Sergio Gadea Caballero

Loving your Neighbor in a Secular Age

Agape in the Philosophy of Charles Taylor

VERLAG KARL ALBER

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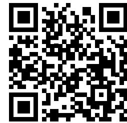

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Acknowledgments

This book is the result of the doctoral research I carried out at the *Hochschule für Philosophie* in Munich, defended in February 2024. Like all work of this kind, it is not the product of an isolated effort, but of many personal, institutional, and lived forms of support, without which it could not have come into being.

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nary body of work provided me with a rigorous entry point into several central debates in contemporary philosophy and offered a way of thinking attentive to history, lived experience, and the conditions under which people make fundamental decisions and seek meaning in their lives. I am also personally grateful for his kindness in receiving me and for the generosity with which he gave time to my questions, an encounter that helped clarify and sharpen the concerns that lie at the heart of this book.

I am a Jesuit, and this work is the result of a mission entrusted to me by the Society of Jesus: the study of philosophy in the field of secularization and the attempt to understand the conditions under which belief is lived today. That mission led me, among other things, to the thought of Charles Taylor. I am deeply thankful to the superiors who entrusted me with this task, for their confidence and for the generosity with which they granted me extended time for study. In a particular way, I wish to thank Manuel García Bonasa, SJ, my spiritual director during most of these years, for helping me through what may be one of the most demanding challenges of doctoral work: discerning an apostolic meaning in the sustained and often demanding labor of study.

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I became a companion of Jesus with a clear awareness not only of the commitment to faith proper to my religious order, but also

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of the pursuit of justice. I have grown within the Society shaped by the three verbs articulated by Ignacio Ellacuría, SJ: *hacerse cargo*—to take reality seriously; *cargar*—to bear its weight; and *encargarse*—to act upon it and seek its transformation. I have been fortunate to walk alongside friends, Jesuit and lay alike, who have made these verbs both horizon and practice, through concrete choices and visible fruits in the struggle for justice. I have also seen, up close, the cost sometimes of such fidelity: weariness, disappointment, suffering, and the slow erosion of hope. Beneath this book lies the question of a fourth verb—*recargarse*: where one learns again how to draw breath, how to be renewed when the weight becomes too heavy, and the horizon seems closed. Where can one return to a source of motivation that does not deceive, that does not exhaust, that allows one to remain faithful even when reality does not respond, when change is imperceptible, and when fruits do not appear?

This book is dedicated to those who have taught me, through their lives, that love—*agape*—is not only the deepest motivation, but the most truthful answer.

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Introduction

This study has three aims. First, it examines how religious moral sources—above all *agape*—can articulate motivation for altruism within current debates in practical philosophy, especially in dialogue with Charles Taylor. Second, it systematizes Taylor's use of *agape*. Third, it explores how a Christian perspective on moral motivation can enter the plural field of humanitarianism and global solidarity. The central claim is that *agape* provides a distinctive motivational depth that both complements and challenges secular accounts of moral life.

In the first claim, we allude to one of the great open questions in moral philosophy, namely, how to advocate and promote the genuine social impulse towards cooperation and benevolent actions for the common good, but also especially towards those distant who do not belong to one's own society, at a time when the focus is more and more on individual interests (Reder, 2018, pp. 85–91). An illuminating case in point is Jürgen Habermas, who in 2007, during a lecture at the *Hochschule für Philosophie* in Munich, reflected on the contribution religions might make to sustaining human coexistence. At one moment he acknowledged the limits of secular reason in motivating solidarity with the victims of injustice and appealed to religion as a source of support:

> "Likewise, practical reason fails to fulfil its own purpose if it no longer has the power to awaken and keep alive in profane minds an awareness of the solidarity that has been violated worldwide, an awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven" (Habermas, 2008a, pp. 30–31).[1]

Even while insisting that modern societies have good reasons to "turn away from the transcendent," Habermas has repeatedly ac-

1 ["Gleichwohl verfehlt die praktische Vernunft ihre eigene Bestimmung, wenn sie nicht mehr die Kraft hat, in profanen Gemütern ein Bewusstsein für die weltweit verletzte Solidarität, ein Bewusstsein von dem, was fehlt, von dem, was zum Himmel schreit, zu wecken und wachzuhalten" (translated by S.G.)].

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knowledged that Christian traditions remain crucial in counteracting "desolidarization tendencies" (Habermas, 2019a, II, p.807, 2008b, p. 96). His unease illustrates a widespread difficulty: when solidarity relies solely on procedural justice or pragmatic consensus, it risks becoming formal and fragile, unable to generate the affective and existential commitment required to stand with victims of injustice.

He also resonates with the cry that arises from the memory of Auschwitz and the demand for an immanent ethics of compassion grounded in anamnetic reason, as Johann B. Metz reminded him when warning that he had parted too soon from Theodor Adorno (cf. Metz, 2017a, p. 241). Ultimately, he shared Horkheimer's longing for full justice that religion can provide, especially the intuition that in a secularized world we are only left with compassion, indignation at evil, and a lifelong commitment to revolt against it (cf. Horkheimer, 2000; Gordon, 2020; Habermas, 1981a, pp. 411–426, 1991a, 1993). However, he cannot accompany him in his claim that God replaces reason in the unconditional foundation of morality. In this way, he continues the original impulse of critical theory, which aspires to designate or describe injustice even without being able to describe the good. But such a question leaves open how to formulate concepts such as justice, normative rightness or altruism without a vision of the good or the good life (cf. Habermas, 2007, p. 205). But somehow, faced with the question of something to sustain our reaction to pain, Habermas is forced to ask about the substantive and universalizable strength of moral sources that we had left behind:

> "Why should the citizens of a modern society, when they are outraged against injustice, unchecked subordinate or adapt those universalistic standards of morality, which have already arisen with the religious and metaphysical world views of the Axis period, to a particular good, which they supposedly find already realized in their form of life?" (Habermas, 2019b, p. 734).[2]

Thus, faced with the cry of sorrow of those who suffer throughout history, confronted with the injustices endured by our neighbor, the

2 [Warum sollten die Bürger einer modernen Gesellschaft, wenn sie sich gegen Unrecht empören, jene universalistischen Maßstäbe der Moral, die schon mit den religiösen und metaphysischen Weltbildern der Achsenzeit entstandenen sind, *ungeprüft* einem partikularen Guten unterordnen oder anpassen, das sie in ihrer Lebensform angeblich schon realisiert *vorfinden?* (translated by S.G)].

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question of what is the basis of our moral commitment becomes, if anything, more acute and penetrating. Now it is added the awareness of something missing when it comes to motivating altruism, an awareness that "there is a gaping hole here" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 87).[3]

At the heart of this inquiry lies a twofold yet inseparable question: how altruistic action can be both grounded and motivated. Philosophical accounts often distinguish between the ontological grounding of morality—what makes altruism rationally or metaphysically intelligible—and the motivational conditions that move agents to act for the good of others. This study contends that these two dimensions converge in the experience of *agape*. The grounding of moral life in *agape* is not merely explanatory but also transformative: the very structure that discloses the good simultaneously awakens the motivation to realize it. To grasp this unity is to understand why the question of moral motivation cannot be detached from the question of what ultimately grounds the moral horizon itself.

To grasp this unity is to understand why the question of moral motivation cannot be detached from the question of what ultimately grounds the moral horizon itself. Modern moral philosophy, however, has often treated these two dimensions as separate: reason has been charged with justification, while motivation has been left to sentiment, will, or faith. Hence, procedural reason seems compelled to acknowledge that altruism requires substantive foundations, not merely formal rules. From a Kantian standpoint, no further motivation would seem necessary: once the moral law is recognized through universal practical reason, duty itself should suffice to determine the will. Yet the contemporary situation reveals something different —the difficulty of sustaining such moral commitment when its sources of meaning have become opaque. This demand —to give a reasonable account of why we must care for others—runs through many strands of moral philosophy that seek practical, action-oriented responses to human suffering, one of the great philosophical questions of our time (cf. Ricoeur, 1985; Tracy, 2020, pp. 57–91).

In light of this divide between justification and motivation, religion—and Christianity in particular—has once again attracted the attention of social theorists as well as moral and political philoso-

3 On Habermas' relationship with religion and theology, see (Habermas, 2021; T. Schmidt, 2020).

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phers. It appears as a possible locus where the grounding of moral obligation and the sustaining of moral motivation might converge, offering resources that purely procedural or secular frameworks seem unable to provide. It appears relevant when confronting the individualizing tendencies of Western capitalist societies, the erosion of belonging and common good, and the enduring weight of realpolitik in discussions of global justice (cf. Rawls, 2003; Pogge, 2008; Taylor, 2010a; Žižek, 2001). Yet this renewed appeal to religion as a moral source arises in highly secularized societies, whether secularization is understood as the end of metaphysics, the decline of religious practice, the withdrawal of religion from public discourse, or the pluralization of ethical visions of the good life.

In any case, the development of the secularization process has resulted in moral pluralism —especially of ethical visions of the good life—as a consequence of the multiplication of visions on the foundations for morality and the epistemological problems added to it from modernity onwards. As Eva Illouz summarizes, the major difference in moral living in the pre-modern and modern ages is "the disentanglement of love from traditional moral virtues, from moral conceptions of the self and from a social cosmology" (Illouz, 2019, p. 179). However, the shadow of morality linked to religion in culture and the nostalgia for externally induced trust based on a convincing encounter with transcendence is still present in many areas of reflection. Indeed, some ask from agnostic positions how to replace the strength of the love of God as a moral motivator towards caring for others when religion seems to have disappeared, but its legacy remains in the importance given in our civilization to empathy and compassion and generous giving (cf. Drescher, 2019).

For instance, we can find radically different ways of understanding what motivates us to help others without attempting to be exhaustive due to the many authors who have approached this subject (see Kraut, 2020). On the one hand, "self-referential altruism" (Mackie, 1990, p. 184), a type of moral foundation based on the cultivation of self-interest through friendship and the aspiration of each individual for the good, has been in force since antiquity. We also find ancient conceptions of eudaimonia (happiness) or human flourishing, which finds in the Nicomachean Ethics its primary reference (Aristotle, 2009, VIII-IX; see also Price, 2010). Already in the modern era, we find the development of a type of moral philosophy based on

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the use of impartial and impersonal reason that would provide us with a type of motivation towards the good of the other based on rational thinking, with a multitude of variants: from Kantian moral deontologist to utilitarianism or Nagel's impersonal point of view (Kant, 1999; see also Chalier, 2002; Esteban Duque, 2020, p. 95; Mill, 2017; Rawls, 2003; Nagel, 2016; Sepúlveda del Río, 2019, pp. 78–95).

Ever since the course of modernity, there have been reactions against this excessively rational and impersonal development of moral motivation by turning attention to some feeling or trust in a proper sense of sympathy, pity, or compassion born of altruistic human nature itself (Hume, 1992; A. Smith, 2002; Schopenhauer, 2007). Even today, there is an attempt to recover a lost metaphysical streak through the encounter with otherness, making ethics the first philosophy (Lévinas, 1989), or searching for the correspondence between divine love and human love, between metaphysics and human experience (Marion, 2002; Vetö, 2020). These efforts are joined by moral and political positions that seek to respond to barbarism and suffering through resistance or the desire for solidarity (Adorno, 1951, 1966; see also Bernstein, 2001; Honneth & Menke, 2006; Rorty, 1989, 2011).

In addition to the possibilities mentioned above, there is the Christian conception of love or the genuine moral motivation towards the love of neighbor hidden behind the *agape* conception. The radical nature of God's love, its gratuitousness, and the generous dynamism in which it introduces the subject remains attractive to many authors as compensation for the excesses of reason (cf. Kierkegaard, 1995; Rosenzweig, 1988). In any case, Christianity has been a fellow traveler and, in many cases, an inspiration or contrasting foundation for many of these approaches. Not least, the moral obligation to the needy beyond even our own circle of interest is part of the Christian heritage that has shaped Western culture. Even many of the authors mentioned have produced alternatives to *agape* in an attempt to precisely understand and adapt its content.[4]

Contemporary attention to *agape* speaks to us of a *return* (Mardones, 1999), of a reawakened "dormant trace" (Vattimo, 1998, p.

4 As Robert Adams says, "*agape* is a blank canvas on which one can paint whatever ideal of Christian love one favors" (Adams, 1999, p. 136).

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79), in a form of nostalgia of its force to be a foundation (if not the cornerstone in history) of moral universalism (cf. Joas, 2021), or of a demand for the spiritual, sacred or sacramental elements of *agape* that philosophy needs to adopt in order to approach the abject, the contingent, the accidental, the weak or the wounded and not fall into the insufficiencies of a human life lived from the schemes of exclusive secular humanism (cf. Kristeva & Vanier, 2011; Kearney, 2016, pp. 93–117). But it is not clear in any case whether *agape* in many of these cases is a gap-filler, whether it is confused with the feeling of sympathy for the needy or with the Kantian respect for dignity, whether it is just another possible explanation for the "selfish" gene of which we are made, or if it is really a spiritualized avatar that comes in support of collective interests, or if, understood in its purity as grace, it does not cease to be a heteronomous moral principle from which to protect oneself and only allow to be inspired by its history and that of the people who have been moved by it. However, the very definition of *agape* is controversial, as are the implications of its definition for moral philosophy, as we will see below.

Such a longing for some sort of substantivity in morals has been called the "post-modernism dilemma in ethics" (Wildes, 1999, p. 309): at a time when the possibility of metaphysics seems to be questioned by many and within a context where a multitude of views on the good life and the basis of right action appear, it seems complicated to construct an ethical framework that transcends particular interests and responds to the great demand for global solidarity and attention to suffering. Furthermore, it is not clear what role *agape* can play, nor even whether it can be experienced in its purity as a source of transcendent origin, in view not only of moral pluralism, but also of the conditions of possibility of belief given the anthropology and naturalistic epistemology that determines our way of being in the world as dwellers of modernity. In any case, the current interest in the Christian conception of neighborly love shows that *agape* can provide important elements in current debates on the relations between the individual and his or her membership in a society, authority, and freedom, and on the way religiosity can inform morality (cf. Söding, 2015, p. 342ff, 2017; see also Brandscheidt, 2018; Luomanen et al., 2017).

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1.1. The meaning of agape

As we shall see in more detail, Charles Taylor's approach to the question of how the love of God might ground moral motivation introduces him to the long theological and philosophical tradition that deals with the concept of *agape*. *Agape* is a difficult concept to define because it attempts to capture much of the doctrinal and moral core message of Christianity.

To begin with, *agape* is a Greek term that opens onto the many-sided meanings of love. Ancient Greek, unlike modern Greek or English, distinguishes as many as four terms that today would be encompassed within the meanings given to the word love (cf. Lewis, 1982; Benedict XVI, 2006): *Stergein* (or *storge*), *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. *Stergein* defines the natural affection and appreciation that arises, for example, within family members or within a social unit. *Eros* is the passionate love that seeks union, a love towards an object of desire—in Plato, *eros* explains the desire to attain Beauty (Plato, 2008)—typically understood and encapsulated in sexual desire. However, it is also "the normal drive towards self-fulfillment" (Tillich, 1960, p. 25). On the other hand, *philia*, with a special connection to Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy, refers to the friendly and faithful affection between friends, business partners, or even members of the same society based on mutuality, reciprocity, and cooperation.[5] Finally, *agape* is an appreciative love that, however, does not respond to the value of its object but is a "spontaneous and unmotivated" (Nygren, 1953, p. 85), choosing disinterested action in favor of the well-being of others, often without regard to self-interest.

