausstattet, so stellt auf der anderen Seite die Fürsorge dessen ebenso notwendigen Gegenpol dar, weil sie ihn um ein Prinzip der einseitigen, vollkommen interessellosen Hilfeleistung ergänzt” (translated by S.G.)].

In the *agape*-regime, reciprocity understood as calculation or exchange is suspended. *Agape* is characterized by excess: gratitude for received gifts and the capacity to give without expecting return. Recognition here is tied to gratitude rather than reward; the donor is “reidentified” to be regarded with affection rather than compensated:

“Recognition can have meaning in *agape* only through reference to gratitude, which reidentifies the donor only to reconsider him or her with affection and not, obviously, to reward him or her for the trouble taken, as would be the case in a spirit of justice” (Boltanski, 2012, p. 148).

*Agape* thus becomes not only an alternative to violence but also to justice understood as equivalence. To make this notion operational in the social sciences, Boltanski explicitly secularizes *agape*, detaching it from its theological dimension (Boltanski, 2012, p. 100). This enables empirical description but leaves unanswered the question of its deeper normative grounding—precisely the point that Ricoeur, and later Taylor, will address.

Paul Ricoeur takes up the question of *agape* explicitly in the final part of *The Course of Recognition* (2005). The three studies of the book follow a trajectory from recognition as identification, through self-recognition in action, to mutual recognition. Hegel plays a decisive role because he does not suppress the negative moment of conflict; rather, conflict is the motor of progress. In Honneth’s reception of Hegel, however, Ricoeur detects the risk of a new “unhappy consciousness”: either an incurable sense of victimisation or the endless pursuit of unattainable ideals (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 218). Justice, as a response to violence, remains caught in what he calls “bad infinity”. To move beyond this impasse, Ricoeur seeks “peaceful experiences of mutual recognition” grounded in symbolic mediations that do not belong to the juridical or commercial order of exchange (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 219).<sup>181</sup>

*Agape* can be understood as precisely such a mediation. It involves gestures in which equivalence and counter-gift are suspended: acts of gratitude, forgiveness, or generosity that open new possibilities in

---

181 “The alternative to the idea of struggle in the process of mutual recognition is to be sought in peaceful experiences of mutual recognition, based on symbolic mediations as exempt from the juridical as from the commercial order of exchange” (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 219).

situations threatened by disrespect and cycles of revenge.<sup>182</sup> *Agape* acquires, in Ricoeur's hands, the status of symbol—ceremonial, generative, and horizon-opening. Its significance depends on the act itself, the recognition it receives, and the new temporal and spatial horizons it inaugurates. Willy Brandt's kneeling in Warsaw in 1970 is Ricoeur's paradigmatic example (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 245).

This account presupposes Ricoeur's broader symbolic anthropology. Across his work he develops an image of the "capable human being", who expresses meaning through action, narrative, and symbol. Human beings try, through symbolic gestures and language, less to describe reality univocally than to make sense of what they undergo. Already in his early reflections on evil he formulated the thesis that "the symbol gives rise to thought" (Ricoeur, 1967, p. 247). Symbols mediate a transfer from individual experience to shared memory and identity, opening a path between subjective experience and the determinations of the community (Ricoeur, 2004, pp. 119–121; Pellauer & Dauenhauer, 2021). When embodied in symbolic action, *agape* participates in this mediating function, reconfiguring how agents and communities understand themselves and one another.

Ricoeur's treatment of *agape* reaches its full depth in his attempt to "build a bridge between the poetics of love and the prose of justice, between the hymn and the formal rule" (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 32). He contrasts a logic of equivalence, illustrated by the Golden Rule, with a logic of superabundance, incarnated in the new commandment (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 34, 1989). Rather than suppressing their contrast, he shows that both are already at work within the very idea of justice, understood as a "regulative idea" pulled alternately by the "good" and the "legal" (Ricoeur, 2022, pp. 21–22). Love needs the mediation of just institutions to enter the practical and ethical

---

182 In order to give a definition, Ricoeur draws on recent research on the ethnology of the gift, counter-gift and gratuitousness, revisiting Boltanski (cf. Anspach, 2017; Davis, 2000; Hénaff, 2002; Mauss, 2021; see also Hénaff, 2020). The properly gratuitous act is the *agape*. *Agape* is not wholly distinct from the logic of giving and receiving. However, it does underline the moment of receiving as the key moment when the recipient of the gift (or of the help, the one who is loved through the act of charity) has to decide how to return the favor: "Instead of the obligation to give in return, it would be better, under the sign of *agape*, to speak of a response to a call coming from the generosity of the first gift" (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 243).

sphere; justice, in turn, needs love as a source if it is to avoid sliding into mere utilitarianism (cf. Hénaff, 2020, pp. 124–147; Domingo Moratalla, 2001). Such is the perspective of what he calls “common ethics in a religious perspective”, which maintains “the tension between unilateral love and bilateral justice and in the interpretation of one in terms of the other” (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 8).<sup>183</sup>

Ricoeur, however, is acutely aware of the fragility of symbolic mediation—gestures inspired by *agape*— can be misunderstood or instrumentalized (Hille, Romaniec, & Bosen, 2020)—raising the question whether symbolic mediation alone can sustain the normative claims attached to love and justice. Nevertheless, his account, together with those of Honneth and Boltanski, allows us to refine the sketch advanced above: love participates in the individual constitution of identity through basic affective relations; it blurs the boundary between private ethics and public morality; and it can serve as alternative or complement to justice, especially where entrenched conflicts need to be overcome. At the same time, the translation of *agape* into secular solidarity, affective regimes, or symbolic acts does not fully capture its dynamics. This raises the question whether the moral realism advocated by Taylor can provide a deeper and more adequate grounding for *agape*-based social and political action.

### 7.2. Agape in Taylor’s Politics of Recognition

The limitations observed in Honneth, Boltanski and Ricoeur—whether in restricting *agape* to the private sphere, reducing it to an affective regime, or confining it to symbolic mediation—invite the question of whether a deeper normative grounding is possible. At this point, Charles Taylor’s contribution becomes particularly relevant. Although *The Politics of Recognition* does not explicitly invoke *agape*, his broader philosophical framework provides the conceptual architecture within which an *agapic* moral source can be rendered intelligible as both normative and socially transformative.

---

183 [“Ce qu’on appelle « éthique chrétienne » ou, comme je préfère dire, l’éthique commune dans une perspective religieuse, consiste, selon moi, dans la tension entre l’amour unilatéral et la justice bilatérale et dans l’interprétation de l’une dans les termes de l’autre” (translated by S.G.).]

Taylor's moral realism, his account of strong evaluations, and his hermeneutical model of identity-formation all offer resources for understanding *agape* not merely as a motivational impulse or symbolic gesture, but as a moral ontology capable of reshaping political life.

Against the common criticism that Taylor's proposal is merely interpretive or descriptive, this section argues that the underlying normative and ontological foundations of his philosophy of recognition emerge only when situated within the full arc of his thought, including his metaethics and philosophy of religion. Once this broader horizon is restored, *agape* appears not as a sentimental addition but as the moral ontology that makes recognition, transformation, and the fusion of horizons possible.

But before turning to the specific elements of Taylor's account, it is important to clarify how he situates his politics of recognition within the broader liberal tradition. Taylor resists the accusation, frequently made by Habermas and others: "On closer examination, (...) Taylor's reading attacks the principles themselves and calls into question the individualistic core of the modern conception of freedom" (Habermas, 1994, p. 109). Taylor understands himself not as an anti-liberal communitarian but as a holistic liberal (cf. Taylor, 1995g; see also N. H. Smith, 2002), one who believes that the construction of individual and collective identity depends not only on universal principles but also on the articulation of goods and common meanings. For Taylor, standard liberalism errs in assuming an atomistic social ontology in which individuals are prior to communities and in which justice can be justified without recourse to substantial values (cf. Taylor, 1985c, 1985j, 1989a, pp. 193–194, 1992a, p. 56, 1995f).<sup>184</sup>

---

184 As Rosa points out, Taylor's concern in the social and political realm is the same concern he has for the private and ethical realm: to avoid buffered subjects: "Taylor's concern constantly applies to the cognitive, but also the political-social and even the emotional and existential 'closure' of the modern subject, its ultimate isolation from a world to which it only has causal and instrumental access. This concern eventually also motivates his sensitivity to the constitutive importance of relations of recognition, which is also grounded in Hegel and presumably reinforced by Axel Honneth. Recognition, Taylor notes, is not only complementary, but correlative and in this sense constitutive for the possibility of (successful) personal identity (Rosa, 2011, pp. 20–21) ["Taylors Sorge gilt durchgängig der kognitiven, aber auch der politisch-sozialen und sogar der emotionalen und existentiellen ›Schließung‹ des modernen Subjekts, seiner ultimativen Abschottung gegenüber einer Welt, zu der es

By contrast, *holistic liberalism* seeks “to obtrude issues about identity and community into the debate on justice” (Taylor, 1995g, pp. 186–187). The tension between individual rights and communal belonging is, for Taylor, internal to liberalism itself: its promise of universal dignity remains incomplete unless it recognizes the cultural and collective goods that constitute the identities of its citizens.