In contrast to the other uses of love in ancient Greek, there is an inflation in the use of *agape* in the New Testament, where it appears as many as 258 times. It is unclear to what extent the writers of the New Testament used it as a synonym of the other terms referring to love since, in many cases, they can overlap, even when we refer to altruism. But what is certain is that we can detect an interest in

5 One aspect to note, however, is that contemporary theories of love sometimes need help to distinguish between the different Greek words for the concept of love and the specific modulations to which it refers. For example, in contemporary theories, the distinction between eros and philia tends to blur when referring to personal love (Helm, 2021).

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highlighting a novelty in understanding the love of God and the love of men that is significantly different from the previously known Old Testament,[6] rabbinic[7] or Greek[8] conceptions of love and treatment of one's neighbor are well formulated in the Golden Rule and ethics informed by religion.

Agape aims to reflect the historical realization of God's love through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, opening a new dimension of depth in the relationship with humanity. The synoptic tradition has concentrated the message on the double commandment of love

6 God's love in the Hebrew Bible (*ahab*) tends to excess and copiousness without asking for anything in return. One of the most outstanding characteristics of the Old Testament *ahab* is the emphasis on exclusivity: from among all the nations created and placed in the world by God, He chose Israel as His people (Deut 30:3; 32:36; 2Ch 36:15; Neh 9:27–31, Is 14:1; 30:18; 40:10). The love of neighbor is lived in Israel in a natural, concentric and expanding way—just as he perceives and feels the love he receives from God, who also chooses and makes distinctions—beginning with one's own family, continuing with the Israel people until reaching the closest strangers: "the Israelite begins his social activity at home, loves his people with the same preference with which God loves this people, extends his love to the stranger insofar as he is affiliated with his home and his people" (Stauffer, 1933, p. 38) ["Der Israelit beginnt seine soziale Betätigung im Hause, er liebt sein Volk mit derselben Vorliebe, mir der Gott diese Volk liebt, er dehnt seine Liebe auf dem Fremden aus, soweit er seinem Hause und Volke angegliedert ist (Ex 20,10; 22,20)" (translated by S.G.).](see also Ackerman, 2002).

7 Rabbinic Judaism speaks increasingly of charity towards the stranger and everyone not part of the Jewish people (including God's creatures, animals, and plants). The highest expression of this tendency is the Golden Rule formulated by Hillel: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn." (cf. Allinson, 2003, p. 30).

8 Already the Stoics showed an idea of global solidarity, making no distinction of nation or origin, of those at home and those from abroad, parallel to the classical period of rabbinic Judaism and the first generations of Christians. However, despite giving a divine origin to solidarity with whole humanity, when it comes down to it, it depends on human nature and the rational use of the powers of the soul, but away from emotions and personal relationships: "The universal scope of the golden rule in Stoicism was based on the affirmation that human beings are the offspring of God (Zeus), the universal logos (principle, reason) governing the entire cosmos. Within each person is a spark of divinity, making it possible to realize cosmic truth; and the Stoics equated the divine spark with reason, an equation that has been the hallmark of philosophic rationalism. To do the will of God, therefore, is to be true to one's nature and to act in accord with right reason" (Wattles, 1996, p. 39).

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of God and neighbor. The Pauline literature, for its part, emphasized love by integrating it into the eschatological salvific action of God and in the description of the loving relationships that should exist among the members of the community. Finally, the Johannine literature reflects the dynamism of love and grace that starts from God and the relationships within the Trinity, the relationship of the divinity with humanity and the whole created reality and between humanity among itself (cf. Brandscheidt, 2018).

In this regard, it is important to highlight three key points. Firstly, one must acknowledge the diversity of sources and the various approaches towards charity already existing at the time of the appearance of *agape*. At any rate, *agape* stands out as a distinctive concept regarding its scope, demand, and phenomenology of moral motivation. Secondly, from a Christian perspective, love of and for God and love of neighbor constitute the quintessence of love and serve as a foundation for all human relationships. As such, all other loves, like love of family or country or community, stem from it. This differs markedly from contemporary literature on global solidarity, which considers it "a subcategory of either social solidarity or civic solidarity" (Scholz, 2012, pp. 65, 231ff). From an ethical point of view emanating from the New Testament, therefore, it would be the other way around: social solidarity or civic solidarity would be a derivative of global solidarity understood as God's love of creatures and love of neighbor.

And thirdly, the conception of *agape* as a moral motivator is not confined to the sphere of religion and theology but also has connections with ethics, cultural philosophy, social theory, and political theory. Hence the diversity of meanings found in the literature: it can be viewed as self-sacrifice or supererogatory action made for someone else's benefit; a complement to justice or its alternative; equal respect between human beings; unlimited and unconditional love; or as a religious experience of divine love. Ultimately it serves as the basis of universal ethics or a motivator for altruism.

In this sense, it is important to scrutinize the New Testament's passages addressing *agape* to gain deeper comprehension. As previously noted, Jesus draws upon central motifs of the Jewish tradition and rearticulates them in a way that brings their ethical and spiritual depth to the fore. In particular, he highlights the inseparable link—already affirmed in the Torah and reflected in rabbinic formulations

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of the Golden Rule—between the love of God and the love of neighbor, presenting them as two dimensions of a single commandment:

> "Then one of the scribes who had listened to these discussions, and who had observed how well Jesus answered them, asked Jesus, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus answered, "The first is: 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mk 12:28–34, cf. Mt 22:34–40).

This passage offers a positive and encouraging formulation of the concept of love without shying away from its more rigorous demands: "ethically, love is for the good that draws one's actions and one's being, and-if Jesus is one's standard-there can be no exclusions in love's application" (Chilton, 2008, p. 77). What is distinctive here is not a rupture with Judaism but a radical insistence on the inner unity of the divine and the human dimensions of love. The appeal to heart, soul, and mind underscores its total character—cognitive, emotional, and moral—transcending any reduction of love to sentiment, mystical experience, or social benevolence alone. In this perspective, the unity of the two precepts also transcends the classical categories of eros and philia, orienting love toward an unconditioned openness to the other.

From the Christian point of view, *agape* is not only exemplified in connection with divinity and among humans, which originates from a theological understanding but is also exhibited through actions. Divine love displays primarily in Jesus' life: his healings and interactions with individuals regarded as sinners, gentiles, or enemies in the society highlight the gratuitous, kind-hearted nature of *agape*. Ultimately, the selfless nature of *agape* is conclusively demonstrated by the Cross at the end of Jesus' life—portraying its primary essence as generous, compassionate, and steadfast without any expectation of reward.

In addition, Jesus imparts the practice of *agape* love through narrating parables, including the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37), which elucidates the nature and extent of neighborly love. In response to an inquiry about who qualifies as a "neighbor," Jesus presents a story highlighting his novel approach. He shows how

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agape transcends Torah's concentric hierarchical relationship, which places the law-abiding Jew as the first subject susceptible to receive supportive love and, at most, the stranger who sojourns with oneself (cf. Ernst, 1994, p. 347). By directing the Samaritan's focus toward a wounded man on the margins, Jesus shows that a neighbor is anyone in need near the moral actors. Additionally, Jesus underscores how love for the needy supersedes any consideration, even one's own personal interests. Also, he shows how compassion, understood as an inner affective movement in contact with reality (*splagnizomai*),[9] is above the Law and arises as a paradoxical outcome thereof at the same time.

Moreover, upon analyzing the scene through a first-century lens, it becomes clear that Jesus' novelty was met with confusion and conflict among his audience. The parable exposes the shortcomings of neighborly love at that time, which prevented the priest and the Levite from helping, even when they had sawn the wounded. Instead, Jesus places a Samaritan as an example of the power of *agape* as a moral source through his spontaneous reactions and his moral decisions: he endangered his own life by helping the wounded man in such a generous and untrammeled freeway (cf. Bailey, 2008, pp. 292–293).

9 ἐσπλαγχνίσθη is third person singular of aorist passive deponent indicative of *splagchnizomai*. It means "the seat of the feelings, affections, especially anger" (Liddell, Scott, Jones, & McKenzie, 1996) or "to have the bowels yearn, i.e. (figuratively) feel sympathy, to pity -- have (be moved with) compassion" (Thayer, 1962, 7:548, 1067). This kind of compassion appears altogether 12 times in the New Testament, 5 in Mt, 4 in Mk, and 3 in Lk. In Mk and Mt, it refers to the compassion that Jesus felt when he saw the multitudes that wandered like sheep without a shepherd, or the compassion when he saw the multitude sick and suffering, or before concrete infirm people that awakened in him this type of compassion (Mt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Mk 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22). Lk also adds the compassion that Jesus felt before the widow whose son was dead (Lk 7:13). Also, Lk offers words of Jesus in which he teaches this compassion through exemplary stories or parables, like this one of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son (or the merciful Father) (Lk 15:20).

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1.2. The puzzle of agape

Beyond our approach to the New Testament, Christian moral theology has continued to discuss the nature of *agape* love over the centuries. Not least, as asserted by Pitrim Sorokin, "religious, ethical, ontological, physical, biological, psychological, and social" aspects are intertwined in this understanding of love (Sorokin, 2002, p.3).[10] Discussions have mainly focused, on the one hand, on whether a human being could love God more than himself and how the love of neighbor and love of self are compatible. On the other hand, there exist competing interpretations of the Good Samaritan's kind of neighborly love, depending on whether one perceives the *agape*-inspired motivation as focused only on a particular relationship or whether behind the Samaritan's behavior, there is a defense of a universalistic morality to love every human being. The multiplicity of ways of understanding love has engendered divergent explications regarding the moral motivation behind *agape* that are fundamentally opposed or alternative at least.

1.2.1. Incarnational love or dialectical love?

With regard to the first set of questions, we can see a contrast between two types of philosophy, depending on the conception of the source of the divine origin of love and its relationship with transcendence. On the one hand, currents closer to Aquinas emphasize a physical origin of divine love that would already be found in immanence itself, based on God's love as Creator of all existing reality and God's love for the human being as an image made in his likeness (cf. Aquinas, 2016; Rousselot, 2001, pp. 82–153). On the other hand, contrasting currents see *agape* as an ecstatic love external to reality itself, highlighting the divine initiative in the movement of love that is transcendent to reality itself and that calls to move away from any hint of self-centered and egocentric love, following the line of St.

10 In contemporary philosophy *agape* appears in authors as diverse as Paul Ricoeur (1995, 2005), Gianni Vattimo (as 'charity' 1999, 2002; 2012), Alain Badiou (2003, 2012), Slavoj Žižek (2001, 2009; 2005), Julia Kristeva (1989) among others, as well as Taylor (cf. Guanzini, 2016; Depoortere, 2008; Núñez, 2013).

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Bernard of Clairvaux (1995; see also Rousselot, 2001, pp. 155–211). For this reason, it is possible to speak of a "sacramental" or "incarnational" approach and a "dialectical" one (Pope, 2013, pp. 141–142), depending on whether or not human love can be transformed to be the bearer of divine love. Or, put another way, the debate revolves around the type and amount of self-love that fits into altruism.

The two accents can be traced throughout history and lead up to the revival of the disputes over *agape* around Anders Nygren's highly influential book, *Agape and Eros* (Nygren, 1953), considered "the beginning of modern treatment of the subject" (Outka, 1972, p. 1). Nygren distinctly sought to emphasize the ecstatic and dialectical nature of *agape* and attempted to carry forward the enterprise of demonstrating, following Luther (2016), that the presence of any self-centered love is a remnant of eros love within Christian theology. For him, early Christianity and the Reformation have been periods in history in which *agape* has shone in its splendor in theological reflection. However, Augustine's translation of *agape* by Caritas and the medieval scholastic disputes result from erroneous syntheses and confusion of motives around love (Nygren, 1953, Part Two). In its purest definition, *agape*, for Nygren the only Christian love, is understood as unconditional, spontaneous, unmotivated, directed towards sinners and enemies, which starts only and exclusively from God, in total opposition to self-love and which is genuinely expressed in the sacrifice of giving oneself to others (cf. Nygren, 1953, pp. 61–159).

In response to this view of *agape*, the literature on *agape* has practically attempted to balance Nygren's radical view (cf. Oord, 2008, 2010a, 2010b). A notable example is that of the Jesuit Martin D'Arcy (1947), who tried to return to the synthesis of the presence of God's love in nature, concerned about the excessive abstraction of the concept of *agape*. The abstraction mutilates every other form of human love that does not fit into pure *agape*. For him, it is important to emphasize that human nature is not impoverished at the expense of grace. On the contrary, it is enriched, enhanced, and transformed without renouncing its nature. In his understanding, *agape* must include both "God's special love and man's response to it as inspired and energized by it" (D'Arcy, 1947, p. 312). In a sense, the key lies in breaking down "the tranquil perfection of St. Thomas's synthesis,“ leaving more room for compassion and grace.

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In his words, there was a need for "an alien emotion and a more extravagant passion that Aquinas had domesticated" (D'Arcy, 1947, p. 101). D'Arcy's response can even be taken as a response from "commonsense ontology" (cf. Pasnau, 2011) to Nygren's restricted and abstract view.

But this tendency to emphasize *agape's* physical or incarnational aspect brings with it the difficulty of distinguishing *agape* from the other sources. Even more so when a history of the appearance of many of these alternative sources finds connections with the very development of Christian-inspired theology and moral philosophy. Even with the risk of generalizing, the underlining of the interconnection between the love of God and human nature and its ways of loving runs the risk that, in some cases, grace or openness to transcendence can be disregarded to explain the motivation for altruism; alternatively, *agape* can be understood as reduced to a single emotion or a rational maxim of attention to the dignity of any human being. In short, a balance between natural and supernatural is necessary, for, in the words of Karl Barth, "Christian love cannot in fact be equated with any other, or with any of the forms (even the highest and purest) of this other, just as this other love has obviously no desire to be confused with Christian. Nor can Christian love be fused with this other to form a higher synthesis" (Barth, 2007, p. 735).

1.2.2. Specific love or universal love?

On the other hand, when we examine the rich and unbounded inspiration that the parable of the Good Samaritan has had in philosophy, we also find a plurality of interpretations. Specifically, two sets of philosophical problems surround this parable concerning, again, who is a "neighbor" and the scope of the moral obligation to love one's neighbor. Hence, there seem to be two alternative ways of understanding the term "neighbor": either it refers to a special kind of relationship that arises between the Samaritan and the wounded man as individuals, or alternatively, the term neighbor alludes to anyone in need, near or far, with the relation itself between the Samaritan and the wounded man constituting an allegory of universalistic morality. The problem revolves, therefore, between proximity and distance.

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The latter is the most common interpretation for those more familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan. For a modern reader, then, the story has a clear moral: do good and practice altruism with anyone who might need it, without excuses, hesitation, delay or prejudice: “Often this parable is simply taken in a general moral sense: if you see someone in the ditch, go and help them” (Wright, 2004, p. 163). Nevertheless, on the other hand, it is easy to hear this parable mentioned to justify any political agenda, from the most conservative and pragmatic to the most activist and progressive (cf. Spencer, 2017). In any case, “the more usual modern view is that the parable is an example story in which the Samaritan shows us a compassion unrestricted by national, racial, or religious barriers” (Nolland & Metzger, 2008, p. 597; see also Söding, Tilly, Bergmeier, Seebass, & Ziemer, 2010, p. 1324). The most paradigmatic case of inspiration from the parable at the social and political level can be found in Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK), who made a reflection on it through collective action, structural analysis, and institutional critique.[11] But there is a leap in the argumentation that goes from the individual example of the Samaritan to a concrete wounded person to the argument in favor of moral universalism that is applied as a basis for collective action and social transformation of injustices.

Without denying the importance of the connection between individual duty and motivation and collective action, some authors appeal to proximity as the central message of the parable, turning attention to the Samaritan’s feeling of compassion, the inter-personal encounter, and the duty to help that arises from empathy for the suffering of the other. Ivan Illich, whom Charles Taylor quotes at key points in his work, says that *agape* inaugurates a new form of relationship between the wounded and the Samaritan: a tie that is

11 In one of his best-known sermons, “A Time to Break the silence," he linked individual moral motivation with the need for organized action-oriented to transform reality: “On the one hand we are called to play the good Samaritan on life’s roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life’s highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth” (King, 1991, p. 241).

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"voluntary and bodily" (cf. Cayley, 2005, p. 31). For the Samaritan, *agape* appears as an invitation, an inclination, an opening towards a new horizon, distinct from cultural or rational ethical principles, from which to carry out practical action. The Samaritan remains free, continuing to be himself and maintaining his identity, from the moment he feels compassion in his guts until he is immersed in a personal relationship with the wounded person that goes beyond help: "My neighbor is who I choose, not who I have to choose" (Illich, 2005a, p. 51). His action is a response to a call and not to categories. Neither, then, is it easily reducible to rules applicable to any situation. But its freedom does not dent responsibility since that call can be disregarded. The call also remains in the subject's consciousness, "not by a sense of guilt but rather a deep sorrow about my capacity to betray the relationship" (Illich, 2005a, p. 53).[12] For Illich, the centrality of the message of Christianity is found in this parable and its call to proximity. Moreover, to want to see in it useful rational categories for social transformation or even to base the institutionalization of the call to love one's neighbor supposes the corruption of that message.

12 From another way of understanding *agape* from the point of view of relation, Lévinas would speak of a heteronomy of the Good Samaritan before the face of the wounded. He suggests a type of morality that also starts from the encounter with the Other and not a morality that starts from principles à la Kant (a fabulous comparison of both moral proposals from the point of view of the moral obligation before the stranger in Chalier, 2002). However, in this encounter with the other, the latter reveals himself to be "higher" than the subject. The Other is "one for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all" (Lévinas & Nemo, 1985, p. 89). In that encounter, the face of the Other has an absolute meaning by itself; it is the good in itself and is prior to any principle. Levinas even finds there the transcendence or the trace of the divine, a reference to a supernatural Good. The Other is the gateway to the mystery of God: present and absent at the same time, personal in the face of the Other and inviting to personal responsibility. But that encounter does not give rise to a symmetrical relationship between the Self and the Other, but insists that there is a disproportion. The responsibility of the I for the Thou appeals to an interruption of the Being of the subject, in which Lévinas finds "egoism." It appeals, in short, to a total sacrifice of self. This extreme has been contested by some theorists of the philosophy of *agape*, such as Outka or Davenport, even in the light of this passage from the Good Samaritan: the reciprocity and symmetry between the Self and the Thou need not be narcissistic or contrary to *agape* (cf. Davenport, 1998; Outka, 1972).

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In any case, the tension in understanding the *agape* at work in the behavior of the Good Samaritan as either an ethic of distance or an ethic of proximity comes from very far away. In this sense, St. Augustine, without denying the unconditional and universal quality of love of neighbor that is born of charity, establishes that there is an order in the attention to one's neighbor: "all men are to be loved equally. But since you cannot do good to all, you are to pay special regard to those who, by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstance, are brought into closer connection with you" (Augustine, 2008, I, 28). The priority of some persons over others does not arise from a criterion of prudence, as Aquinas' vision will later complement (cf. 2016), but is rooted in the very order of creation (*ordo amoris*). The *Big Chain of Being* itself, with its hierarchy of goods and its quest for peace in the tranquility of order, also manifests itself in natural human relationships, which expand in a series of concentric circles (cf. Aquinas, 2016). Thus, Augustine suggests that "a Christian could not love every neighbor but should love nay neighbor who happens across her way" (Gregory, 2008, p. 35). In the relationship between the earthly and heavenly cities, the subject has to pursue peace with everyone but apply reason until "God is all in all" (Augustine, 1998, XIX, 14).

At present, debates about the proximity or universalism behind the parable of the Good Samaritan consider other factors while keeping the nature of the question about our responsibility to alleviate the suffering of those who are distant. On the one hand, economic and political globalization, and the development of the means of communication and information bring within our reach knowledge of human suffering in areas far from us. On the other hand, the emergence of institutions and organizations dedicated to charity and care for the worst off in society and the world allows for this new relationship of proximity to remote realities. However, the existence of these organizations raises questions about their use as conscience-cleansers or, in the case of faith-based organizations, about whether they really allow the proximity shown by the Samaritan in the parable (Illich, 2005b, 2018). Moreover, the development of a greater sensitivity to the suffering of those far away, also supported by the development and importance of the protection of Human Rights from the late 18th century onwards, is offset by the insistence of a call

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to care for relationships of proximity in a way that counterbalances the dangers of a stark or overly condescending universalism.

In any case, the issue that persists nowadays is how to reconcile the rejection of exclusivism and the affirmation of universalism inherent in the usual reading of the parable while still prioritizing special relations and care for others.[13] As Roger Scruton succinctly summarizes the nature of this dilemma, the questions can be summarized as follows: "When we look to solidarity as a universal motive, and as the solution to the great conflicts that threaten us, are we looking in the wrong place? Ought we to be looking for the small, the local, the committed and the neighbourly, rather than the global, the inclusive and the 'non-discriminatory'?" (Scruton, 2015, p. xiv). Behind these questions is the growing discomfort with the answers given only from reason as applied to morality and the application of universal rules as the only way to respond to the current standards of solidarity instead of the relational and the particular.

The dilemmas of many charitable organizations between fidelity to the charism of closeness to those who suffer and the need to be efficient and relevant to fulfill the mission—sometimes even confusing their goals with the public sector in a welfare state—would be a new way in which this quandary between the particular and the universal occurs. Thus, the question of distance or proximity "is as urgent now as it was when Christ told the parable of the Good Samaritan. And the worst possible answer to it is that which seems to be currently most favoured, namely that the duty of care that we owe to others falls not on us but on the state" (Scruton, 2015, p. xiv).

1.2.3. What a theory of moral motivation grounded in agape must account for?

Having argued that *agape* can unite the grounding and the motivation of moral life, we must now ask what such a theory must actually explain and account for. Today the parable of the Good Samaritan is often read as an emblem of moral universalism, a call to

13 A summary of the debates on the interpretations of the parable of the Good Samaritan in recent years within the Anglo-Saxon sphere, in (Gregory, 2008, pp. 28–42).

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overcome exclusivism. Yet any attempt to ground moral motivation in *agape* must go beyond the phenomenology of this experience and confront the persistent dilemma between the proximity of special relations and the demand for universal love. This tension underlies the contemporary view of *agape* not as a heteronomous command but as a central virtue shaping Christian attitudes and motivating neighbor-love and community building (Outka, 1972; Silverman, 2021). In any case, given the renewed attention to Christianity in moral philosophy, any ethicist who wants to suggest *agape* as a moral source for motivation toward altruism must prove the uniqueness of *agape* without falling into the dangers of fusion with other kinds of love or into extrinsicism.

Whether understood as transcendent grace or as the perfection of human nature, any account of *agape* must clarify how this grounding translates into moral motivation. In this regard, a further requirement of any account of *agape* is that it must clarify its quality as a moral source. In other words, whether it is transcendent to the human being, and therefore unmotivated and only experienceable through an event of grace from which springs a supernatural and meritorious act that is completely distinctive, or whether *agape* is an experience of perfection of human nature itself, created in the image and likeness of God, capable of loving one's neighbor with the same love it has received from God, also through its reason, its feelings, and its will. Even trying to avoid issues specifically of theological anthropology or Christian ethics, an affirmation of *agape* would have to try to respond to the now classic objections to love of neighbor as an unattainable ideal and even harmful to the individual, in Friedrich Nietzsche (1887) or Sigmund Freud (2010), or the vision of a larval individualism in a supposedly disinterested love, in Hannah Arendt (2021) or Theodor Adorno (1979).

Moreover, *agape* has to do with compassion and with "good will" (Aquinas, 2016, q.27, a.2), as shown by the Good Samaritan, but this sentiment should not be confused with mere emotion or with a genetic disposition of the human being toward altruism (Breitsameter, 2010, p. 99). In addition, as we have seen in detail, an account of *agape* as generous and decentered love must clarify what kind of self-love is compatible with it, i.e., whether it is compatible with or contrary to any form of human flourishing. Related to this is

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the necessity or not of supererogatory actions or renunciations of human goods to favor others or achieve a greater good.

Furthermore, God's love influences the configuration of political and social reality (Augustine, 1998; TeSelle, 1998). Conversely, *agape* is related to justice and has had its relevance in the promotion of human rights, inclusion, and the transformation of socio-economic and political-legal institutions (Ricoeur, 1995; Boltanski, 2012; King, 1981, 1991; Cochran, Jr. & Calo, 2017; Iorio, 2014; Min, 2018). But it needs to be clarified to what extent *agape*, as a source of religious content, can participate in the public discourse where criteria of justice are discussed. Moreover, it needs to be clarified to what extent love has primacy over it, is a parallel principle to it, or simply inspires it, and under what circumstances. One of the situations in which *agape* has its place and is in a complex relationship with justice is its application in contexts of forgiveness, reconciliation, and recognition (Tutu, 2000). In any case, an account of *agape* must account for how to understand suffering, violence, and injustice in the world. This question also affects the kind of language that must be employed in the neutral public sphere and whether it admits *agape's* undeniable religious and metaphysical content. In short, a theory of moral motivation grounded in *agape* must show how a religiously rooted conception of love can illuminate, without dominating, the shared moral space of plural societies.

1.3. Taylor on altruism and the role of agape

Having laid the foundations of the debate—both concerning the need for a transcendent grounding of altruism and the challenge of sustaining moral motivation in a secular age—we may now ask how Charles Taylor's philosophy addresses these two dimensions together. Taylor has not been directly concerned with the subject of altruism in his writings; yet, several of his moral analyses touch upon what could be regarded as the anthropological foundations of altruistic behaviour, without ever formulating a normative theory of it.[14] If we were to find a place that summarizes his contribution to

14 Moreover, there are only a few writings in which Charles Taylor addresses issues specifically and exclusively with solidarity (Taylor, 2007a, 2010a). An informa-

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the debate on the grounding of altruism and the basis of motivation towards it, we could use the following quote taken from the context of his reflections on the presence of the sacred after the Disenchantment:

> "We require an ontology with the depth to allow there to be real differences in motivation between 'altruism' and strategy, even unconscious strategy. A mechanistic account can't make room for this. The whole difference must be one in how people feel" (Taylor, 2011a, p. 117).

What is decisive here—and what, in our view, expresses Taylor's most original contribution—is the conviction that the ontological grounding of moral life already carries within itself the power to motivate it. The same ontological depth that makes altruism intelligible also renders it existentially compelling. In our interpretation, Taylor's moral ontology shows that the sources which disclose the good are not merely explanatory frameworks but living wellsprings of moral motivation. Hence, the problem of grounding and the problem of motivation are not two separate questions but two dimensions of a single structure of moral experience. To recognize the good as real is already, in some sense, to feel its pull—to be moved by it.

In particular, the above quotation mentions the need for an ontology that enables us to see the differences between the various forces that move toward altruism. The reference to ontology is part of the characteristic moral realism he defends. For Taylor, human beings relate to each other, move in the world, and make moral decisions considering our position in relation to some notion of the good. However, as he explains in *Sources of the Self*, many moral theories have mutilated and severed the concrete way in which human beings live their moral lives and have failed to attend to the criteria,

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tive overview on Taylor's position on solidarity in (N. H. Smith & Laitinen, 2009). Both authors call Taylor's approach to altruism "moral solidarity" and are critical of Taylor's option for *agape*, which we will examine here. On the one hand, they are of the opinion that he prematurely excludes other sources of motivation. On the other hand, they are skeptical that *agape* is the right choice in a pluralistic society, since this source of motivation would fail in the absence of reciprocity (cf. N. H. Smith & Laitinen, 2009, 64–68). Although Taylor had previously discussed compassion as a primitive moral response (Taylor, 1999a), this analysis does not amount to a systematic treatment of altruism or solidarity, but rather explores the anthropological roots of moral responsiveness.

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qualitative valuations, and normative assumptions that underlie our moral decisions, how we human beings understand ourselves, and our motivation toward altruism. Among them, Habermas's own proposal of a discourse ethics, the figure with which we have begun this introduction (cf Taylor, 1989a, pp. 85–88, 1991a; Habermas, 1991b, pp. 119–226).

In his own way, Taylor gives his own version of the postmodern dilemma: the value of human dignity, justice, and benevolence has reached unprecedented levels today, but nevertheless, there is a blindness in the form of an inarticulation of the moral sources, that is, there is little disposition to ask about the ontology and the relation to the good present in our moral predicament. This eclipse of the sources and their articulation results in the inability to be consistent with our moral commitments. In this sense, Taylor points out that we live in a tension, consisting of an increase in the demands for solidarity and attention to those who suffer both near and far from us, while there is a distrust toward reflection on the visions of the good on which our criteria and our moral decisions are based. Not attending to the notion of good, in short, puts us in a situation of not attending to this demand for solidarity or attending to it from moral sources that make us give an insufficient response to the pain of others.