Recognition policies therefore aim to mitigate the negative effects of a blind application of liberal principles—equality, non-discrimination, neutrality—when these principles are applied without sensitivity to the substantive meanings through which individuals and groups understand themselves. Such policies need not break with liberalism; they extend it. Recognition becomes a mode of social solidarity and a means of fostering political cohesion in pluralistic societies. Taylor’s method for clarifying these tensions mirrors the broader hermeneutical strategy found throughout his work. He seeks to uncover the horizons of understanding that shape the positions in conflict, undertake a genealogical reconstruction of their historical antecedents, and recover forgotten moral sources that can point toward a “best possible account.” In *The Politics of Recognition*, this strategy highlights the importance of cultural goods, dialogical identity formation, and openness to the other as indispensable components of any viable liberalism. These themes, already central in *Sources of the Self*, provide the normative and ontological background necessary to grasp the full significance of recognition as a political project.

### 7.2.1. The dialogical nature of identity

The construction of modern identity has been at the very core of Taylor’s philosophical production. Actually, the construction of the personal identity of the modern subject is the main guiding thread

---

nur noch kausalen und instrumentellen Zugang hat. Diese Sorge motiviert letztlich auch seine Sensibilität für die ja ebenfalls bei Hegel grundgelegte konstitutive Bedeutung von Anerkennungsbeziehungen, die vermutlich noch durch Axel Honneth verstärkt wurde. Anerkennung, bemerkt Taylor, sei nicht nur komplementär, sondern korrelativ und in diesem Sinne konstitutiv für die Möglichkeit (gelingender) personaler Identität” (translated by S.G.).

of *Sources of the Self*. Two factors then defined identity. On the one hand, by “strong evaluations” and moral articulations:

“My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand” (Taylor, 1989a, p. 27)

On the other hand, Taylor notes how identity construction itself has “some reference to a defining community” (Taylor, 1989a, p. 36). The conception of one’s own identity needs the recognition of others: “We are formed by recognition” (Taylor, 1992a, p. 64). This is evident in how fairness is understood, as public recognition of difference to give everyone an equal chance to develop their own identity (cf. Taylor, 1992b, p. 50). Taylor is aware that when we talk about the construction of identity and the politics of recognition, we do so within a historical context in which the self-affirmation of the subject has a moral primacy (cf. Taylor, 1992b; see also Abbey, 2014). This desire in the subject for self-affirmation is what is known in Taylor’s thought as *authenticity*, which he presents as a moral ideal,<sup>185</sup> as the force behind notions of self-fulfillment which are operative in the present time.

In any case, the construction of one’s own community will not be, in Taylor, the fruit of one’s own efforts at self-definition, even if he speaks of a background of constitutive goods or a community or group that provides a framework. Identity is not constructed in a monological or atomistic way, as a subject facing the world making free choices, but relations of alterity play a fundamental role. If human identity is constructed dialogically, then the recognition of identity in the public sphere demands a politics that allows for public deliberation about the aspects of our identities that we actually or potentially share with other members of society. A genuinely multicultural society will be therefore constituted by this collective dialogue. Such a collective dialogue in the public sphere has to

---

185 As defined in *Ethics of Authenticity*, a moral ideal represents “a picture of what a better or higher mode of life would be, where ‘better’ and ‘higher’ are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we ought to desire” (Taylor, 1992b, p. 16)

take place around what Taylor calls “shared goods,” which will be discussed later.

The presence of the dialogical component as openness to the other is present in Taylor’s Philosophy from the importance of language acquisition in order to express oneself (Taylor, 1992a, p. 33, 1992b, pp. 81–91)<sup>186</sup> to the importance of the recognition of others in the construction of one’s own subjectivity, as Honneth also points out.<sup>187</sup>

In this perspective, openness to the other within intimate relationships carries the “imprint” of love: “On the intimate level, we can see how much an original identity needs and is vulnerable to the recognition given or withheld by significant others” (Taylor, 1992a, p. 36). Taylor mentions the need for love and care at the beginning of life to fulfil, but not to define, ourselves and the relationships of friendship and love, which “are also crucial because they are the crucibles of inwardly generated identity” (Taylor, 1992a, p. 36). On this point, then, he agrees with Honneth and Ricoeur. The role of the Other in the affirmation of one’s own identity and recognition is key. Without positive recognition on behalf of the others, without a dialogical construction, there is no *healthy* identity:

“The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or

---

186 In numerous works, Taylor embodies his view of how the primary function of language is to form a community of speech and is integral to the formation of the basic feeling of a common way of life (Taylor, 1985b, 1985d, 1995g, 2016). But, as Browne and Lynch explain, behind this image of language as a creator of community lies a clear influence of Hegel and his construction of intersubjectivity: “Taylor’s statement about the mutuality of conversation clearly brings out this position and how, in his view, it is through linguistic communication that we transcend the isolated standpoint of the single individual” (Browne & Lynch, 2018, p. 43). In any event, such isolation standpoint and the nomological character of the construction of one’s identity are not possible as long as language exists.

187 Like Honneth, the Hegelian basis is evident in how he thinks about recognition. Taylor acknowledges that he takes from Hegel, on the one hand, the link he weaves between identity and recognition: “we can flourish only to the extent that we are recognised”. On the other hand, as we shall see below, he also takes from Hegel his idea that society has to aspire to be a regime of reciprocal recognition among equals, “one in which there is a “we’ that is an ‘I’, and an ‘I’ that is a ‘we’” (Taylor, 1992a, p. 50).

society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (Taylor, 1992a, p. 25)

Taylor discusses here the negative consequences for the psychology of the individual and society as a whole of the lack of recognition. In a way, Taylor places himself in the path of interests of critical theory, pointing to the pathologies of modern societies, which he calls *malaises*, in line with an emancipatory and liberating philosophy (cf. Taylor, 1992b; N. H. Smith, 2021; Ikäheimo & Laitinen, 2011). But it does so by moving away from a vision of the subject who has to take charge of reality and mold it to his or her needs, as the Enlightenment attempted. Nor does the kind of recognition it advocates go beyond a liberation from normativity, like postmodern or poststructuralist theories (cf. Taylor, 1992c, p. 66, 1985e, 1988, 1989b). On the contrary, the articulation of constitutive goods, which bear a clearly normative status, is an integral part of the construction of identity, as we have seen above.

### 7.2.2. Inarticulation as a danger for recognition

When examining recognition policies in liberal states, Taylor observes that they often fall into an aporia: despite aiming at equality, they inadvertently generate new forms of inequality. In seeking to emphasize the equal dignity of citizens and ensure non-discrimination in plural societies, such policies frequently end up reinforcing the values of a dominant culture and overriding the cultural identities of minorities. Behind this conflict, there are two ways of understanding fairness. On the one hand, the Enlightenment conception of a principle of neutral and universal dignity for all human beings, which entails equal rights and duties for all. On the other hand, the increasing need for recognition of difference, which calls for recognition of the unique identity of an individual or group, that which distinguishes them from all others.

Taylor's point is that, in the face of equality, the *right to difference*, which also underlies the principle of universal equality, has been overlooked and disregarded. Egalitarian dignity aims to equalize everyone, and the politics of difference aims to escape assimilation into a dominant culture. Hence the emergence, in Taylor's sense, of contemporary "struggles for recognition." Pure liberals see any

positive discrimination as a betrayal or denial of the principle of equality, but claims for recognition in increasingly diverse and multicultural societies are growing—individuals and groups who feel discriminated against accuse pure liberalism of blindness.

In Taylor's argument, as mentioned above, the genealogy of the birth of this heightened interest in identity and the conflicts it entails is of great importance. For Taylor, the origin is to be found in shaping the "ethic of authenticity," which we presented above. But also, with the decline of the hierarchical society—paradigmatically manifested in Rousseau (2008) and Herder (1853)—the expectations of modern subjects to have their personal identity recognized increased. It is also to be found in the historical development of the concept of human dignity.<sup>188</sup> Certainly, the need for recognition as a necessary element of self-determination and self-fulfillment did not arise with the modern age. But in parallel with the demands for equality and greater autonomy, there was also a growing awareness of the conditions under which equality might fail.