Thus, for Taylor "the issue is what sources can support our far-reaching moral commitments to benevolence and justice" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 515). Or, put in other form, "what ontology do we need to make sense of our ethical or moral lives, properly understood" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 618). Taylor's contention, based on the search for the best account of moral behavior and considering the current pluralism of ethical views, is that a theistic view—the one which is based on *agape*[15]—has a potential "incomparably greater" (Taylor,

15 Although here we will focus only on *agape* as a source of transcendence, it should be noted that Taylor also makes mention of the Buddhist *karuna* or the rabbinic *tikkun olam* as concepts in some sense synonym to *agape*. Regarding *karuna* ('great compassion', Taylor, 2007b, p. 818n23), to which the concept of *metta* is attached ('loving kindness', Taylor, 2011b, p. 18), he means thereby as a reflection of the same paradoxical relationship that *agape* has with flourishing and renunciation, as we shall see in chapter 8: "Buddhism also has this notion that the renouncer is a source of compassion for those who suffer. There is an analogy between *karuna* and *agape*. And over the centuries in Buddhist civi-

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1989, p. 518) than humanistic responses to the motivation to love one's neighbor. The following quote, in which Taylor uses clearly confessional language, captures much of his approach to *agape* and, moreover, seems to be a direct response to Habermas "awareness of what is missing:"

> "What is missing, in other words, is a love for human beings as they are, with their faults and weaknesses, even if they are dumb and unattractive. But this would be exactly the love with which God loves people, and which Jesus Christ embodies—a love of which we are capable only by God's grace. A place where, beyond the eclipse of God, transcendence can shine through in this world is therefore the work of people close to God, who bring that love back among people" (Taylor, 2003a, p. 15).[16]

In sum, my interpretation of Taylor's account suggests that the experience of *agape* reveals the unity of moral grounding and motivation: the good discloses itself as lovable, and in doing so, empowers the agent to act in its light. Nevertheless, a number of scholars have contested his theistic argument, claiming that it undermines his moral philosophy as a whole by concealing an apologetic intent in favor of his own faith (Abbey, 2000, pp. 31–33; Allinson, 2003;

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lization there developed, parallel with Christendom, a distinction of vocation between radical renouncers, and those who go on living within the forms of life aiming at ordinary flourishing, while trying to accumulate 'merit' for a future life" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 18, cf. 1999b, pp. 22, 30; for more understanding of karuna as compassion, see Panikkar, 2000, pp. 255–293 specially 276; Peetush, 2018; Thammarongpreechachai, Teerapong, Wongpinpech, & Weinstein, 2021; Kittel, 2011). In addition, Taylor alludes to the Hebrew expression *tikkun olam*, "which we might render as 'healing the world'" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 681), as a positive response to suffering and evil in the world through work and personal commitment. This attitude is also related to transformation beyond human flourishing and as "a collaboration with the restoration of a fuller flourishing by God" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 17, cf. 2016, p. 74; for more detailed guidance on the meaning and moral application of *tikkun olam*, see Dorff, 2007).

16 [Was und mit anderen Worten fehlt, ist eine Liebe zum Menschen, so wie er ist, mit all seinen Fehlern und Schwächen, und selbst wenn er dumm und hässlich ist. Die wäre nun aber genau ejne Liebe, mit der Gott die Menschen liebt, und die Jesus Christus verkörpert—eine Liebe, deren wir nur durch Gottes Gnade fähig sind. Ein Ort, an dem jenseits der Gottesfinsternis die Transzendenz in dieser Welt durchscheinen kann, ist daher das Wirken von Gott nahe stehenden Menschen, die jene Liebe wieder unter die Menschen bringen (translated by S.G.)].

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Kerr, 2004; Klevesath & Reese-Schäfer, 2011; Laitinen, 2004, 2008; Lane, 1992; Mulhall, 1996; Rosa & Kern, 2012; Skinner, 1991, 1994). In this work, we take up that debate by focusing on the question of moral motivation toward *agape*-based neighbor-love, seeking to understand it on Taylor's own terms—that is, by both analyzing and assessing his reconstruction of moral realism and his intuition of the greater explanatory potential of *agape* as a moral source capable of meeting the demands of modern solidarity. Our view is that this intuition is indeed plausible when approached phenomenologically, as an account of what it means to experience the motivation to altruism through *agape*.

In any case, the moral argument developed here builds on a renewed form of moral realism: one that approaches the good from a non-anthropocentric perspective while remaining attentive to its expression in human meanings. In this view, the task is to show how subjects interpret themselves and the world when they recognize that the goods they most deeply value exist independently of them. Taylor's proposal, however, has given rise to considerable debate concerning the status of his moral realism, which focuses on human understandings of the good but pays less attention to its objectivity as something independent of the subject—an emphasis typical of traditional moral realism (cf. Sayre-McCord, 2021; Dancy & Hookway, 1986).

As we shall see, the literature is divided between those who understand it to be a *weak* realism, which would simply attempt to account for how individuals experience the goods in their lives, or those who argue that it is a strong realism, stressing the perception that the goods referred to are independent of human beings and the implication of their actual influence on their behavior (cf. Abbey, 2000, pp. 9–54; Gurciullo, 2001; Laitinen, 2004, 2008; Meijer, 2017a, 2018a; Meijer & Taylor, 2020; N. H. Smith, 2002; Thiebaut, 1991). This problem of interpretation becomes particularly acute when we focus on Taylor's phenomenology of moral motivation toward altruism and, above all, on his notion of *agape* as a theistic moral source, by definition open to transcendence (cf. van Buuren, 2014; Rosa, 2011). The fact that Taylor speaks of *agape* in terms of transcendence involves indeed a relationship with a good that exists outside of us, regardless of whether we perceive it or not. In our understanding, the confusion surrounding openness to a source of transcendent

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goodness arises from Taylor's lack of clarity about the concept of *agape*, a difficulty compounded by the absence of a systematic treatment of the concept in the secondary literature.[17]

For this reason, our second task is to systematize and understand the concept of *agape* in Charles Taylor's work, both where it appears explicitly and in other parts of his thought where, in our view, it plays an implicit role, as we believe it does in his seminal contribution to the debates around recognition. In any case, the lack of systematization of the concept of *agape* leads us to ponder on his position in resolving the tensions inherent to the abovementioned Christian ethics. In fact, this lack of systematization in this area has caused some theologians to reject the orthodoxy and theological finesse of Taylor's proposal, thereby providing the paradox of being criticized by theistic and non-theistic scholars alike (cf. Hauerwas & Coles, 2010; Hauerwas & Matzko, 1992; Milbank, 2009; see also Kerr, 2010).

For example, in a first approach to the term in his major works, we find that in *Sources of the Self agape* is defined as "grace" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 410), emphasizing its status as a *strong* source transcendent to humans and in dialectical relation with the rest of the sources emerging throughout history. Thus, Taylor ponders his proposal of a moral source that, on the one hand, responds to the demands of his moral realism and, on the other hand, appeals to the religious dimension of the human being. *Agape*, in fact, refers to the love that God has for the human being and for creation: overflowing, gratuitous, and disinterested love. At the same time, it refers to the particularity of neighborly love and altruistic help proposed by Christian ethics (Pope, 2013, p. 138).

However, a first reading of *A Secular Age*, one of Taylor's major works, yields an incarnational and specific image of *agape*. Specifically, *agape*, as a moral source of love of neighbor, attracts Taylor's attention in some allusions to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37, cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 158, 246, 277, 576, 737–742, 844n39), with which he shows how the motivation toward love of neighbor emulates the love of God, even from a feeling of compassion felt

17 Although there are references to this concept in several commentators, an attempt to deal directly with it and its systematization can be found in (Heath, 1996, pp. 193–227; Hendrickson, 2022, pp. 45–51; Kühnlein, 2011).

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corporeally. *A Secular Age* focuses on lived religion, conceived as a search for fullness, and associates *agape* with a transformation that transcends life and reaches "beyond merely human perfection" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 20).

At the same time, the book seeks to describe the meanings of world and life from a believing standpoint that remains open to transcendence while situated within an *immanent frame*—one *buffered* against the presence of transcendence beyond it. In this regard, we can discern traces of *agape* throughout Taylor's narrative: in his reflections on evil and violence, in his portraits of charismatic figures and leaders of justice, and in his attention to religiously inflected languages that still surface in the public sphere. For these reasons, we shall speak of a distinctively Taylorian approach to transcendence, which we will refer to as *agapeic transcendence*.

Besides, in both mentioned works, the genealogy of modern times plays a fundamental role in Taylor's way of arguing. Thus, in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor shows how modern subjectivity and the importance given to identity has its roots in the different ideas about the human good that have occurred throughout history. In that history, *agape* plays a prominent role, particularly if the point of interest is the reconstruction of the benevolence and tendency to avoid suffering that characterize the modern moral order. On the other hand, in *A Secular Age*, he tries to explain how society and culture shifted from a situation in which it was unthinkable not to believe in God to one in which being a believer is simply one possibility among others and not the most obvious one (Taylor, 2007b, p. 3). Accordingly, a history of neighborly love can be reconstructed, where we go from the spontaneity and relationality of *agape* through a whole series of changes until we reach the institutionalization of aid and the pluralism of current sources.

Here strongly resonates his thesis—borrowed from Ivan Illich (2000; 2005b)—that secularization is the result of the corruption of Christianity through the effort of some elites to reform the lives of Christians and the social order to conform them to the ideals of the evangelical *agape* through institutionalization, especially of the exercise of charity. However, despite some commentators taking this idea very seriously (cf. Lehmann, 2011; B. K. Ward, 2014), it can be shown that this idea is inconsistent with the general argument of his work and with the role that faith-based non-profit institutions

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dedicated to humanitarianism and charity can play in today's secular world.

Taylor's use of history is original, complex and richly nuanced, with repetitions, digressions and explorations outside the main argument—something that will undoubtedly be reflected in our own reconstruction, despite our desire for systematization. Indeed, on some occasions it seems to provide ammunition to those who complain about the length, complexity and density of his works as well as his lack of attention to other non-Western philosophical traditions or, more specifically when referring to *agape* and altruism, to other relevant authors who have reflected on these topics such as Max Scheller, Adorno or Hanna Arendt (cf. Kühnlein, 2011, 2008, pp. 117–126; Klevesath & Reese-Schäfer, 2011).

However, one of the main lines of debate in reading tries to make sense of the dynamics and patterns of development with which Taylor constructs his narrative. In particular, many have pointed to the trace of Hegelian historical dialectics discernible in the background of his reconstruction, noting in the background its tendency to justify the *status quo* of modernity and a certain historical determinism despite its distinction from showing linear and casual historical processes (Angus, 2014; Connolly, 2002; Gordon, 2008; Morgan, 2008; Sciglitano, 2019a; Somma, 2018; Thiebaut, 1991). As we shall see, Taylor has recently made a contribution to this debate with his *History of the Ethical Growth* (2021a, 2022a) where he calls the slow path to ethical universalism of the "space of *agape*," a place where people and higher modes of human fulfillment matter and where "the whole planet, the entire ecosystem is striving, is groaning and travailing to some end: to live up to the demands of the space of *agape*" (Taylor, 2021a, p. 2).

1.4. Taylor and the "catholic attitude"

This quotation, which echoes Rom 8:22, puts us on the track toward what we have called the *catholic attitude* in Taylor and which will put us on the way to the answer to the third of our questions, that is, about the possible role of Catholic thought in the plural realm of humanitarianism and the moral motivation toward altruism in plural society. To define the *catholic attitude*, we have to turn again

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to the debate on the qualification of *agape*. As we see, the number of aspects surrounding *agape* makes the task of clarifying its nature problematic. Any choice can be situated between excess and defect: between incarnate love and dialectical love, between particular love and universal love. But also between the natural and the supernatural, between heteronomy and autonomy, between the transcendent and the immanent, and between justice and the good. All these areas are relevant to Christian ethics. Indeed, history of theology and philosophy is full of attempts to respond to the dilemmas of *agape* that have fallen into the oversimplicity of explanations that fail to cover some of these dilemmas or fall into the most unintelligible abstraction far detached from real moral experience.

Thus, when we affirm that there is a *catholic attitude* in Taylor, we speak of a paradigm instance that allows us to affirm the extremes of the poles without denying the opposite, showing an openness to find truth, good or beauty in whatever form it may present itself. As Richard McBrien expresses, "As its very name suggests, Catholicism is characterized by a radical openness to all truth and to every authentic value" (McBrien, 1994, p. 1190). By attitude we mean a form of "Catholic distinctiveness" (McBrien, 1994, p. 9), of "Catholic conscience" (Adam, 1946, p. 13), of "intimate intelligence" (Lubac, 1988, p. 18) that forms a series of instincts and awareness with which the faithful subject engages in philosophy without undermining the plausibility or otherwise of his theses or the accent and influences contained in his work. By instincts and awareness we mean a predisposition or mentality of openness and humility that admits that there is some truth in the diversity of opinions and that they are all part of a unity or totality. As expressed by Yves Congar, a theologian well read by Taylor (cf. Taylor, 2013a, 2020a, pp. 79–94), the catholicity of the Church, as an attitude expressed in the Church, "is the dynamic universality of her unity, the capacity of her principles of unity to assimilate, fulfill and raise to God in oneness with Him all men and every man and every human value" (Congar, 1939, p. 117).

Such an ability to seek inclusivity and universality is embodied in simple ideas that are part of the fund of Catholicism: "the 'both/and' principle, and a deep concern for unity" „ (O'Collins, 2017, p. 106; cf. Francis, 2013, p. §217–237). As McBrien expresses, the *catholic attitude* we are trying to define

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> "is a comprehensive, all-embracing, *catholic* tradition, characterized by a *both/and* rather than an *either/or* approach. It is not nature *or* grace, but graced nature; not reason *or* faith, but reason illumined by faith; not law *or* Gospel, but law inspired by the Gospel; not Scripture *or* tradition, but normative tradition within Scripture; not faith *or* works, but faith issuing in works and works as expressions of faith; not authority *or* freedom, but authority in the service of freedom" (McBrien, 1994, p. 1190).

Leading this approach to *agape*, a *catholic attitude* affirms both incarnate and dialectical love, particular and universal love, vertical and horizontal, mystical and diaconal. The attitude to which we refer denies the excesses of a univocal assertion but affirms all the visions to reach the unity that Jesus expressed in his twofold commandment to love God and the neighbor.

Therefore, when we refer to a *catholic attitude* we do not speak of prejudices or mental reservations; by catholic we do not mean here a set of norms and dogmas that form part of a creed, nor a program of human and social reforms inspired by a kind of *Christian spirit*, nor do we even want to mention a set of traditions or a particular conception of the Church in its relationship with History or the State. By *catholic attitude* we do not mean to confine ourselves to the set of characteristics that advocate a clear line of demarcation of the Catholic Church with respect to all other expressions of Christianity, nor do we enter into the debate whether Catholicism, as a historical form, needs to be offset by other forms of Christianity, such as Protestantism. Nor do we pretend to find some substrate or intrinsic quality expressed in beliefs invariably expressed throughout history by the Catholic Church as a kind of *catholic substance*.[18]

In any case, the *catholic attitude* can also be found in some of the characteristics that attempt to describe what are the proper accents of Catholic thought palpable both in theology and in philosophical thought as "positive determination" of the catholic "*forma mentis*"

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18 Paul Tillich referred to the dialectic between the "Catholic substance" (the sacerdotal) and the "Protestant principle" (the prophetic), so that Protestantism denies the Catholic tendency to consider certain figures, such as saints or sacred ministers, or institutions as little less than incarnations of the divine. On the other hand, "Catholicism, by its very existence, reminds Protestantism of the sacramental foundation without which the prophetic-eschatological attitude has no basis, substance and creative power" (Tillich, 2020a, p. 238).

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(Cordovilla, 2019, p. 189).[19] Following McBrien largely (1994, pp. 1196–1199), catholic values can be summarized as sacramentality, mediation, communion, sense of history, and Christian realism. First, through sacramentality, the *catholic attitude* tries to express the conviction that the divine also manifests in material reality within the order of creation. Second, the principle of mediation maintains that the divine is present in persons, communities, events, and institutions with a transforming power of reality and injustices. Third, a sense of communion underlines the social character of the relationship with God and with one's fellow human beings. Fourth, respect for history and continuity, recognizing that we are products of the past and shapers of our future, collaborators with divinity in the transformation of creation. And finally, what McBrien with Bernard Lonergan calls "Christian realism," which sees the world as full of meaning and in dynamic relation to grace, thus rejecting both the naive empirical realism of a world apprehensible only by the senses and idealism, whether it rejects the possibility of knowing things in themselves, or admits that it is possible in the identity of thought and being, or sees reality as configured by ideas and structures that underlie it (cf. McBrien, 1994, pp. 1192–1196; Lonergan, 2016).

Ultimately, we find a similar *catholic attitude* and some of these values, characteristics, accents, or marks in Charles Taylor.[20] He himself is a self-confessed Catholic and describes the same simple principles as part of what it is to be Catholic, in his words: "comprising both universality and totality" and "unity through difference as opposed to unity through identity" (Taylor, 1999b, p. 13). He understands catholicity not as "innate virtue but a task" (Taylor, 2020a, p. 91). On numerous occasions, Taylor has committed himself to this task by trying to defend a truly Catholic Church, embracing

19 A good synthesis of this search for the characteristics of catholicity can be found in (Dulles, 1984).

20 We make this assertion in the face of other interpretations that tend to understand some of his positions, even those that point to that dynamic between unity and diversity, as too much influenced by G.W.F Hegel (cf. Thiebaut, 1991; Somma, 2018) or drawing on a pragmatic attitude (cf. Joas, 1996; Nagl, 2011). The influence of both tendencies on Taylor is undeniable, just as we can find traces of phenomenology and hermeneutics in his interests in identity, subject, and language, of neo-Romanticism in his aesthetics, or of communitarianism in his political theory, to point out just a few.

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everyone and all reality, rather than as affirming a system of truths or interested in the adoption of her message by all.[21]

Yet beyond his interest in the visible Church today, we find in Taylor’s understanding of *agape* a *catholic attitude* prevails. As we have shown and will show in this study, Taylor’s thinking on *agape* is fragmented and sometimes inconsistent. That is, although we will find many of the elements required of an account of *agape* throughout his writings, it is difficult to discern a description of the dynamics between incarnational and dialectical love, between specific love or universal love, and in short, theologically speaking, between nature and grace. Even the concept of *agapeic transcendence* that we will develop may not resolve the tension between transcendence/immanence, except descriptively. Part of this problem is explained by the fact that he does not work in the field of Christian Ethics, so that in his treatment of *agape* he is not closed to its epistemological and methodological assumptions and current debates.

However, we argue that the *catholic attitude* prevails regarding *agape* and its role as a moral motivator and social transformer. The “both/and” characteristic of the *catholic attitude* is evident in its desire not to mutilate anything of human experience, not even violence or heroism, or in the pursuit of a religious experience proper to the via media, such as that of St. Ignatius of Loyola or St. Francis de Sales. Even in his *Best Account* argument, which attempts to prove the bigger explanatory potential of moral realism, a certain connection could be found with the idea of a catholicity that embraces the universality of human expression, then “nothing authentically human, whatever its origin, can be alien to her” (Lubac, 1988, p. 297).

On the other hand, as we will show, *agape* as the moral source of neighborly love plays a fundamental role in Taylor’s thought. This is so both in proposing his ethical realism as opposed to procedural ethics and utilitarianism, in his development of the history of the moral sources of altruism, and implicitly in his theory of recognition. Informed by the *catholic attitude*, the above will lead us to understand Taylor’s proposal as a model of Catholic thought on

21 Some examples of Taylor’s insights on the Church nowadays can be found in (Taylor, 1999b, 2008, 2012a, 2013a, 2013b, 2017a, 2019a, 2020a, 2020b, 2021b, 2023).

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the foundation of altruism valid for the conditions of contemporary moral life and as a mode of dialog with secular culture. The chapters that follow pursue this intuition in a systematic way. They trace how the concept of *agape* shapes Taylor's moral realism, his genealogies of modernity, and his reflections on recognition and transcendence. Each chapter takes up a different facet of this dialogue between Christian and secular moral sources, showing how the grounding and motivation of altruism can converge in Taylor's thought.

1.5. Outline of the study

This book explores how the concept of *agape* operates in the philosophy of Charles Taylor and how it sheds light on the problem of moral motivation in a secular age. Building on the insight that the grounding of moral life and its motivation converge in the experience of *agape*, the chapters follow this tension through Taylor's moral realism, his genealogies of modernity, and his reflections on religion and transcendence.

The analysis unfolds in eight chapters. It follows the five types of arguments that Melissa Lane (1992, p. 46) identified in *Sources of the Self*—phenomenological, transcendental, best-account, historical, and normative—while also engaging Taylor's reflections on social and political life, where the traces of *agape* emerge most clearly. Chapters 2 to 5 and Chapter 8 correspond broadly to these five arguments. They explore, respectively, Taylor's moral realism, his phenomenology of moral experience, the genealogy of modernity, the best-account argument, and his treatment of religion and transcendence. Chapters 6 and 7 extend the inquiry to two fields where the dynamics of *agape* become socially visible: the relationship between charisma and institution in faith-based humanitarian organizations, and the politics of recognition. Together, these chapters map the presence and significance of *agape* throughout Taylor's work and within the major debates that surround it. Particular attention is given to Taylor's conception of moral realism and its ontological commitments, the nature and scope of the best-account argument, the influence of Hegelian dialectics on his genealogical method, the normative implications of identity and recognition politics, and his

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approach to religion and transcendence as dimensions of the search for fullness.

Chapter 2 examines *agape* as both a constitutive good and a motivational source, tracing the reconstruction of Taylor's moral realism primarily through *Sources of the Self*. The discussion unfolds along the phenomenological line of argument, since Taylor's ethics is grounded in how human beings experience moral life. The moral experience illuminated by *agape* centers on benevolence, global solidarity, and the incommensurability of moral goods—issues that raise, from the outset, the question of whether genuine altruism entails sacrifice for the sake of others. The chapter also revisits debates over the ontological strength or weakness of Taylor's moral realism and concludes by engaging Enrique Dussel's critique from the perspective of the Philosophy of Liberation, which questions whether Taylor's account privileges the subject over the concrete call of the other.

Chapter 3 turns to a historical reconstruction of what might be called the secularization of *agape*—the transformation of its meaning through the multiplication of moral sources that sustain altruism in modernity. Drawing again on *Sources of the Self*, the chapter traces a series of "slippages" that mark shifts in the substantivity of moral sources across history. Because Taylor defines *agape* in terms of grace in that work, a central question is whether his secularization thesis entails a collapse of the supernatural into purely immanent accounts of morality. The chapter also examines Taylor's interpretation of major figures such as Augustine, Descartes, Shaftesbury, and Kant, and explores key moments in his narrative, from the Victorian era to Romanticism and the Expressionist movement.

Chapter 4 explores Taylor's Best Account argument as a way of defending moral realism and, *mutatis mutandis*, the theistic proposal of *agape* as the most plausible explanation for moral motivation toward neighbor-love. The chapter also brings Taylor's realism into dialogue with Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance, using the Good Samaritan as a shared paradigm of responsive relationality. The discussion revolves around the importance—or not—of adopting ontological commitments when articulating moral motivation, and addresses whether Taylor's interpretation of *agape* can be understood merely as a romantic inspiration, given his sympathy with that tradition.

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Chapter 5 returns to the historical argument to reconstruct the story of the secularization of *agape*, this time through Taylor's genealogy in A Secular Age. Following Talal Asad's suggestion that secularization is best approached indirectly (cf. Asad, 2003, p. 67), the chapter traces Taylor's exploration of the changing social imaginaries of poverty, charity, and human solidarity, examining how alternative moral sources have emerged alongside *agape* throughout history. The discussion highlights both Hegelian and Foucauldian influences in Taylor's historical method, with particular attention to his later reflections on the "history of ethical growth"(cf. Taylor, 2021a, 2024, pp. 553–587) and the gradual universalization of moral concern.

Chapter 6 departs from Lane's schema to focus on Taylor's provocative claim, influenced by Ivan Illich, that the secularization of *agape* represents a "corruption of Christianity" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 158), influenced by his reading of Ivan Illich (2005b). Indeed, we find his statement striking in his narrative and conflicting with other expressions of his thought that do not reject the institutionalization of *agape* yet draw attention to the dangers of its codification. Building on Illich's distrust of charities, we will attempt to reconstruct Taylor's vision of civil society and the role of NGOs in the social and moral imaginary of our time. Exploring Taylor and his notion of *agape-network*, we will discuss the contribution of faith-based organizations in the humanitarian sector and secular society and the untranslatability of religiously inspired language in the political and social sphere, especially when it comes to motivation towards altruism.

Chapter 7 turns to the politics of recognition, another area where *agape* plays a formative role. Engaging authors such as Axel Honneth, Luc Boltanski, and Paul Ricoeur, this chapter rereads Taylor's Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition" (Taylor, 1992a) through the lens of *agape*, recovering the normative elements of moral realism and hermeneutical openness that stem from Christian neighbor-love. It highlights attitudes such as generosity, dialogue, and self-renunciation as potential correctives to the rigidity of contemporary identity politics and as resources for renewed solidarity.

Chapter 8 returns to the normative argument to explore *agape* as a concept explicitly linked to religion and transcendence. The notion of *agapeic transcendence* introduced here encapsulates Taylor's dis-

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tinct way of approaching transcendence from within an immanent frame. The chapter revisits his dialogue with Martha Nussbaum and Friedrich Nietzsche in *A Secular Age* and outlines how Taylor's later writings interpret transcendence through moral exemplars, admiration, and the subtle languages of faith.

The concluding chapter offers an assessment of Taylor's recovery of *agape* as a motivational source for charity. It argues that Taylor's attention to the ontology behind solidarity and his account of *agape* as a moral source with higher motivational potential remain compelling, even within a secular age. Yet a gap persists between his theory of constitutive goods and a full-fledged theory of action—one that, if bridged, would strengthen his own Best Account argument. The conclusion also clarifies Taylor's position on the two tensions inherent in *agape*—its relation to human flourishing and the possible renunciation of worldly goods—and interprets these through what we have called the *catholic attitude*, a disposition that illuminates both the strength and the ambivalence of *agape*. Finally, the book points to several areas where neighbor-love inspired by *agape* can still make a positive contribution today: in the motivation of humanitarian workers and volunteers, in the identity and social mission of faith-based organizations, and in the work of reconciliation after political and social conflict. The result is an image of how the Christian motivation to love the neighbor continues to shape the plural moral landscape of modernity—and how, in a profound sense, *agape* fills the awareness that there is something missing.

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2. The place of agape in Taylor's moral realism

The previous chapter set the stage by posing a double question that runs through the whole book: how can altruistic action be both grounded and motivated in secular modernity? It argued that these are not separable tasks but two dimensions of a single moral experience. This chapter takes up that claim and gives it philosophical traction by turning to Charles Taylor's moral realism. Here I argue that Taylor provides the conceptual space in which *agape* can be seen at once as a constitutive good—a source that discloses the horizon of the good—and as a motivational source—a power that moves agents toward benevolence and solidarity.

The thematic focus of this chapter is therefore twofold. First, it reconstructs Taylor's account of constitutive goods, strong evaluation, and articulation, showing how they yield a picture of moral life that is irreducibly qualitative and oriented to goods that claim us. Second, within that framework, it situates *agape* as a distinctive moral source whose phenomenology—admiration, gratitude, and a widening concern for the other—exemplifies the unity of grounding and motivation. On this view, to recognize *agape* is already to be drawn by it; disclosure and impulse belong together. The argumentative aim is to defend a robust reading of Taylor's moral realism—neither platonist in the hard sense nor constructivist in the thin sense—and to show that *agape* makes this robustness intelligible in practice. Taylor's realism, I contend, accommodates both the independence of moral goods and their lived efficacy in shaping agency, thus clarifying why appeals to agape are not mere sentiment or supplementation but integral to an account of how agents come to care for distant others under conditions of pluralism.

Our research begins, therefore, by focusing on Taylor's phenomenological reconstruction of moral life with the main interest of understanding how *agape* is defined as a constitutive good and motivational source toward neighborly love. We will approach *agape* as it is reflected in the works of Taylor dealing with the connection

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between morals and ontology, especially *in Sources of the Self*. For this purpose, we will study Taylor's notion of moral realism—"robust but plural realism" as defined in *Retrieving Realism* (2015, p. 168), one of Taylor's later contributions to debates on moral ontology—and his notion of *constitutive goods*.

Taylor's realist proposal makes sense in the context of his critique of the neglect of ontology by the main contemporary ethical schools, which results in a misconception of how moral actors situate themselves in the world and make their decisions. Indeed, one of the aims of *Sources of the Self* is to show how utilitarianism, theories derived from Kantian normative deontologism and Nietzschean-based anti-humanism exclude the spontaneous recognition of distinctions between higher and lower values and moral reflection, by excluding value ontology and strong evaluation. They also ignore the fact that some human desires, goals and ways of life are simply more valuable than others (Taylor, 1989a, p. 249). Taylor's way of criticizing these moral theories is not to show that they are wrong theories, but to show that they silence the strong evaluations behind their contentions. In short, they disregard the ontology that supports their theories.

Underlying his critique of contemporary ethics lies Taylor's interest in the problem of which ontology can best underpin our moral experience. In this respect, Taylor assumes that there is a connection between phenomenology of human morality and the ontological vision of the good. Despite various attempts to articulate ethical predicaments without ontology and, in our case, a solidarity without metaphysical commitments, ontology cannot be avoided if one looks at the actual way in which human beings make ethical decisions. In Taylor's moral realism, then, human beings undertake ontological commitments when making their ethical decisions.

In this sense, Taylor argues that the motivation to love one's neighbor stems from the *strong evaluation* of *constitutive goods*, that occurs, for example in the contrast and conflict of values that happens within the subject when we are faced with a situation of need of our neighbor, when we meet exemplary people or, directly, when we feel strongly the horizons to which a moral source opens us. The decision to act is made based on the conflict between one's own well-being and the good of others, as well as between justice and love and compassion (cf. Taylor, 1997). However, one of the

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problems with Taylor's proposal lies in the lack of clarity of what the moral agent is ultimately committed to, i.e. what is the concrete content of his ontology, what guiding principle he advocates for his ethics. Specifically, the problem lies in determining the nature of Taylor's proposed realism—whether he seeks to grant ontological status to realities independent of the agent, whose articulation constitutes the core of moral life, or whether his realism concerns only the ways in which human beings articulate such *constitutive goods*. Even if the latter is the case, the question about the status of the entities that Taylor understands as *constitutive goods* have remains open.