### 7.3.3. The way out of the struggle: holistic liberalism and the articulation of collective goals

Taylor finds the way out of this conflict of interests and struggles for recognition in the assertion of certain goods that must be articulated, this time, in social practices. Indeed, the effective establishment of equality, justice and personal dignity were collective goals that accompanied the end of the *ancien régime* and the hierarchical social model. As he studied in-depth in *Sources of the Self*, the result was an

---

188 The historical origin of this concept of dignity is to be found, according to Taylor, in the collapse of social hierarchies and the ethics of honor at the end of the Middle Ages and its replacement by social equality (Taylor, 1992a, pp. 26–27, 1992b, p. 46, 2007b, p. 45,80–81). Specifically, Taylor draws a genealogical line running from Rousseau to Kant and on to current liberal theories such as those of John Rawls (1999) or Ronald Dworkin (1977; cf. Taylor, 1992a, p. 44ff). For Rousseau, true equality is achieved through reciprocity in public recognition only after the concern for reputation and honor is completely overcome. Instead, his error would be that the general will would be profoundly homogenizing and leave no room for difference. He also finds in Kant this homogenization or assimilation in his idea of autonomy and in his approach to a set of rights that can be universally applied regardless of cultural context.

excessive focus on principles and rules and the neglect of visions of the good and of what is valuable in itself (cf. Taylor, 1989a, p. 84).

The collateral effect of this expansion of the rights of individuals was the closure of public space to ethical debate about the good life and to the richness of cultural differences in their different visions of the good: "A liberal society must remain neutral on the good life, and restrict itself to ensuring that however they see things, citizens deal fairly with each other and the state deals equally with all" (Taylor, 1992a, p. 57). In return, liberalism raises a strong procedural commitment to justice and equal treatment of all citizens (cf. Dworkin, 1977). But what is neglected in this process in modern society is the material good represented by the conceptions of the good life in different cultures and religions, which are important for the construction of individual and group identities. Thus, in the next step, Taylor looks at the "survival" of certain groups and calls it a "collective good". He looks in particular at Quebec society and its policies of affirming French culture as a concrete way of actively creating identity through public policies and positive discrimination measures. Thus, identity, the search for the good and liberalism are united in Taylor's *holistic liberalism*. As mentioned above, the notion of *holistic liberalism* is a kind of liberalism that, without abandoning proceduralism and neutrality in some respects, advocates for certain goods that are of vital importance for society and for the identity of some of its members (cf. Taylor, 1995g, pp. 197–198).

Taylor maintains that these goods not only need to be identified and acknowledged explicitly (cf. Taylor, 1990c, p. 99ff); they must also be articulated and sustained in the public sphere. Public discourse indeed plays an essential role in keeping these goods operative. However, collective goods are manifested in practice. Hence, in a first step, discourses that seek recognition of groups or cultures within society seek to broaden the meaning of justice as fairness and as demand for "chances for everyone to develop their own identity" (Taylor, 1992b, p. 50) by first pointing out that difference is indeed a common good.<sup>189</sup> Thus,

---

189 Excessive individualism, the fruit of the development of modernity itself, always jeopardizes another of its achievements, the common good. This tension is reflected again in his recent writings where, focusing on the recent debate on meritocracy brought by Michael Sandel (2020), Taylor talks about how "Fo-

## 7. Agape and the Politics of Recognition

“to come together on a mutual recognition of difference (...) requires that we share more than a belief in this principle; we have to share also some standards of value on which the identities concerned check out as equal. There must be some substantive agreement on value, or else the formal principle of equality will be empty and a sham (...). Recognising difference, like self-choosing, requires a horizon of significance, in this case a shared one” (Taylor, 1992b, p. 52).

As Laitinen has seen, this horizon of shared meaning to which Taylor alludes can already be the basis of universal moral solidarity:

“whether or not we are participants in the same democratic state as full citizens, or in the same public sphere as discussants, or in the same economy as workers, employers, consumers, or exchangers, or in the same society as “social citizens” or peers, we all are members of the ideal moral community” (Laitinen, 2015, p. 103).

This kind of moral solidarity, of a universal community, can take two different paths, as do the different forms of recognition that we have seen, especially in Boltanski and Ricoeur: the direction of mutual respect and tolerance, which would be more a matter of justice; and the direction of solidarity understood as esteem and love. Still, identifying collective goods is only the first step. One of the problems that have been pointed out with this approach to public discourse is that, despite the “substantive agreement” in what he has elsewhere called “irreducibly social goods” (Taylor, 1995h), the truth is that in many cases, the identification of those goods often fails to converge (cf. Helfer, 2012).

As we shall see below, Taylor will aspire to a second form when alluding to the “fusion of horizons” to meet demands for recognition and building community. The task of identifying collective goods will be just the first step. For one of the problems that has been pointed out with this approach to public discourse is that, despite the “substantive agreement” in what he has elsewhere called “irreducibly social goods” (Taylor, 1995h), the truth is that in many

---

ocusing on personal success also obscures the public good” (Taylor & Calhoun, 2022) and how meritocracy as a framework by which people give meaning to their lives leads to disregarding the contribution of others and of the community itself to one’s own success. This new step in the culture of “authenticity” also moves away from the sense of social responsibility and philanthropy that great fortunes have traditionally had with respect to civil society.

cases, the identification of those goods often fails to converge (cf. Helfer, 2012). That is, for instance, whenever not all actors or groups involved in society consider the protection of a minority through specific measures to be a social good or a collective goal. The fact is that maintaining the path of justice and mutual respect does not in itself guarantee social peace: conflicts often remain latent, if not constantly exposed, in the political debate.

For this reason, Taylor argues that a second path of recognition is required—one that surpasses the limits of procedural justice and mere respect. This path appeals to the possibility of a fusion of horizons, in which agents and communities open themselves to new meanings that reconfigure the terms of conflict. Here *agape* becomes relevant as a moral source that can ground a more robust form of universal solidarity: one that does not arise merely from negotiating principles or achieving consensus, but from a deeper engagement with the goods and aspirations that shape the identities involved.

#### 7.3.4. The fusion of horizons

Taylor's *holistic liberalism* seeks to “bring sight back” to a liberalism that has become “blind” to both cultural difference and the articulation of shared goods.<sup>190</sup> *Holistic liberalism*, therefore, seeks to go beyond the procedural liberalism of rights and what he calls the “politics of equal respect” (Taylor, 1992a, p. 60). Plain liberalism “insists on uniform application of the rules” and “it is suspicious of collective goals” (ibid.). Holistic liberalism in recognition debates must move away from the procedural standardization of rights that are not fundamental. And it must also meddle with judgments about the good life—“judgments in which the integrity of cultures has an important place” (Taylor, 1992a, p. 61).

Taylor justifies his attack on procedural liberalism because he too naively understands public space as neutral. Yet this neutrality is hardly fictitious because it is itself a source of discrimination, conflict and struggle, and because of the difficulty after so many years to achieve integration and recognition. Moreover, as it says

---

190 This critique of the blindness of liberalism is also made by Michael Sandel (1998) and Alasdair MacIntyre (2007).

elsewhere, referring to public institutions, “the state’s neutrality is (...) not complete” (Maclure & Taylor, 2011, p. 17) because, although the state cannot identify with any principle, it must take sides to promote the equality and neutrality of the state.

Anyway, the possibility of resolving struggles for recognition begins with what Taylor calls an “act of faith”, a “presumption”. It is akin to the “hunch” in favor of theism as the best moral motivator for solidarity. It is thus an act of *agape*-love, as we want to understand it. It is an initial hypothesis that overcomes conflict and the struggle for recognition through an attitude of openness to the other regardless of whether or not the cultural aspects that are important for the affirmation of the subjects’ identity clash directly with affirmed rights for all. The only non-negotiable limit, in any case, is fundamental rights. This act of faith begins with the following presupposition: “The claim is that all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings” (Taylor, 1992a, p. 66).

It is an openness to the other based on the predisposition to always see something valuable in any culture or person. There is always something worth discovering, admiring and protecting. In the individual, it is dignity, and with regard to cultures, something that has to do with the humanity we all share and the goods that articulate it. This openness to the other is more than a wish and needs to be actually put into practice. Hence, it is understood by Taylor from Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*) (Taylor, 1992a, p. 67; Gadamer, 1975, pp. 289–290). Taylor applies this central concept of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics to ethics and intercultural communication.