Nevertheless, Taylor makes a plea for moral realism from a phenomenological approach to the way in which human beings engage with moral decisions and make *strong evaluations*. In that sense, we refer to his proposal as a human-centred proposition. But it is that same phenomenological study of the nature of our moral experience that points to a *non-anthropocentric* framework or background of the good and of values, as Meijer calls it (Meijer, 2018). *Self*, identity, moral commitment are instances which gain in meaning through openness to ontology: "our understandings of the good are tied up with our understandings of the self" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 109). But the focus on how agents make their moral commitments is not offset by a consideration on the nature of the truths that lie outside of us. This lack of clarity respecting the nature of *constitutive goods* has led to an intense debate in secondary literature about the strength or weakness of Taylor's ontological commitments, especially when it comes to explain *strong evaluation* (cf. Abbey, 2000; Laitinen, 2008; N. H. Smith, 2002; Meijer, 2018a).

We are interested in showing Taylor's understanding of moral motivation in the light of these *constitutive goods*. One of these possible *constitutive goods* is indeed Christian *agape*. *Agape* is a term that appears in *Sources of the Self* relatively infrequently. In this major work by Taylor, we can reconstruct a definition of *agape* as a moral source, as a *constitutive good*, understood as God's love "for us" which "humans through receiving can then give in turn" (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 93, 270), as we have seen in the introduction. On several occasions, moreover, it appears in contexts pointing to the moral novelty brought by the Christian conception of *agape* and

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its subsequent secularization or transformation into benevolence or altruism.

In any case, *agape* implies a truth independent of the human being that influences the moral life of the individual, both on the level of motivation and on the horizon of understanding of the world. But it does so in a peculiar way, insofar as it implies openness to religious transcendence and the possibility of a new horizontal transcendence, in the form of new modes of solidarity among human beings. One question we ask here is, consequently, whether there are elements in Charles Taylor's realism that show distinctive peculiarities of *agape* with respect to other moral sources. We find them in the introduction of the element of incommensurability, as well as in the nature of the ontological and moral framework to which *agape* opens or in the admiration for exemplary individuals. Moreover, the relevance of *agape* lies in the commitment—in the form of hunch or intuition—that Taylor makes for theism as more adequate than non-theistic sources to respond to the great demand for solidarity of our age (cf. Taylor, 1989a, p. 520, 1991b, p. 240) and to satisfy the desires for human fulfillment (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 15–20, 639–656).

Finally, we turn to Enrique Dussel's critique of Taylor's moral realism from the perspective of the Philosophy of Liberation. Alongside Laitinen and others, Dussel raises one of the most common objections to Taylor's ethics—namely, that by focusing too much on the subject's identity and self-understanding, he neglects the concrete Other. Examining this critique will help us identify elements in Taylor's thought that show his concern with alleviating others' suffering, without abandoning his attention to the moral life of agents or his ontological commitments.

2.1. Mapping Taylor's moral realism

At the outset of *Sources of the Self*, Taylor insists much contemporary moral philosophy—shaped by naturalistic, non-realist, and subjectivist currents—, "has tended to focus on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 3). An exclusive focus on the right narrows moral inquiry, brackets the

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question of the good life, and neglects the ontological background of motives and languages that silently underwrite moral experience under conditions of pluralism. According to Taylor, the modern context makes it all the more necessary to give voice to aspects forgotten by the main contemporary moral schools.[22] Precisely for this reason, he aims to examine "the richer background languages in which we set the basis and point of the moral obligations we acknowledge" and "the background picture of our spiritual nature and predicament which lies behind some of the moral and spiritual intuitions of our contemporaries" (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 3–4).

Throughout *Sources of the Self,* Taylor denounces the missing debate over constitutive goods that stands behind ostensibly shared moral standards. He notes a characteristic modern pattern: ever higher demands—universal justice, benevolence, altruism—combined with an eclipse of the sources that could sustain both the ought and the motivation to live up to it: "What underlies our sense of historical exceptionalism, that we recognize and can meet very stringent demands of universal justice and benevolence?" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 410).[23]

Against this backdrop, Taylor defends a form of moral realism that stands between *strong realism* and *weak realism*.[24] Unlike theories such as those that Taylor criticizes, moral realists hold that there is a real instance independent of the subject's interpretations and understandings that can be accessed, not only through facts,

22 Stephen K. White emphasizes that "no thinker today has done more to press broad ontological questions than Charles Taylor" (White, 2000, p. 42). According to White, Taylor would join a not small set of thinkers who have concluded that avoiding ontological questions in philosophical thought is a bad strategy, including George Kateb (1992, 2011), Judith Butler (1990) or William Connolly (Connolly, 1993, 1999).

23 Later in this chapter we will examine what this historical exceptionalism consists of.

24 The use of the adjective *weak* in the context of realism or the fact of speaking of *strong* and *weak* ontologies in this context of debate around the recovery of ontology by Taylor and others, should not lead us to fit Vattimo's *pensiero debole* within these parameters. Vattimo's *weak thought* is an anti-metaphysical way of thinking that derives from Heidegger's nihilistic reading of the fate of Being, understanding metaphysics as the idea that there is an objective order of being that, from this perspective, can no longer be postulated (Vattimo & Zabala, 2011, p. 94). On the difference between Taylor's "weak ontology" and Vattimo's "weak thought", see (White, 2009).

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but also through interpretations of meaning, and that can be the source of morality. The problem of the qualification of his moral realism is aggravated when *agape* is studied from the coordinates of Christian moral realism, for which "the base point that ought to be most decisive is the interpretation of God and God's relations to the world, including human beings" (Gustafson, 1992, p. 144). In any case, broadly speaking, it is possible to distinguish between two different interpretations of this moral realism depending on whether it defends a *weak* or a *strong* ontology. Broadly, two interpretive families emerge depending on whether one reads Taylor as endorsing a weak or a strong ontology. The fault lines concern, first, how much ontological content is attributed to moral experience, and second, whether openness to transcendence is affirmed, i.e., whether "there is a genuine connection between ethics and ontology that is best explained by a non anthropocentric understanding of strong evaluation." (Meijer, 2018, p. 67).

On the one hand, realism from a *weak* ontology focuses on how individuals experience the good in their lives rather than on the existence or ontological nature of the goods themselves—their place and ontological characteristics, etc. From this perspective, valuing a good as worthy, positive, noble, or deserving of attention does not in itself entail engagement with it, nor does it amount to affirming or denying that it possesses an independent ontological reality. For instance, Stephen K. White has interpreted Taylor as a *weak* ontological realist (White, 2000, p. 43). For White, on the one hand, Taylor's ontological arguments arise from his anthropological interest in describing the moral agent in terms of the identity of a subject that is "always already engaged, embedded, or situated" (White, 2000, p. 44). That is, although Taylor is interested in ontology, his orientation is fundamentally subjective, ontologically undetermined, with no claim to be a "level of metaphysical bedrock" (White, 2000, p. 49). Thus, the interest is not so much in describing the good, but in seeing the descriptions that are made of it and how they are made. Moreover, Taylor acknowledges "a certain openness to ontological diversity" (White, 2000, p. 52), which would be an argument in favor of the weak predicament of his ontology.

But White's view, as Michiel Meijer puts it, "results in a too limited account of Taylor's arguments about agency" and, moreover, "fails to acknowledge the non-anthropocentric elements in Taylor's onto-

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logical thought" (Meijer, 2018, p. 180). Indeed, there are elements in Taylor's thought that could support a *weak* ontological reading. However, Taylor does not advocate subjectivism or even some kind of relativism at all. In his ontological account there are elements that suggest metaphysical realities beyond the control of human subjectivity, which can be defined as "strong" and which Meijer considers as non-anthropocentric. For Taylor, experience and belief—that is, the attribution of moral meaning—remain contestable; but the metaphysical background or framework that gives meaning to these evaluations is not.[25]

Alternatively, *strong* realism assumes that such metaphysical frameworks exist in the sense that people respond to an idea of goodness that is external and independent of them when they pursue these goods. For this interpretation, such an idea, once identified, commits the moral agent to act in accordance with it. Given these premises, Frederik Olafson interprets Taylor as a strong realist who advocates a return to Plato's world of pre-existing forms: "Indeed, the impression one gets from the account that Taylor gives of these matters is that it is guided more by his Platonic model—what he calls the idea of an "ontic logos" —than by anything else" (Olafson, 1994, p. 194).[26]

From our point of view, Taylor defends a realism that occupies a middle ground between *weak* and *strong* interpretations, at least, in view of the elements we have in *Sources of the Self*. On the one hand, he distances himself from Plato's metaphysical view Plato's metaphysical framework becomes untenable after the rise of post-Galilean ontology and the *disenchantment* of the world, as he has described in numerous places. However, the fading of Plato's ontology of ideas does not rule out the notion of a moral good as an object capable of empowering and motivating moral actions (cf. Taylor, 2011c, pp. 292–299). Taylor's point about strong evaluation—which has given rise to so much confusion —is that even ethical schools that build their conception of the good on an immanent view of the

25 See more details on Meijer's response to White about his weak interpretation of Taylor on (Meijer, 2017a).

26 In support of such an argument it can be argued that Taylor himself acknowledges indebtedness to Iris Murdoch's theory of the sovereignty of the good in the elaboration of his doctrine of strong evaluation (Taylor, 1989a, p. 3, 2011b; Murdoch, 2006).

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good are compatible with part of the Platonic ethical conception, insofar as this implies a show of respect for those *constitutive goods and* a commitment that goes beyond mere recognition of them or desire for them. Thus, Meijer notes that Taylor defends his non-anthropocentric perspective as a middle position between "a 'Platonist' mode of moral realism, on the one hand, and "mere subjectivism, on the other" (Meijer, 2018, p. 8). Yet the label *non-anthropocentric* can be misleading, since Taylor's realism is also concerned with the ways in which human beings express themselves and give meaning to their own lives.

In this sense, the expression "robust realism" that he develops with Hubert Dreyfus in *Retrieving Realism* may be useful to clarify the middle ground between strong and weak interpretations of his moral philosophy. By the expression "robust", the authors use the term to describe a realism that, on the one hand, takes into account independent realities outside us that demand the continuous adjustment of our thinking, as is the case with ethical goods and the search for meaning in life (cf. Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015, p. 162). On the other hand, it is a realism that defends that the knowledge of external objects—such as moral truths beyond our reach—arises from our embodied existence within the world, not from a detached or objectifying stance. Moreover, *robust* realism is defined as *plural*, in the sense that such embodied contact with the good gives rise to different conceptions of reality, coming from different cultures or perspectives on reality. Thus, Taylor supports a robust and plural realism in the sense that it

> "(1) multiple ways of interrogating reality (that's the "plural" part), which nevertheless (2) reveal truths independent of us, that is, truths that require us to revise and adjust our thinking to grasp them (and that's the robust realist part), and where (3) all attempts fail to bring the different ways of interrogating reality into a single mode of questioning that yields a unified picture or theory (so they stay plural)" (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015, p. 154).

Thus, we can agree with Ruth Abbey in describing Taylor's realism as "falsifiable realism" (Abbey, 2000, pp. 10, 27–30; see also Wang, 2021). Of course, Taylor's realism entails a pluralism of ethical visions—indeed, as many as there are possible moral articulations—and in encountering alternative perspectives it continually challenges our own conceptions of the good, as we shall see below.

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We can also follow her in proposing that Taylor's realism is falsifiable in the sense that it remains provisional: since we see that human beings act and live morally, realism is for now the most plausible explanation "unless and until a moral theory emerges that can explain why the human urge to respond to goods as if they had an independent existence is unconnected to reality" (Abbey, 2000, p. 29).

Finally, the label *falsifiable* aligns with the spirit of the *Best Account* argument that we will see in Chapter 4, according to which Taylor's realism provides the best model for making sense of our lives. Thus, the ontological debate over the strength or weakness of Taylor's moral ontology does not, in itself, resolve many questions about *agape* as a source of motivation for helping strangers. What is certain, however, is that Taylor's realism offers a conceptual framework that makes it possible to regard *agape* as a moral source to which we can turn to strengthen our commitment to our neighbor and to "bring the air back into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 520).

Indeed, debates over whether Taylor's moral realism should be classified as weak or strong have often revolved around Taylor's version of *agape* and its ambiguity (Skinner, 1991; Taylor, 1991b). Moreover, some commentators, such as Morgan (1994) have discerned echoes of MacIntyre (2007) in Taylor's own proposals. A similar assessment comes from Gary Kitchen, who finds Taylor's proposal of strong evaluation linked to theism (or *agape*) unpersuasive because it rests on mere intuition. In general, the actual description of his belief within the parameters of his moral realism, as well as his own interpretation of strong realism, "seems to parody his own conception of practical reason and leave no room at all for discussion" (Kitchen, 1999, p. 49; see also Skinner, 1994). Even more to the point, if we go by how he addresses *agape* as grace in *Sources of the Self* and take his arguments for theism more seriously than Skinner or Kitchen, the most likely option is that he is arguing for some kind of *strong* ontology. In that sense, the option of understanding Taylor's realism as *robust* (not strong) but also *falsifiable* allows us to make a tentative plausibility judgment of the open-ended orientation toward a higher ontological reality influencing the moral world.

In summary, debates over the distinctive nature of *agape* in Taylor's moral realism have continued given its theistic special status.

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We will explore its particular place within Taylor's moral realism in the following chapters. In any case, there are critics who invalidate Taylor's whole argument for moral realism as being all permeated with theism. Others simply set aside the peculiarities of *agape* or its openness to transcendence while accepting the rest of Taylor's moral realism (cf. Laitinen, 2008). Still others are drawn to his rehabilitation of the question of the good life, although they dismiss any ontological claims (cf. Rosa & Kern, 2012).

To our knowledge, some critics have suspected that Taylor's persuasive version of realism conceals a defense of Christian faith against rival sources. However, this is not what Taylor affirms, who has not failed to point out the plurality of possible moral sources that can satisfy the framework of *robust* realism. Taylor accepts as distinctive of modernity the great plurality and variety of goods, let us say, as available to serve the agent as a source of moral action. All the same, Taylor has a *hunch* that a theistic ontology may be the best account to offer a satisfactory explanation of human morality, which may tip the balance towards a strong version of realism. Nonetheless, Taylor himself, as we shall see, leaves the question open for further inquiry. The debate has continued to the present day, with new variants following the turn to religious questions after the conference *A Catholic Modernity* and, above all, after the publication of *A Secular Age*. Therefore, in the current debate it is necessary to consider his proposal in light of his concrete understanding of *agape* and of what we shall later call *agapeic transcendence*.

Agape, as Taylor names the theistic source of altruism, may offer the motivation to move beyond the exclusivity and self-sufficiency characteristic of the modern human moral perspective. His tentative defense of theism, however, should not be understood as the conclusion of a comprehensive argument about moral realism intended to demonstrate the rational grounds for belief in God. On the contrary, *robust, plural and falsifiable* moral realism retains its plausibility even without engaging the theistic possibility. "Accordingly, we will now examine Taylor's moral realism in detail to clarify both the phenomenological experience of universal solidarity and the ontological openness to a stable source such as *agape*.