According to this concept, humanities and social sciences can gain knowledge by broadening their awareness of history and tradition. In Gadamer’s view, the process of historical understanding (of a text) can be described as an attempt to enter into dialogue with it by connecting one’s own horizon (or background) of understanding at the present time, with one’s own standards and prejudices, with the historical horizon of the text. Opening up to this horizon does not imply abandoning one’s own present time but entering into “the great horizon, which can be moved from within, [which] encompasses the depth of history of our self-consciousness beyond

the limits of the present" (Gadamer, 1975, pp. 287–288).<sup>191</sup> Thus, no "closed horizons" would anchor the observer to a certain position. Nor would there be fixed opinions in this dialogue because it is expected that this process of broadening horizons will gradually undo particularities and previous notions.

In Gadamer, we also read that "openness to the other thus includes the recognition that I must allow something in myself to be valid against me, even if there were no one else to assert it against me" (Gadamer, 1975, pp. 343–344).<sup>192</sup> In the same sense, Taylor says, "We have reached the judgment partly through transforming our standards" (Taylor, 1992a, p. 67), referring now to the recognition of other cultures. Here lies the proper understanding of the other and recognition, according to Taylor: one cannot understand the other without modifying one's own understanding. That is, proper understanding always has a cost for our identity. Nevertheless, in any case, to understand others better is to understand oneself better (cf. Taylor, 1985k) and to understand the other's point of view better: "understanding other societies ought to wrench us out of this: it ought to alter our self-understanding" (Taylor, 1985h, p. 129). Conversely, understanding another culture is inseparable from its critique, but this, in turn, is inseparable from self-criticism. Taylor speaks of a basal empathy that serves for interpretation and better understanding (*verstehen*). But without necessarily adopting the other's point of view, because it is expected of the Other that, through the exchange, he will also better understand his or her own point of view and criticize and abandon certain preconceptions.

In this approach, there is a combination of empathy and strangeness: everyone remains in their self-descriptions, but these are expected to change, making distance from his/her standpoint. Moreover, the transformative capacity of this fusion of horizons lies in this play of openness and closedness, of self-definition and empathy towards the other. As we shall see when talking about transcendence, this capacity for openness and transformation characterizes

---

191 ["[...]den einen großen, Von innen her beweglichen Horizont, der über die Grenzendes Gegenwärtigen hinaus die Geschichtstiefe unseres Selbstbewußtseins umfaßt" (translated by S.G)].

192 ["Offenheit für den anderen schließt also die Anerkennung ein, daß ich in mir etwas gegen mich gelten lassen muß, auch wenn es keinen anderen gäbe, der es gegen mich geltend machte" (ranslated by S.G)].

*agape* as a potential transformer of the individual and society. *Agape* appears here in this dialectic enabling a change “which goes beyond any possible mutuality, a self-giving not bounded by some measure of fairness” (Taylor, 2007, p. 430).

But it is not only the transformative potential behind the *fusion of horizons* that is attractive to Taylor. His commitment to it can be explained by its potential for overcoming lasting conflicts. But the end of struggle and conflict must also involve overcoming the potential lack of convergence with regard to social goods. What facilitates it is the contact with what Taylor calls “deep incommensurability”, which he finds in the “human meanings”—ethical, moral or spiritual meanings at the cultural level—faced in the processes of intercultural dialogue mediated by the fusion of horizons (2011m, p. 28; 2015, p. 108).

An explanation of what “human meanings” are for Taylor is to be found both in *Understanding the Other* (2011m) and in *Retrieving Realism* (2015, pp. 102–130). Comparing Gadamer’s fusion of horizons to Donald Davidson’s (1984) *principle of charity*<sup>193</sup>, he argues that Gadamer avoids the danger of ethnocentrism inherent in making the other intelligible only by assimilating them to our own criteria. When confronted with “constitutive dimensions of language” (2015, p. 122), that express forms of life irreducible to our conceptual scheme, Taylor rejects the aspiration to radical translation or full interpretation. He instead acknowledges that there are “incommensurable schemes” and meanings “not intertranslatable” (2015, p. 119). These limit the extent to which another culture can be fully captured in our language.

There will always be a limit of incommensurability, beyond which any culture, any person, cannot be described or interpreted in a language other than his or her own (Taylor, 1985g, p. 120).<sup>194</sup> Taylor

---

193 Roughly put, the principle of charity says that, when interpreting someone, you have no choice but to ascribe to her overall logicity and rationality and beliefs and utterances which are mostly true. Thomas Bedorf compares Taylor’s fusion of horizons with the principle of charity in Quine’s version (Bedorf, 2010, p. 39; see also Quine, 1980). However, as Taylor points out, there are fundamental differences between Gadamer and the principle of charity, whether in Quine’s or Davidson’s versions. For the different versions of the principle of charity, see (Feldman, 2016).

194 Behind the notion of incommensurability lies the basis of one of the latest

speaks of a “language of perspicuous contrasts” that should be the basis of mutual understanding (Taylor, 1985l, p. 125), a language distinct from ours and the other’s: “this would be a language in which we could formulate both their way of life and ours as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both” (Taylor, 1985l, p. 125). It is a language that allows us to understand our practices in relation to our own. But there can be no such interpretation without a thorough knowledge of the foundations of our culture and without access to the goods considered common that constitute a certain normativity within a culture. Ultimately, however, to understand better is to welcome the other better, to articulate better. As Carlos Gutiérrez says of Taylor: “to understand is to transform fate into freedom” (Gutiérrez, 2020, p. 214).<sup>195</sup>

Gadamer’s *fusion of horizons*, as adapted by Taylor, thus attempts to understand the language of another culture—or of another historical period—beyond mere description, employing the constitutive and articulatory function of language. “We have to see,” Taylor

---

disputes between Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor over the role of religion in the public sphere (Judith Butler, Mendieta, & VanAntwerpen, 2011; see also Habermas & Taylor, 2009; Holzienkemper, 2016; Rosa, 2019a). While the two maintain an increasingly convergent stance on the role of religion in secular or post-secular society, divergences can be perceived in the type of reception and attention to religious traditions in the public sphere. These differences can be seen in the different notions of “translation” (Habermas) and “articulation” (Taylor). Habermas’ ‘post-secular’ approach recognizes the continuing global vitality of religion and stresses the importance of ‘translating’ the ethical insights contained in religious traditions into a ‘post-metaphysical’ philosophical perspective. The post-secular stance regards religious sources of meaning and motivation as an indispensable ally for the critical work of philosophy but always stresses the crucial difference between faith and knowledge, despite shared genealogies (Habermas, 2003, 2005, 2012, 2013, 2019a; Habermas & Ratzinger, 2005; Costa, 2019, pp. 150–181; Endreß, 2012; Mendieta, 2010; Reder, 2008, 2013, pp. 74–128; Ricken, 2008; J. Schmidt, 2008; T. Schmidt, 2014, 2020; Wisman, 2014). Taylor has continually argued in his conversations with Habermas in favor of ending the treatment of religion as a ‘special case’ (Butler et al., 2011, p. 37) and no longer distinguishing religion as something else from non-religious views. Taylor’s point relies on the collective goods of a society and their articulation to balance freedom of conscience and equality of respect (Maclure & Taylor, 2011). These collective goods are, in a sense, untranslatable. But they need to be identified and recognized in order to be enjoyed to their full potential (Taylor, 1990c, p. 99; cf. Abbey, 2000, pp. 118–121).

195 “comprender es transformar el destino en libertad” (translated by S.G.)

writes, “how they can bring a certain horizon of concern to a certain articulation” (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015, p. 124). This requires assuming a connection between different cultural interpretations: a shared horizon of significance. Such a horizon is accessible only through the culturally mediated articulation of the *human meanings* that shape our conceptions of the good, the sacred, ordinary life, solidarity, and neighborly love. These “constitutive goods—features of ourselves, or the world, or God, such that their being what they are is essential to the life goods being good” (Taylor, 2011b, p. 10, see also 1989a, pp. 91–107) —are, in a broad sense, shared, though always accessed through the mediations of culture, language, and self-understanding (Taylor, 2011m, pp. 27–28).

In this sense, Taylor’s vision in the field of recognition is coherent with his moral realism.<sup>196</sup> It is also transformative as a social and political proposal since it understands the way out of social struggles and conflicts between groups as a transformation of everyone’s perspectives and horizons. The approach to other ways of life must entail broadening one’s own horizons of understanding of the world and of normativity and facilitating the recognition of what is good, valid and admirable in any culture.

For some, however, this transformative potential is not enough. Michael Haus, for example, interprets Taylor’s approach as yielding

---

196 There is a major difference between Taylor and Gadamer, i.e. between Taylor’s moral realism and Gadamer’s hermeneutics: while Taylor assumes that we all make qualitative ethical distinctions, Gadamer insists on the impossibility of understanding incommensurability, as well as hierarchising our understanding: “Suffice it to say that one understands differently, if one understands at all” (Gadamer, 1975, pp. 280–281) [“Es genügt zu sagen, daß man anders versteht, wenn man überhaupt versteht” (translated by S.G.)]. Moreover, Taylor does open up a certain hierarchy of understandings when he accepts Gadamer’s historical perspective, albeit with a Hegelian tinge. For Taylor, it is possible to see social situations as more “advanced” or “backward” than others: there is undoubtedly a history of the progress of reason to be celebrated. It, therefore, gives rise to a certain direction of history and a certain understanding of potentiality. It is a potentiality that, unlike Hegel, is not a single line of potential revelation in fixed stages but a potentiality that manifests itself in each culture differently. This different potentiality, the differentiated development in cultures regarding the articulation of goods important for human flourishing, is the origin of the diversity and conflict of goods in plural societies. But it is also—and here he is indeed entirely Gadamerian—the possibility of broadening the horizons of understanding (cf. Taylor, 1995i).

a merely ecumenical “reconciled diversity” (Haus, 2011, p. 211),<sup>197</sup> which may open moral space for solidarity and mutual obligation but does not, in his view, guarantee structural transformation. We contend, however, that this moral space—precisely the space of *agape*—can itself be transformative, as argued above. The relative brevity of Taylor’s discussion of the fusion of horizons may obscure the strength of his insight. Read within the wider context of Taylor’s work, the *fusion of horizons* gains depth through his metaethics and reflections on religious sources. *Agape*, understood as a constitutive good articulated within our moral commitments, can provide the normative motivation necessary for such a fusion. Despite its historical transformations, *agape* remains, at least within Western cultures, an operative moral source capable of facilitating encounters across difference and generating new horizons of understanding and coexistence.

### 7.3. The Good and the Right

The reference to collective goods that must be articulated to ensure that liberal policies do not exclude anyone or hide ethnocentric prejudices introduces us to another of the issues of *agape*-based politics, namely, whether love is a source of grounding for social practices in possible contrast to justice. We thus enter an ontological dimension of the phenomenon of recognition.

As in the works of Honneth, Boltanski and Ricoeur, Taylor also points to a dialectical relationship between the right and the good. In particular, he starts from the priority of the good, or rather, of the various “goods of life” and “constitutive goods” over issues of justice, as Ricoeur does:

“It is necessary, then, that the theory of justice proceeds from types of goods and types of common practices that tend to procure these goods that people have or seek in a given society. Ethical theory must understand the given practice; it cannot be abstracted” (Taylor, 1990b, p. 76).<sup>198</sup>

197 “versöhnte Verschiedenheit” (translated by S.G.)

198 [“Es preciso, entonces, que la teoría de la justicia parta de tipos de bienes y de tipos de prácticas comunes que tiendan a procurar estos bienes que la

The way in which justice theory avoids abstraction when it comes to practice is by articulating the goods that lie behind agents' social practices, also the goods that they choose, appreciate, pursue, and desire at the individual level. These include those collective goods that are important for the formation of a person's identity, such as the culture of belonging, friendship, or fraternal spirit.

For Taylor, the relation between justice and the good is a flexible, non-codified, non-proceduralized relation. At a theoretical level, the articulation of the good has to precede the elaboration of any theory of justice. Articulation is, at any rate, inescapable: any theory of justice based on rules and procedures recognizes a hierarchy of goods, even if it does not make it explicit. Behind the binding force of legal procedures and codes, there is a certain understanding of human life and, therefore, a certain conception of the good. As he reminds Habermas, any theory that gives primacy to the right over the good is actually based on a notion of the good. This appears in the need to articulate that conception of the good in order to make its motivations explicit. Furthermore, it would be incoherent or dangerously superficial to hold a theory of justice that denies that it has this grounding in the good (cf. Taylor, 1991a; see also Hoyeek, 2021).

On a practical level, the precedence of the good ensures that the demands of justice do not destroy other important goods. However, Taylor offers no criteria to establish clearly under what circumstances the good takes precedence over justice or when the opposite is the case, beyond a few allusions.<sup>199</sup> As Taylor points out, putting

---

gente tiene o busca en una sociedad dada. La teoría ética debe comprender la práctica dada; no puede hacer abstracción" (translated by S.G.).

199 In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor identifies three ways of understanding the priority of the right over the good. (1) In some cases, the primacy of justice over the good is justified—for example, in Kant's critique of the good understood merely as welfare in utilitarianism. (2) In other cases, however, restricting morality exclusively to obligatory actions ends up denigrating substantive conceptions of the good, as in Rawls's "thin theory of the good," which neglects the qualitative distinctions agents intuitively make and fails to articulate a "thick" account of the (cf. Taylor, 1989a, pp. 88–89, see also 1985m; Rawls, 1999, p. 160, see also 160ff) (3) Taylor also notes a third view—"hubristic and self-destructive"—in which the right is given categorical priority in a way that reduces love of neighbor to sheer obligation, thereby eclipsing the agent's own fulfillment and distorting the nature of love and *agape* (Taylor, 1989a, p. 533;

the claims of justice first at all times would lead to a severe deterioration of social goods. An excessive proceduralist ethos that demands justice at every moment and insists on an exhaustive definition of rights would lead to a negative spiral that would undo the bonds of cohesion in society. This is why the norm of justice cannot be detached from the conditions of its application, i.e., articulation—in Taylor’s case, how people and cultures value and make decisions in the light of what they consider to be good.

One criticism made of Taylor is that there is no such neglect of the good and the good life when the focus of the critical power of philosophy focuses on the overcoming of injustice as Will Kymlicka does. What has been abandoned are the “qualitative distinctions”, and that was for a great relief: with the advent of Modernity, there has been no longer the identification of a list of substantive goods that could be imposed almost in an authoritarian fashion. The turn in modern moral philosophy has been more in the direction of the elaboration of “discovery procedures”, that is, “what sorts of social conditions are best suited to enabling individuals to make these judgments [on the matter of good-life]<sup>200</sup> on an on-going basis” (Kymlicka, 1991, p. 162). The good resides in the procedure. Furthermore, the good life is made possible based on this procedure so that everyone in a plural society can find a way to flourish.

At the end of his commentary, Kymlicka turns his interest to the dilemma of high modern moral standards of justice or solidarity and the inability to achieve them without articulating constitutive goods. His point is particularly interesting because Kymlicka brings Taylor’s hitherto metaethical arguments into the realm of politics. And it can help us to answer the place of the good in the discernment of situations that have to do with justice. Kymlicka, focusing on the demands of the Black people, says that these are not just the claims of a discriminated part of society by the dominant whites. Rather, it is an issue that concerns us all. That is why we should not try to find ways to persuade whites to show solidarity with the worst-off part

---

see also García Caladín, 2012). Across these modes, Taylor stresses that any attempt to adjudicate conflicts between justice and competing goods ultimately requires *phronesis*, since no procedural criteria can fully determine how such goods ought to be balanced in practice (cf. Taylor, 1985m, 1989a, p. 125, 1990a, 2007b, pp. 704–705, 2011f, p. 348; see also Aristotle, 2009, Book VI).

200 Added by S.G.

and motivate them to make great sacrifices. Instead, it would be a matter of finding coercive procedures to force the most reluctant to give up their advantages:

“Where individuals are unable to comply with moral norms, we do not change the norms, we simply try to ensure that someone else will compel their compliance. In these cases, morality is not about empowering individuals to act morally, but about constraining individuals from acting immorally. A functioning moral society must not only empower those who are able to act morally, it must also disempower those who are unable to act morally. Taylor focuses solely on the first. But modern moral philosophers accept the necessity of the second” (Kymlicka, 1991, pp. 174–175).

Therefore, if our moral standards are high or our demands for justice are right, and we are faced with resistance from some parts of society to the development of equality or fair distribution (and the same in the international system), then we have to devise mechanisms of coercion to get them to go down that path. This is a justified use of force and coercion on the basis of justice, which, in Kymlicka’s view, contains in itself the good of the state, the good of society, and the good of the people.<sup>201</sup>

Taylor’s response reaffirms his argument and shows how his conception of the good, which has to do with the good life, is anchored in his anthropological view of how goods are articulated. Specifically, he responds to the argument that “there is something chilling in Kymlicka’s willingness to resort to ‘the coercive power of the state’, as though principles could be established as valid and binding, independent of the conditions of their application” (Taylor, 1991b, p. 244).