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2.2. Articulation, live goods and constitutive goods

We now turn to a brief outline of Taylor's moral theory as presented in *Sources of the Self*. This short overview will situate his distinctions among different kinds of goods, since these form the conceptual background for understanding how *agape* functions later as a constitutive and motivational source. The aim of *Sources* is to show the origins, development, and eventual crisis of the identity of the modern Self. In Taylor's view the question of identity is inseparable from the human aspiration toward the good life and fulfillment, which brings with it the ultimate question about the nature of the good itself. For Taylor, ethical life can only be constructed from the concrete horizon of the intuitions that lead the agent towards the good, in particular, to *hypergoods* and *constitutive goods*.[27]

In order to clarify this framework, Taylor distinguishes in his phenomenology of human moral life between three different qualifications of goods. On the one hand, there are the life goods, which in their own way give purpose and meaning to the actions we undertake, such as family love, the importance of the relationship of friendship, economic success, honor, creative expression, etc. Surpassing them in importance are those goods which, like commitments to universal justice, benevolence, freedom and also altruism, and which, by their nature, may cause us to give up some life good in order to achieve them. Taylor calls the latter *hypergoods*. Finally, constitutive goods are even more important than *hypergoods* by positioning themselves above or below them—depending on how one wants to understand metaphorically—as moral sources, providing a moral framework or map from which human beings understand who they are and the meaning of their actions. As we shall see, it is

27 As Hans Joas emphasizes, the connection Taylor makes between values or the good and research on the formation of modern identity represents a shift in the fundamental assumptions of contemporary moral philosophy. For him, the real novelty of *Sources of the Self* lies in the intersubjective construction of the meanings of values and their valuation presuppositions. Willam James and Emil Durkheim had already united meaning and valuation in the experience of the sacred. Taylor, however, introduces in moral philosophy the formation of identity. Therein the transcendent, the sacred, still plays a special role, albeit always from an interpersonal perspective and from a strong anthropological interest (See Joas, 2017a, pp. 195–226).

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at the level of constitutive goods that *agape* finds its place (cf. Taylor, 1989a, pp. 62–107; DeSouza, 1998).

To guide the reader through the argument, it is helpful to note that what follows summarizes one of Taylor's central anthropological assumptions: moral life always implies an implicit ontology. Taylor bases his argument on the premise that the conception of the good, whether verbalized or not, is a universal or permanent feature of moral life. Conversely, the choice between an enormous set of goods (a feature of modernity) is not resolved simply through a formal or procedural principle of the good. Moreover, as the book attempts to show throughout, conceptions of the good are closely tied to the anthropological question of identity, a question that, moreover, has to be understood in a relational and culturally charged way.[28] In many cases, these moral sources go back to religious traditions. Yet this connection no longer has any justifying value *per se*. To be human-centered, to shed light on right action, to allow respect for fellow human beings and to help in the pursuit of happiness in a broad sense, are requirements that are expected today, after modernity, from any moral proposal. Nowadays "all goods which are not anchored in human powers or fulfillments [are treated] as illusions from a bygone age" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 506).[29] But in addition to that, he argues that the ancient belief in the objectivity of the good is still at work in everyday moral behavior, even if modern philosophical theories tend to obscure or undermine it (Kerr, 2004, pp. 87–91).

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28 "Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 3).

29 It is a position in which he is inspired by the work on morals from the analytical philosophy done in the 1950s by Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot and, above all, by Iris Murdoch. Taylor would find in it a double movement of liberation that he echoes: the movement in moral philosophy to go beyond moral obligation and the interest in the good life and "the question of a good and satisfying life to the consideration of a good which would be beyond life, in the sense that its goodness cannot be entirely explained in terms of its contributing to a fuller, better, richer, more satisfying human life. It is a good that we might sometimes more appropriately respond to in suffering and death, rather than in fullness and life—the domain, as usually understood of religion." (Taylor, 2011d, pp. 4–5). As we will see below, such an understanding of the good "beyond life" is one of Taylor's ways of understanding transcendence.

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Despite the silence of contemporary mainstream moral theories, however, moral conflicts surface especially in moments of clear conflict between different goods at stake (as in the abortion or euthanasia debates). It becomes in those moments when the moral agent is forced to *make sense* of the unspoken frameworks and ideas behind the moral judgments. This is what Taylor calls *articulation*.[30] *Articulation* is not itself an ethical theory but consists of a practice (even a human capacity) by which ideals and ideas of good that are attractive to the particular moral agent are elicited and inspire to act in accordance with them.[31] Above all, these conflicts also arise when it comes to qualifying a way of life, an action or a good as more or less valuable, that it is to say, to *make sense of it*. When the good is articulated through moral action, what happens is not just that the agent justifies why such an action is carried out (e.g., seeking to increase happiness or acting by the categorical imperative). By *articulation* Taylor refers to the ontological background which makes it possible for a whole set of rules to define what is just and what is good. Therefore, he does not try to find a unique reason on which to base moral action, but to insert moral life in a more comprehensive vision of morality, relating it also to the field of identity, the type of person one wants to be or the ideal that motivates him. In that sense,

> "the central point of Taylor's emphasis on articulation seems clear enough: only articulated goods can be truly motivating, expressed either in linguistic descriptions and philosophical prose or in expressions

30 "What is articulated here is the background we assume and draw on in any claim to rightness, part of which we are forced to spell out when we have to defend our responses as the right ones" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 9).

31 The concept of articulation plays an important role in Taylor's philosophy. In *The Language Animal* (Taylor, 2016), Taylor deepens and systematizes his notion of articulation: it is a communicative act, but also an act of meaning construction. Articulation is fundamental when it comes to constructing the collective identity of a society, since the communicative act—performed not only through language, but also by subtler languages—involves the transmission of the historical understanding of a concept, which enables communication in time and space. Therefore, articulation is not only fundamental for the construction of one's own identity in interaction with peers, but is also important for the formation of collective identity, even in plural contexts. For Taylor, in line with Heidegger's *Lichtung*, meaning in language is not external to the agent, but language actively participates in meaning-making and, at the same time, reveals the world as meaning (Taylor, 1985a, pp. 215–246, 1995a, pp. 100–125).

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beyond the bounds of language as normally conceived" (Meijer, 2018, pp. 37–38).

Along with the moral *articulation*, Taylor appeals to the concept of *constitutive good*, which would be at the basis of the sources of moral and vital orientation. Taylor does not simply refer to *constitutive goods* and *moral sources* indistinctly. *Moral source* is the name given to *constitutive goods* when they function as moral motivators. The identification of these goods is fundamental for the *articulation* and consequently for moral motivation.

However, Taylor does not offer a definition of these *constitutive goods* either but he does come close to it in some of the distinctions he makes and the examples he uses. According to Taylor, moral perspectives and life integration function at two levels. On the one hand, *life goods*, which would be features of everyday life that have value and make life worthwhile: "what actions, modes of being, virtues really define a good life for us" (Taylor, 1997a, p. 173).[32] Some examples would be freedom, reason, piety, authenticity, courage and benevolence (Abbey, 2000, p. 47). For Taylor *constitutive goods* would be beneath or above *life goods* and would serve as the true source of what we appreciate and value in life: "the *constitutive good* is a moral source, in the sense I want to use this term here: that is, it is a something the love of which empowers us to do and be good" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 93).[33]

Constitutive goods possess both an affective and a cognitive dimension: they can evoke identification, capture the imagination, inspire admiration, and even provoke guilt or shame.[34] At the same

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32 For Arvo Laitinen, "life goods" would be the values themselves: "what is important, significant, meaningful, valuable, worthy, reasonable, obligatory, i.e., from the level of life-goods. The notion of "life-goods" refers to the ordinary goals the pursuit of which can give substance to one's life. Engagement with life- goods and with what is of value is the source of the 'substance' or 'content' of one's life" (Laitinen, 2004, p. 74, 2008, p. 258).

33 "What is the constitutive source of value, which makes the important things important, or makes the good features good etc. Correspondingly, on the first level, the relevant question about ourselves is what it is in us humans that gives us access to values, whereas on the second level, the relevant question is how humans can be in touch with the sources of value" (Laitinen, 2004, p. 74, 2008, p. 58).

34 On the debates about the interpretation of the double affective and reflective character of the articulation of constitutive goods, see (Meijer, 2018, pp. 38–40).

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time, they also have an ontological status, insofar as they rest on some feature of the universe, of God, or of human nature itself (cf. Taylor, 1991b, p. 243). As moral sources, however, they are not situated outside the subject but within the very framework through which moral life is experienced. Their ontological location, whether on a Platonic supralunar level, in a theistic transcendence, or in a shared horizon of meaning, is not relevant for Taylor at this point. What truly matters is how the agent articulates these goods within his or her lived moral horizon.[35]

Although Taylor acknowledges a certain epistemological uniformity in the way subjects articulate—or are capable of articulating—goods, the specific life goods valued by different individuals do vary. Yet, within a shared cultural horizon or social imaginary, we tend to recognize the same hypergoods, notably altruism and benevolence. When we turn to the normativity of constitutive goods, however, their number appears even more limited. In fact, considering a paradigmatic modern motif such as benevolence, Taylor observes that

> "it can have a number of backgrounds—some theistic, some atheist, some not classificable in terms of contrast—yet they have in common that they see love, or something like it, as our highest capacity, and they see human beings as worthy objects of this love, whether as children of God, or beings with inherent dignity, or whatever else" (Taylor, 1997a, p. 173).

In terms of our focus on altruism, pluralism comes to a kind of "overlapping moral consensus" (Rawls, 1999, 2005) when referring the importance given to this principle, regardless of the metaphysical or ontological background behind the valuation of the subject, even if the same modern framework is shared (cf. Taylor, 1989a, pp. 515–516).[36] Taylor considers that the fact that many ethical theories (such

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35 Taylor justifies this internal realism by turning to history in *Sources of the Self*: and the drive towards interiority that begins with St. Augustine and continues until today, with a notable impetus from modernity. Following that reconstruction of History is how it is possible to explain the plurality of goods and moral sources today.

36 Such *overlapping consensus* is well reflected in Amartya Sen's idea of "neighborhood" when he comments on the passage of the Good Samaritan: "It does not matter whether the Samaritan was moved by charity, or by a 'sense of justice,' or by some deeper 'sense of fairness in treating others as equals.' Once he finds

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as utilitarianism, or post-Kantian theories) do not consider these *constitutive goods* represents a moral blindness, by leaving out of their objectives the personal fulfillment or the domain of good life:

> "Utilitarianism is the most striking case. A good, happiness, is recognized. But this is characterized by a polemical refusal of any qualitative discrimination. There is no more higher or lower; all that belongs to the old, metaphysical views. There is just desire, and the only standard which remains is the maximization of its fulfillment" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 78).

Yet it does, in fact, operate with these qualitative distinctions:

> "The critic can't help remarking how little utilitarians have escaped qualitative distinctions, how they in fact accord rationality and its corollary benevolence the status of higher motives, commanding admiration. But there is no doubt that the express theory aims to do without this distinction altogether" (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 78–79).[37]

Taylor's point is that, despite the fact that utilitarianism or post-Kantianism obviates *constitutive goods* even though they are in fact based on them, such goods still lie behind the moral aspirations of modern man: the affirmation of ordinary life, the notion of the freedom and independence of the subject, and the stress on practical benevolence.[38] With the development of substantive and procedural ethics this blindness is accentuated. About Habermas, he points out:

> "It seems that they are motivated by the strongest moral ideals, such as freedom, altruism, and universalism. These are among the central moral aspirations of modern culture, the *hypergoods* which are distinctive to it. And yet what these ideals drive the theorists towards is a denial of all such goods. They are caught in a strange pragmatic contradiction, whereby the very goods which move them push them to deny or denature all such goods. They are constitutionally incapable of coming

himself in this situation, he is in a new 'neighborhood'" (Drèze & Sen, 1989, p. 172).

37 One of the interesting considerations that Taylor makes about Kant is that he reveals that there are constitutive goods while remaining within the immanent sphere (in his case, rational agency): "As the Kantian case shows, an entirely immanent view of the good is compatible with recognizing that there is something the contemplation of which commands our respect, which respect in turn empowers" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 94).

38 Here he discusses Habermas' procedural theory particularly (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 85–88; Habermas, 1983).

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> clean about the deeper sources of their own thinking. Their thought is inescapably cramped" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 88).

This is more clear in the case of benevolence:

> "It has become one of the central beliefs of modern Western culture: we all should work to improve the human condition, relieve suffering, overcome poverty, increase prosperity, augment human welfare. We should strive to leave the world a more prosperous place than we found it" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 85).

Then, Taylor emphasizes that these theories are based on *hypergoods* and yet deny what is beneath or above them, that is, *constitutive goods*. They are able to defend ideals as strong as altruism or solidarity and yet the theories end up denying the moral-ontological nature of such goods. It is for this reason that these ethical theories are *inarticulate ethics*: by denigrating any conception of the good as Taylor understands it, they fail to articulate. As he says referring to Habermas elsewhere, "you cannot make any sense of the force of this discourse ethic (...) if you imagine away this highly substantive background" (Taylor, 1998, p. 86). His point is that *constitutive goods* need such articulation in order to operate and to be able to motivate moral action for the sake of justice or benevolence. Without this articulation of good, therefore, any enterprise to achieve social justice, solidarity in the community or altruism with the most distant from the free and voluntary adhesion of each individual could not succeed.

Moreover, consequences of inarticulation in the public discussion are confusion when clashes of different values occur (as in the debates on abortion or euthanasia); the fall into a biased subjectivism, that is, into a detached individualism; and, finally, the negative view regarding goods, which are seen as ways to generate guilt or to give smug reasons for superiority, obviating the potential they have to lead life and bring it to fulfillment. In the case of global solidarity the consequence of inarticulation is more palpable as without an *articulation* of solidarity action in a *constitutive good* commitment to philanthropic action may falter, as we will see.

Finally, it should be noted that Taylor completes the map of moral theories emerged from Modernity with Nietzschean anti-humanism. As we shall see when we refer to Taylor's dialogue with Nietzsche in chapter 8, Taylor will also accuse him of falling into inarticulacy. As

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with all other perspectives, Taylor's point is that all ethical approaches rest on some constitutive good, on a moral source that transcends the individual, regardless of whether any such reality is more or less explicitly recognized, attacked or deconstructed.

2.2.1. Strong evaluation and moral motivation

This subsection clarifies the evaluative mechanics—weak versus strong evaluation—and explains why constitutive goods, once articulated, exert motivational force that purely procedural accounts cannot capture. Even though contemporary moral philosophy silences the issue of the good life and the sources of morality, in this regard, subjects are oriented toward the good. This orientation is relevant to the direction they give to their lives and the motivation according to which the subject acts.[39] *Constitutive goods* are thus relevant for the narrativity of our lives; they are fundamental for our moral orientation and the realization of *qualitative distinctions* between human desires and goals: they are highly relevant "for those with a strong commitment to such a good, what it means is that this (the good) above all others provides the landmarks for what they judge to be the direction of their lives" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 62).

It is precisely from this phenomenological consideration of how individuals direct their lives and actions that Taylor affirms a hierarchy of goods (cf. Taylor, 1990a, p. 71ff). Relevant to our interest is the role of *constitutive goods* as moral motivators. Taylor suggests that we use qualitative distinctions between various *constitutive goods* to evaluate our motivations. This helps us identify our aspirations in terms of the kind of person we want to be, or the quality of life we desire.