Taylor reproaches Kymlicka that, as he identifies himself as a proceduralist, he does not have the resources to, first, rank the different demands of justice—all questions of justice can be equally vital and serious—and, second, that proceduralists “don’t give enough attention to the good to determine whether and when the

---

201 It is the same argument from Hume that Taylor takes from his reading of Sandel in his discussion of Rawls’ invocation of the Humean “conditions of justice”: “According to Hume, justice is a relevant virtue when there are scarcities, and people are not spontaneously moved by tics of affection to mutual benevolence” (Taylor, 1995g, p. 183).

moral principles they offer ought to be modified to accommodate its demands” (Taylor, 1991, p. 245). The big problem that Taylor sees is that in pursuing compliance, goods that are important to the individual may be sacrificed. Specifically, Taylor refers to “collective goods”: “community spirit, friendship, or traditional identity” (Taylor, 1991b, p. 244).<sup>202</sup> Correct identification of collective goods would avoid the excesses of proceduralism like Kymlicka’s. Therefore, this normative moment must prevail, chronologically and substantively, over the formal application of procedures, even if the intention is well-meaning.

## 7.4. Agape and the end of violence

It remains to explain how we can understand the end of violence and, with it, of the struggle for recognition in Taylor’s thought. As we have pointed out in this chapter, a paradox in identity politics is that they can fall into the “bad infinity” denounced by Ricoeur. Even inclusion policies, when grounded in the legitimacy of popular sovereignty, can reproduce the exclusions that provoke violence. This is something that Taylor also remarks: “the dynamics of democracy also often push towards group rivalry and exclusion, and it is precisely this circumstance in which identity struggles are based” (Taylor, 1999d, p. 24, see also 1997b).<sup>203</sup>

The solution, for Taylor, is to construct a form of shared identity among citizens—what we have already described as a fusion of horizons. In his article on *Faith and Identity*, Taylor speaks of “collective agency” (*kollektiver Handlungsinstanz*), understood under the paradigm of popular sovereignty that can make all citizens, different from each other, identify with the state.<sup>204</sup> In his solution, religion

202 In the same allusion as in the previous footnote, Taylor paraphrases Sandel’s argument: “trying to enforce a rule will quite possibly disrupt the existing ties: to insist punctiliously on sharing expenses with a friend is to imply that the links of mutual benevolence are somehow lacking or inadequate. There is no faster way of losing friends” (Taylor, 1995h; cf. Sandel, 1998, p. 35).

203 [Dennoch drängt die Dynamik der Demokratie häufig auch in Richtung Gruppenrivalität und Ausschließung, und eben dieser Umstand ist es, der den Identitätskämpfen zugrunde liegt (translated by S.G.)].

204 Taylor has dealt with issues of collective identity in (Taylor, 1996a). In any

can play a role especially in contexts where the religion of minorities plays a role in the construction of their identity as distinct from that of the majority: “where exclusion and violence are driven by identity struggles supposedly fought in the name of religion, the most effective antidote may be genuine piety that strives to save faith from its shameful exploitation by extremists” (Taylor, 1999d, p. 37).<sup>205</sup>

In this sense, Taylor strongly argues that “good” religion, grounded in authentic religiosity, can help overcome violence and exclusion:

“Contrary to the beliefs of secular liberals, weakening religious faith or piety would perhaps not be a boon. On the contrary, it would remove even the last barriers of conscience for cold-blooded murderers. Yes, where exclusion and violence are driven by identity struggles supposedly fought in the name of religion, the most effective antidote may be genuine piety that strives to save faith from its shameful exploitation by extremists” (Taylor, 1999d, p. 36).<sup>206</sup>

It is in this context of the role of religion in today’s politics that the dialectic between justice and love is found in Taylor. But even if there is a positive religiosity committed to the end of violence and love of neighbor, what history reveals is that often the notion of the sacred has been linked to the use or justification of violence. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor examines this phenomenon through René

---

case, his concern with collective agency goes back to his studies of Hegel. In particular, Taylor points to Hegel’s implicit critique of the atomistic conception of modern thought. The stressing of individuality over community and an overly individual-centred epistemology is an unwarranted abstraction in which much is lost along the way (see Taylor, 1979, pp. 84–92).

205 [Ja, wo Ausschließung und Gewalt von vermeintlich im Namen der Religion ausgetragenen Identitätskämpfen angetrieben wird, mag das wirksamste Gegengift echte Frömmigkeit sein, die bestrebt ist, den Glauben vor seiner schändlichen Ausbeutung durch Extremisten zu retten” (translated by S.G.)].

206 [“Im Gegensatz zu den Überzeugungen der weltlich orientierten Liberalen würde eine Schwächung des religiösen Glaubens oder der Frömmigkeit vielleicht keine Wohltat darstellen. Im Gegenteil, sie würde noch die letzten Gewissensschranken für kaltblütige Mörder beseitigen. Ja, wo Ausschließung und Gewalt von vermeintlich im Namen der Religion ausgetragenen Identitätskämpfen angetrieben wird, mag das wirksamste Gegengift echte Frömmigkeit sein, die bestrebt ist, den Glauben vor seiner schändlichen Ausbeutung durch Extremisten zu retten” (translated by S.G.)].

Girard's reflections on mimetic conflict and the religious origins of violence (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 624, 821 note 64; Girard, 1977, 1986, 2001). Taylor extends Girard's insights by applying archaic patterns of violence to modern democracies and their exclusionary moral orders (See also Taylor, 1992b, 1999d, 2011n; Kühnlein, 2011, pp. 418–438).

Girard emphasizes the persistence of violence in liberal societies despite the social contract. He traces this to violent mimetic desire regulated by the *scapegoat mechanism*, which transforms a struggle of all against all into a struggle of all against one (cf. Kühnlein, 2011, p. 420). The foundational murder and the scapegoat reveal both the link between crisis and violence and the kind of peace on which many social orders—ancient and modern—have been built: the exclusion of one part of society by another (cf. Taylor, 2022b, p. 37ff).

Charles Taylor has taken Girard's arguments seriously.<sup>207</sup> As early as 1996, he said:

“The only way to escape fully the draw toward violence lies somewhere in the turn to transcendence—that is, through the full-hearted love of some good beyond life. A thesis of this kind has been put forward by René Girard, for whose work I have a great deal of sympathy although I don't agree on the centrality he gives to the scapegoat phenomenon” (Taylor, 1999b, pp. 28–29).<sup>208</sup>

Like Girard, Taylor believes that one can escape violence only through openness to transcendence. Violence—especially “categorical violence”—is, for Taylor, rooted in meta-biological forces that operate within the realm of meaning. Only a “redefinition or transformation of this meaning (...) might take us beyond it” (Taylor, 2007, p. 673, see also 658–660). Yet Taylor is not naïve: returning to the spiritual origins of religion, including *agape*, does not automatically solve the problem of violence (See, for instance, Taylor, 2011d, 2019). Religion contains this “virus” of fascination with death, violence and exclusion through the very anthropological nature of *homo religiosus* (cf. Taylor, 1996b, p. 13).

207 For a summary of the relationship between Charles Taylor and René Girard, see (Palaver, 2010, 2017).

208 It is noteworthy that in *A Secular Age*, he reproduces the same paragraph when analyzing the problem of violence but no longer incorporates the formulation of his distance from scapegoat theory (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 639).

We therefore need some mode of access to transcendence that allows us both to account for the historical entanglement of religion and violence and to overcome it. For Taylor, this is precisely the place of *agape*. Its strength lies in the fact that: “[its] power lies not in suppressing the madness of violent categorization, but in transfiguring it in the name of a new kind of common world” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 710).

Taylor also observes that *scapegoating mechanisms* infiltrate many ostensibly liberating secular movements, often through new forms of exclusion or forced assimilation, sometimes rationalized with the “good conscience” of just intentions (see, for example, Taylor, 2007, p. 686, also 456, 612, 1999b, 2011e, 2008). As shown, for example, in the French Revolution: in it, the sacred slaughter is now shown to be increasingly “more rational (directed against targets that really deserve it), clean, clinical and technological (the guillotine), and to bring about the real reign of good” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 687). In pursuing the highest good, modernity often repeats the very violence it seeks to eliminate.

Morality tends to rationalize these processes and even codifies them, creating new scapegoating mechanisms, this time within a disenchanted and rationalized modern moral order. As a result, violence persists unnoticed, despite the belief that globalization or economic growth will bring peace and prosperity (cf. Taylor, 2007, p. 708). And it is not to be counted on anymore with the nobility and dedication previously exercised by dedicated warriors (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 689, also 657). Added to this is the lack of articulation of moral goods and the lack of contact of the rules with the sources, in addition to the history itself of the disruption of the social balance and the secularization of *agape*.

It seems a hopeless story. In any case, what is clear is that neither a detached humanism, that is, closed to transcendence nor a religion freed from scapegoats can stop the atavistic violence of the human being. Taylor finds the way out of the dilemma of violence in openness to transcendence, in what he calls the “vertical dimension,” the dimension that allows for “reconciliation and trust” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 706) as understood by the Christian tradition. For Taylor, one’s openness to this vertical dimension reveals the depth of one’s moral motivation—the extent to which individuals and societies can live

up to high standards of human rights, universal solidarity, and the integration of others.

The horizontal dimension—where justice operates—cannot, for Taylor, escape scapegoating mechanisms. True reconciliation and trust belong to the vertical dimension, which requires disengagement from rigid codes of justice and openness to an eschatological horizon “beyond any merely intra-historical perspective of possible reconciliation” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 706). The vertical dimension, moreover, appeals to the perspective of “motivational conversion”, which places *agape*-love in a dialectical position with justice. Openness to the dimensions of reconciliation and trust—which Taylor understands to be present in the Gospel and the Christian tradition—<sup>209</sup> overcomes the merely procedural perspective of justice and the atavistic violence behind it:

“For clearly moving higher in the dimension of reconciliation and trust involves a kind of motivational conversion, and ability to forgo the satisfactions of retribution, or the security which comes from keeping a distrustful distance from the neighbor. It involves people bonding in a new way, whether this vertical path we are moving along is understood in a Christian way or not” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 707)

The context in which Taylor refers to overcoming violence and exclusion by the openness to verticality with detachment from codes is the appeal to the sources of motivation for high moral standards of

---

209 Taylor, however, does not want to defend a hegemonic Christianity in relation to other cultures and religions. Undoubtedly, Taylor acknowledges the transformative character of the Cross of Christ, despite the tension he recognizes within the modern Christian faith between the affirmation of the value of human flourishing and the hermeneutics of divine violence, which is also present in Girard. Violence and evil, but also reconciliation and good, open up a new dimension beyond immanence, “aware that God has given a new transformative meaning to suffering and death in the life and death of Christ” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 656). On the other hand, Taylor is aware that religion has a troubled dialectic with violence in the eyes of history, and he intuits that only true religiosity can contribute to the solution (Taylor, 1999d, p. 36). But to be part of this solution, one cannot simply suppress and deny the drive towards violence or sexuality but must purify it in the name of a new world common to all (Taylor, 2002b, p. 71). Furthermore, he values the capacity of other religious traditions to stop violence and generate solidarity from openness to verticality and moral articulation from transcendent sources, as he does with Buddhism and its concept of *karuna* (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 17–18, 708, 726, 818, n.23).

altruism. As we know, Taylor's interest is to point out the inadequacies in modern liberal society behind its effort to define and apply codes in every possible sphere.

## 7.5. The question of transcendence and politics

*Agape*-love implies an openness to transcendence that aspires to a new way of inter-subjective relations beyond any already established moral-ethical or political code. Also, a new motivation towards solidarity that basically recovers *agape* as a source of moral motivation for the high standards of integration and recognition of modern plural societies. According to the example used by Taylor himself, *agape*-love would be behind, for example, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and the paradigmatic examples of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu in the application of transitional justice.<sup>210</sup>

A correct solution for overcoming apartheid policies would be the compensation of all victims. It would be sufficient to appeal to consensual justice procedures to reach this solution. However, this alone would not have guaranteed another good that the Commission also sought: a new political and social situation capable of overcoming conflict through reconciliation and making possible a genuine new beginning. This latter goal entails a certain renunciation of the justice that could be exercised to punish perpetrators. Compensation and reparation—the struggle for one's own rights—belong to the horizontal dimension, where procedural justice operates. By contrast, “the vertical space opens the possibility that by rising higher, you'll accede to a new horizontal space where the resolution will be less painful/damaging for both parties” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 706).<sup>211</sup>

---

210 Transitional justice is an approach applied to places and conflicts where systematic or massive human rights violations have occurred. It seeks to achieve two goals: to achieve some level of justice for victims and to strengthen the prospects for peace, democracy and reconciliation by transforming the political systems, conflicts and conditions that triggered the abuses. To achieve these two ends, transitional justice measures often combine elements of criminal, restorative and social justice (See Eisikovits, 2017).

211 Transitional justice based on *agape*, therefore, requires the following procedure: “First, we have to judge between claims A and B; but then we also have

Transitional justice based on *agape* therefore requires the following double movement: “First, we have to judge between claims A and B; but then we also have to decide whether we will go for the best ‘award’ between A and B on the level we’re now on, or try to induce people to rise to another level” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 706).

According to Taylor, this kind of detachment, which allows to reach another level or horizon, has its basis in *agape*. Historically, it appears through charismatic figures who are able to evaluate the goods at stake, intuit new avenues of resolution beyond confrontation and the mere restitution of rights, and lead society toward a new horizon in which reconciliation becomes possible. In a way, the commitment of these charismatic figures to these values to be achieved goes beyond the rhetorical or symbolic. They somehow “embody” these values, and in their struggle for them, they are putting even their whole lives at stake. Taylor’s current examples are Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, but he also refers somewhere else to Adam Michnik or the Dalai Lama (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 710, 2011n, pp. 210–211).

In one of his latest contributions, Taylor uses the angles of transcendence discussed by David Martin (D. Martin, 2018). Christianity or Buddhism offer a sharp and acute “angle of transcendence” to prevalent social practices and institutions. In a way, these charismatic characters would offer a greater angle of transcendence, having one foot in the ideal forms of ethics, in this case *agape*, as a constitutive good, and putting the other foot in the regnant ethos of a society. They are not completely detached from a society’s history of violence and its institutions, but their vision of *agape* is capable of elevating the situation to a new beginning (Taylor, 2024, p. 559).

In the dialectic between justice and love, Taylor uses these paradigmatic examples to make visible the normativity of *agape*. He does not offer a detailed theory of *agape*; rather, he points to exemplary practices. One might conclude that he merely describes the role of the good or of love in relation to justice within conflict resolution. However, if he does not “codify” *agape*, it is because of its incompatibility with codification. The exemplary behavior of Man-

---

to decide whether we will go for the best ‘award’ between A and B on the level we’re now on, or try to induce people to rise to another level” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 706).

dela or Tutu is inspired by Christianity, yet “Christian faith can never be decanted into a fixed code” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 706). Codifying love would again entail falling into the perspective of comparison, negotiation, conflict and, with it, the possibility of abuse, exclusion and disintegration.

This is why Taylor emphasizes attitudes such a “forgiveness” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 709).<sup>212</sup> There is no legal formula, covenant of justice, or sharp demarcation between right and wrong, inclusion and exclusion—nothing purely horizontal—that can definitively prevent the emergence of violence and oppression. Taylor presents here a trade-off between horizontal justice and vertical love: either one insists on compensation for the evil suffered, while sacrificing the goods of solidarity and reciprocity; or one renounces that compensation in order to make truth and reconciliation possible. What makes the second alternative viable are “moves, always within a given context, whereby someone renounces the right conferred by suffering, the right of the innocent to punish the guilty, of the victim to purge the victimiser” (ibid.). Therefore, it is a question of forgiveness, “but at a deeper level, it is based on a recognition of common, flawed humanity” (Taylor, 2007, p. 710). In Mandela’s case, without this renunciation of the victims’ rights, “the new South Africa might never have even begun to emerge from the temptations to civil war which threatened and are not yet quite stilled” (ibid.). Mandela chose the risky path of truth and reconciliation over the path of justice and revenge.

Love is thus presented in a dialectical relationship with justice. Justice is not suspended but recreated, raised to another level, a new horizon of understanding, reoriented by love, in much the same way as Ricoeur (cf. Kühnlein, 2011, pp. 434–435, n. 128). The role of *agape* in the politics of recognition is that of generous detachment. First, it involves relinquishing one’s own standpoint and moving toward a new shared horizon with the other—not only to understand him or her better, but to create a new space of understanding in which peace and genuine recognition become possible. Second, it

---

212 Alongside attitudes, narratives that give new meanings to space, time and shared spheres and reconnect with moral sources are also of particular importance (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 720–726); So does openness to transcendence that “quite wildly and unpredictably” (Taylor, 2007b, p. 727). Narrativity and openness to transcendence reveal a thirst for a higher meaning in the lives of individuals and groups.

entails a detachment from one's perfectly reasonable claims from the standpoint of justice, in order to make reconciliation and a new beginning possible. The basis of such detachment lies in the recognition of common humanity, a shared dignity, or, in Taylor's terms, a shared capacity to confer meaning, to make decisive choices in light of articulated goods. This is more than an intuition, a feeling, or symbolic power. It rests on attachment to a constitutive good—*agape*—which articulates social practices. In this space, vertical openness to transcendence finds its privileged place in the public sphere.

Furthermore, we also see to what extent *agape* is a normative concept beyond the descriptive zeal that many have found in Taylor: the externalization of the negative feeling of injustice and inequality must give way to a social order that is just in another dimension; but this passage is only possible from the dictates of *agape*, or similar motivations, which are capable of bringing society to another, higher point of justice, where the spiral of the struggle for recognition comes to a halt. In Ricoeur, we find a poetic use of the imperative to love that facilitates forgiveness and mutuality even beyond institutions and codes. For Taylor, however, although influenced by the symbolic, *agape* has the status of a moral source capable of attracting even strong evaluations of the goods at stake (cf. Roman, 2016).

Some authors view this confidence in the transformative power of love with a degree of skepticism. In the German-speaking context, it has been noted, for example, that Taylor does not engage directly with philosophical critiques of the commandment to love (cf. Kühnlein, 2011, pp. 438–445; Klevesath & Reese-Schäfer, 2011, pp. 460–468). One thinks of Theodor Adorno's critique of the instrumentalization of others for the sake of loving God implicit in the command to love one's neighbor (Adorno, 1979), or Hannah Arendt's concern about the transition from love as an inward experience to its political expression. For Arendt, genuine solidarity would be a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited, but grounded in rationality (see Arendt, 2019, p. 109ff, 2021, p. 101ff).

From the Anglo-Saxon world, further criticisms are directed at the place of violence in Taylor's social ontology. John Milbank, for instance, criticizes Taylor's account of religion's role in suspending violence (cf. Milbank, 2009, p. 96). In essence, he criticizes that violence is naturalized. In essence, he reproaches Taylor for "naturalizing" violence. The critique goes further when Milbank's comments

on Girard's scapegoat theory are considered (see Milbank, 2006, pp. 397–402; see also Depoortere, 2008, pp. 84–91). This is close to the standard critique of sociological positivism: religion is explained purely in social terms, as in Durkheim, and becomes merely a functional instrument to create social solidarity and restrain violence.

Naturalizing religion and violence would tend to justify the existing social order—in this case, the liberal order. And Taylor indeed accommodates himself to this order despite the inadequacies he notices, as we already mentioned talking about the *social imaginaries*. From the point of view of the origin of society and its ontology, we would be talking about an initial cultural situation in which competition and violence are the norms, and religion is an invention to deal with the cultural crisis. Moreover—and here the theological argument becomes explicit—if we say that religion and violence are naturalized, we are also saying that there is no grace (in the nature–grace scheme) that interrupts or transforms the given order of reality. That is, there is no love beyond human nature capable of overcoming violence. There is no extrinsic solution to violence in society, even if some inspiration might come through charismatic figures. Even then, their impact will always be mediated by individual interpretation and by the incommensurability of concrete experiences.

However, Taylor's solution deserves analysis, both with regard to what he means with transcendence and with regard to what we have called *catholic attitude*. Regarding the first point, we have seen in Taylor's argument the different horizons to which the horizontal and vertical dimensions open up. The new dimension that opens up involves a role of transcendence in the political sphere. It goes beyond the legal recognition of the various religious groups and the debates about tolerance. We saw it in Taylor's defense of collective goods, and in *agape's* role in ending struggle and violence for a new social perspective.

Thus, we have seen that finding a space for *agape* in the social and political realm implies applying to them the moral articulation and individual motivation that we have seen in the first chapters. Moreover, by finding a space for *agape* in the social and political sphere, we have found a space in Taylor's thought that extends his schemes for transcendence, which we will see in the next chapter. We will see that Taylor understands transcendence as a religious phenomenon from the existential question of the search for fullness. In particular,

he finds that *agape*, as the source of fullness, has as its characteristic the transformation of the individual to the point of renouncing some good in order to attain a greater good that is connected to love itself. In this way, as we have seen in the previous pages, the concept of the fusion of horizons and the role of charismatic individuals, to which we have alluded, implies a generous renunciation of legitimate goods from the point of view of justice for the sake of a greater good, adhering to the vision of forgiveness of these exemplary individuals, which entails the transformation of reality. In our view, such a renunciation of justice for the sake of a greater good reflects the renunciation of *agape* for the sake of transformation.

It is precisely such a transformation of reality—which we have described as a new horizon in politics and society based on dialogue, on understanding other positions from the point of view of the goods at stake (understanding goods from the point of view of human meanings), and on a generous detachment from one’s convictions—that makes us think of a *quasi-sacramental* role of people like Nelson Mandela or Desmond Tutu, which allows us to return to our thesis of a thought of a *catholic attitude* present around the concept of *agape* in Charles Taylor.<sup>213</sup>

For this, we need to use the concept of *sacrament*. Catholics understand that in certain signs and symbols linked to rites, God communicates himself to men, operating in them through grace, which appears through communication and symbolic exchange between God and humanity (cf. Chauvet, 1995).<sup>214</sup> Certainly, not only does such symbolic exchange appear in the rituals of the Catholic Church, but it also appears in many ritualized religious phenomena. However, Catholic sacramentality does have some distinctive features that make them particular. In the first place, its linkage to a person, Christ, from the irreducibility of this concept, which makes it strong to the “arbitrary construals” (Taylor, 1985n, p. 262,

213 We refer to them as “quasi-sacramental” symbols because they cannot be equated with the role of Christ and his revelation in Catholic sacramental theology and in that of other churches that also maintain some of the sacraments with the role of the Saints, to which we will not refer in the following chapter.

214 Taylor refers to the sacraments as a “specific catholic form” of expressing “christian specificity, which can be defined as the doctrine of the Incarnation-Crucifixion-Resurrection”, which is the great difference between Christianity and other religions (Taylor, 2021b, p. 496).

see also 1985o) to which the interpretation of a symbol based on a non-human material reality can be open.

In our discussion of Ricoeur, we saw that the symbolic mediation of gestures of social transformation is marked by the fragility of interpretation and by the risk of relativistic reduction. The theologian Paul Tillich also noted similar weaknesses in symbols due to their origin in the (group) unconscious (Tillich, 1964, p. 58). When he speaks of sacraments, however, he distinguishes their origin from that of symbols: they do not originate in the unconscious of a group, but in God Himself as the ground being. And specifically in Christ as the “new being” (cf. Tillich, 2020b; Thomas, 1994).

With regard to the charismatic figures, we see that they are symbols in a sacramental way because they themselves embody that to which they refer, which is *agape* love. Beyond the historical relevance of some of their gestures, it is their persons on which the presence of *agape* as a motivating force is based. *Agape* in them and through them, as with the sacraments, “disposes (...) to practice charity” (‘Sacrosanctum Concilium’, §59). They themselves have experienced generous detachment and the power of forgiveness that sustains divinely inspired love. In any case, their charisma and the trust, confidence, and admiration they inspire across broad sectors of society function as a kind of substitute for the assent of faith on which sacramental efficacy rests.

From the above, we understand that we must take into account the quasi-sacramental role of the charismatic figures referred to by Taylor in his reflection on recognition: they are people who, having been in contact with *agape* as a moral source, become a sacramental symbol of the new reality and the path of transformation. Again, this manifests a *catholic attitude* in Taylor’s thinking.

Finally, the existence of charismatic figures and of admiration for them opens a space between morality and politics that is not fully secularized and remains open to transcendence. In other words, although the disenchantment of the cosmos and the rise of naturalism and exclusive humanism have reshaped the modern imaginary and the understanding of transcendence, the persistence of charisma draws a line of continuity between modern and premodern worlds of interpretation. The term charisma itself—closely related etymologically to charism—has a theological origin that the social sciences adopted early on (cf. Weber, 1996). Its protagonism in histo-

ry implies, in a way, a return to the enchanted world about which “historians had difficulty deciding whether history was the result of the remarkable actions of remarkable men or the significant consequences of powerful forces” (Shields, 2010, p. 12). In a sense, the presence of these personalities in Taylor’s account suggests that we live in a new age of charisma. Charisma has lost much of its original commanding authority, yet it emerges as an alternative to procedural ethics, which arose as a substitute for Christian morality (cf. S. Turner, 2003). Now charisma reappears in the form of attraction to exemplary persons who are admired as an alternative or support to excessive reliance on codes and rules, as a way of articulating the good from which formalism has moved away.

As we have seen in this chapter, Taylor expresses his concern about this fetishism of codes, which has intensified since modernity. Somehow, this confidence in reason as the designer of all spheres of life, despite its successes, has as a consequence the mutilation of everything that cannot be codified or understood by it. Rescuing openness to transcendence from the mutilation of exclusive humanism and immanent counter-enlightenment is precisely Taylor’s main interest in addressing the conditions of belief in *A Secular Age*. Much of the next chapter will be concerned with addressing this issue and with describing *agapeic transcendence* in which these charismatic figures will again play a role, along with the significance of hermeneutic interpretations and the use of *subtler languages*.