According to Taylor, it's natural for people to make judgments about the worth and value of things. This includes evaluating our own moral motivations, which is an essential part of human morality. There are two types of evaluations we can make: *weak* and

39 Taylor acknowledges that he is influenced here by Heidegger, Ricoeur and MacIntyre (Taylor, 1989a, p. 47).

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strong.[40] *Weak* evaluation involves weighing different options without considering the value of our moral desires, while strong evaluation takes into account the quality and worth of our desires. For example, if we feel like taking a walk but decide to postpone it until we finish writing a chapter, that's an example of weak evaluation. *Strong* evaluation, on the other hand, would involve considering the importance and value of both options before making a decision.

Thus, Taylor also believes that the most prominent contemporary ethical doctrines obviate strong evaluations, at least as an important element in the discernment of constitutive goods. This is the case of classical utilitarianism, for example, which moves at the level of life goods but rejects any view about constitutive goods and operates solely according to the criterion of maximizing pleasure:

> "The aim of this philosophy was precisely to reject all qualitative distinctions and to construct all human goals as on the same footing, susceptible therefore of common quantification and calculation according to some common 'currency'„ (Taylor, 1989a, p. 22).

In this sense, utilitarianism can only speak of strong evaluation at the level of life goods, where it locates some important moral issues such as the pursuit of ordinary human happiness, avoidance of suffering or seeking universal benevolence. Classical utilitarianism, however, is averse to admit that there are ways of living, feeling and acting that are purer, deeper, more admirable and so on, that it, there are facts of higher worth. It rejects "the fact that these ends or goods stand independent of our own desires, inclinations, or choices, that they represent standards by which these desires and choices are judged" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 20). The consequences of this rejection are manifested in some hyperbolic examples proposed by Taylor to show that, eventually, there are indeed alternatives that are incomparable: "it could be doubted whether giving comfort to the dying is the

40 At this point, Taylor adopts and modifies Harry Frankfurt's distinction between first and second order desires. While many animals seem to have first-order desires, to do or not to do, human beings have desires to have desires, or second-order desires, thereby manifesting their reflective capacity (Frankfurt, 1971; Joas, 2000, pp. 127–128). Besides, Meijer notes that "the concept of strong evaluation finds its roots in Frankfurt's theory of second-order desires, and is introduced by Taylor to describe a structural feature of human agency" (Meijer, 2018, p. 32).

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highest util-producing activity possible in contemporary Calcutta. But, from another point of view, the dying are in an extremity that makes calculation irrelevant" (Taylor, 1985a, pp. 235–236).[41]

2.2.2. Incommensurable Goods and the Orientation of a Life

We now turn to the status of *incommensurable goods*. The above consideration about the need for a *strong evaluation* of a *constitutive good* above the life goods and that operates in the face of the vision of the suffering of others requires the introduction of terms such as *incommensurability* (Taylor, 1985b, pp. 237–240) or *incomparability* (Taylor, 1989, pp. 62–65) to be understood.[42] For Taylor,

> "there are ends or goods which are worthy or desirable in a way that cannot be measured on the same scale as our ordinary ends, goods, *desirabilia*. They are not just *more* desirable, in the same sense though to a greater degree, than some of these ordinary goods are. Because of their special status they command our awe, respect, or admiration" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 20).

Incommensurable goods are what we called before *constitutive goods*, understood as "goods which are not only incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must

41 In the same way, he is equally concerned about any variant of the categorical imperative in Kantian moral deontology when it is closed to the strong evaluation of constitutive goods.: "Of course, if someone professes to see no distinction between his concern for the flowers in his garden and that fort he lives of refugees faced with starvation, so that he proposes to act in both cases just to the degree that he feels interested at the time, we are rightly alarmed, and take this more seriously than the failure to appreciate Mozart over Boieldieu" (Taylor, 1985a, p. 238).

42 As Meijer notes, the two terminologies seem somewhat interchangeable, but in the context of strong evaluation, incommensurability seems more appropriate. Citing Ruth Chang, Meijer specifies that incommensurability means that the different objects being evaluated "cannot precisely be measured by some common scale of units of value", while incomparability simply states "that the items cannot be compared" (Chang, 1997, p. 2). In this sense, "you can compare 'enjoying ice cream' with 'saving a human life,' the crucial point is that they cannot be equally measured because of the sense that the preservation of life is on a different—that is, higher—level than the lust for ice cream, which makes the former incommensurably (not: incomparably) higher than the latter." (Meijer, 2018, p. 46, note 8).

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be weighed, judged, decided about" (Taylor, 1989, p. 63). Taylor observes that *constitutive goods* and the qualitative distinctions between actions and ways of life that are incommensurably higher or lower than others have been obscured by the reduction and homogenization of morality since modernity. It is from the postulate of the functionality of *constitutive goods* that Taylor makes ethical propositions that go beyond right action into the normative terrain of the good life, in opposition to utilitarianism or Kantian formalism.

The fact that *constitutive goods* are incommensurable is relevant in moral discernment in two types of situations affecting moral reaction to demands for justice and pain of others, as well as the way of conducting personal life. In the first case, *incommensurability* appears when an act with the best consequences may conflict with the integrity of the agent or, for example, when "the demands of benevolence to others may conflict with those of my own fulfillment. Or the demands of justice may conflict with those of mercy and compassion" (Taylor, 1997a, p. 170).[43]

On the second case, the *incommensurable goods* play an important role in the conduct of the life of the moral subject, since they consider the totality of life and tend to completely mobilize it. They do not focus, therefore, only on the rational or elective faculties, on the type of action that can be more noble or more rational, more adequate or with better results: *incommensurable goods* have the capacity to guide the whole of the conscious acts of an individual. For Taylor, real life forms a whole: morality and the *articulation* of goods should not be something separate from the totality of life:

43 In this case, Incommensurability also plays an important role in multicultural contexts, where it is customary to compare values or goods from very different cultures that coexist in the same environment, difficulting the seek common ground. In this sense, Taylor again denounces ethical theories that adopt a point of view that denies the diversity of the goods at stake and eliminates the complexity of the problems that arise with diversity in communities. Similarly, Taylor dismisses theories that accept diversity but do not want to articulate moral and evaluative answers, fleeing from incommensurability: "I am thinking of the various forms of utilitarianism, on the one hand, and the theories inspired by Kant, on the other. In reaction, critics arise who declare values to be unarbitrably diverse. The most popular views of this kind today are the various flavors of 'postmodernism'" (Taylor, 1997a, p. 171). We will look at this point in depth in Chapter 6.

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> "Real ethical life is inescapably led between the one and the many. We cannot do away either with the diversity of goods (or at least so I would argue against modern moral theory) or with aspiration to oneness implicit in our leading our lives" (Taylor, 1997a, p. 183).

Out of this understanding of the moral predicament, Taylor, in contrast to utilitarian and post-Kantian theories, relates the importance of the good life and the direction that the subject gives to it. Moral life is not only about deciding the right action in isolated acts but living life and becoming a certain kind of human being: "It would be telling us to become the kind of person who can dedicate ourselves thus totally to the rightness called for at this moment" (Taylor, 1997a, pp. 179–180).

Thus, the force of *incommensurable goods* is not only in directing the will toward good, virtuous action, with a more or less obligatory force.[44] *Incommensurable goods* tell us about the self, the other and the world. In other words, they contain aspects that go beyond ethics to enter the field of anthropology and ontology. As we said before, despite its incompleteness in some passages, Taylor's proposal explores the connection between a phenomenology of human morality (philosophical-anthropological) and an ontological vision of the good (non-anthropocentric) in which a theistic vision is possible, since it is capable of articulating action and directing the life of the subject through incommensurable goods. It is the contact with *constitutive goods* that encourages moral life. And moral life is encouraged in turn by contact with life in common with other human beings, with nature and with openness to transcendence. As he himself summarizes:

44 The incommensurability inherent in *hypergoods* is precisely what Richard Rorty rejects. Rorty finds in *hypergoods* a claim to universalism and to recover a correspondence theory of truth: "Taylor thinks of his own attachment to *hypergoods* as entailing a need to defend some form of the correspondence theory of truth. I reject all forms of that theory, except those that are so shallow and trivial as to be noncontroversial. I think that Taylor would do better to split off universalism—the belief in hypergoods that are there for all of us—from this theory. He and I would doubtless continue to disagree about moral experience even if we came to agreement on what to say about truth, and about such related issues as the relation of language and thought to the rest of the universe" (Rorty, 1998, p. 85)

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> "I would want to say something roughly like this: ethics tries to define the shape of the human moral predicament. But there would not be such a thing unless human beings existed. Once we exist, certain ways of being are higher than others in virtue of the way we are (the "Aristotelian" component); certain demands are made on us by other human beings in virtue of the way both we and they are (the "moral" component). [...] I would want to *add:* certain demands are made on us by our world in virtue of what we are and how we fit into it (the "ecological" component). And further, I believe that certain goods arise out of our relation to God (the "theological" component)" (Taylor, 1991b, p. 245).

In a way, Taylor's moral realism wants to revive the contact with the sources of morality through the relationships of individuals with their fellow human beings, with the community and with the sacred. Regarding love of neighbor and commitment to the suffering of others, Taylor recognizes the contemporary moral temperament that exalts questions about benevolence (something that lies behind utilitarianism) or justice (theories derived from Kant) and that focuses its interest on obligations to others as a positive feature of our time. Regarding the importance given to the avoidance of suffering: "We are much more sensitive to suffering—the notion that we ought to reduce it to a minimum is an integral part of what respect means to us today—however distasteful this has been to an eloquent minority" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 13). Great moral clarity has been achieved in these respects, in Taylor's terms, in the understanding of the *hypergoods* we ought to respect. However, Taylor also points out the high price paid for the inarticulation of constituent assets. We will see later what this is about due to its importance for the love of neighbor. In sum, incommensurable goods not only direct discrete choices; they orient a life as a whole by shaping identity, practical reason, and responsiveness to others. This prepares the ground for our later analysis of *agape* as a constitutive good whose disclosure and motivational pull cohere within Taylor's robust, plural realism.

2.3. Is the articulation of agape qualitatively distinctive?

Building on the distinctions drawn in §2.2, *qualitative distinction* is relevant in understanding how *agape*, as *hypergood*, can be qualitatively and valuationally more appreciated as a source of moral

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behavior. In *The Diversity of the Goods*, an essay predating *Sources of the Self*, Taylor exposes the special character of *agape* through Mother Teresa of Calcutta. In our study, she can be understood as a clear example of solidarity with the neighbor from a Christian moral source:

> "The aim here is to associate oneself with, to become in a sense a channel of, God's love for men, which is seen as having the power to heal the divisions among men and take them beyond what they usually recognize as the limits to their love for one another. The obstacles to this are seen as various forms of refusal of God's *agape*, either through a sense of self-sufficiency, or despair" (Taylor, 1985a, p. 234, cf. 1989a, p. 699, 1994a, p. 184).

The example of Mother Teresa is one of four that Taylor offers to show, intuitively, how we can recognize and evaluate a good over others. The remaining examples are personal integrity, in the sense of directing one's life toward the best expression of what is considered most important, most noble, most admirable and desirable, even in the face of social demands; actions that are directed toward the goal of liberation through the struggle for the dignity of individuals and communities; and, finally, rationality as understood by utilitarians, as a self-affirmation of the subject and of his goals through an objectification of himself and the world around him. Hence, "integrity, charity, liberation, and the like stand out as worthy of pursuit in a special way, incommensurable with other goals we might have, such as the pursuit of wealth, or comfort, or the approval of those who surround us" (Taylor, 1985a, pp. 236–237).

The nature of these *incommensurable goals* can be better understood from the way in which the subject articulates them. In *The Diversity of the Goods* (Taylor, 1982) and much later in *The Language Animal* (2016, p. 177ff), Taylor offers three features of this *articulation*: (1) the way in which these goods constrain; (2), the emergence of admiration for persons who exhibit *higher goods*; and (3) the way in which sensitivity to *incommensurable goods* is already part of their performance. Moreover, Taylor also notes elsewhere that love's revolutionary nature is subtle and not clearly defined, "thanks to an anticipation, in our imagination, of the style of practice it would

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imply, and is often communicated to us by exemplary persons of action in reality or in fiction" (Taylor, 1990a, p. 74).[45]

The example of Mother Teresa is not the only one that Taylor uses throughout his work to illustrate the role of *agape*. We will see this in more detail in chapter 8. However, the reference to these individuals when discussing charity leads us to ask whether *agape* has distinctive features in its articulation that lead us to postulate a different ontological character from other *incommensurable goods*. Another important related question is whether these distinctive features of the articulation of *agape* lead to a prescription of a concrete action. That is, whether the articulation of *agape* leads us to some kind of action in helping one's neighbor that is proper to someone who is motivated by this moral source as distinct from actions prescribed by an articulation from another alternative source. Let us construct this argumentation following three points.

First, articulation of *incommensurable goods* generates responsibility insofar as they introduce us to a horizon of understanding. Here Taylor explains how movements occur in our moral self-understanding with respect to the good that constitutes us or when we discover a good with a greater explanatory potential. Nevertheless, Taylor's theory does not explain by itself how motivation towards concrete action is produced. In any case, the question is whether the framework to which *agape* introduces empowers more towards neighborly love than other rival goods. As asserted in *Sources of the Self*, the articulation of *incommensurable goods* entails a particular notion of moral responsibility, either in the form of moral obligation or substantive commitments: "For those with a strong commitment to such a good, what it means is that this above all others provides the landmarks for what they judge to be the direction of their lives" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 62). So, in the case of *hypergoods*, the goal to which they are directed is one that the individual ought to have

45 ["Un nuevo valor revolucionario tampoco puede ser plenamente explícito. Lo comprendemos en parte gracias a una anticipación, en nuestra imaginación, del estilo de práctica que implicaría, y a menudo nos es comunicada por personas de acción ejemplares en la realidad o en la ficción. El Nuevo Testamento es el ejemplo patente en nuestra cultura de una nueva espiritualidad que fue ampliamente diseminada por una historia: tanto la de los Evangelios mismos como las que cuentan los Evangelios" (translated by S.G.)]. On the use of moral imagination by Charles Taylor, see (Bachelard, 2014).

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in order to conduct his or her life. In that sense, *incommensurable goods* commits or oblige, in a very different fashion from formal moral theories, which usually "derive all obligations from some single principle" (Taylor, 1994b, p. 213; cf. Abbey, 2000, p. 126) and tend to muffle conflicts between goods.[46] For Taylor, incommensurable goods compel or compromise insofar as they form a framework for understanding both morality and selfhood:

> "To articulate a framework is to explicate what makes sense of our moral responses. That is, when we try to spell out what it is that we presuppose when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement or status, or define our moral obligations in a certain manner, we find ourselves articulating inter alia what I have been calling here 'frameworks'" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 26).

Thus, in addition to the subject gaining self-knowledge through the articulation of the *incommensurable goods* that lie behind one's values and moral responsibilities, the articulation also introduces us into a framework. Such a framework—understood as the set of assumptions, values and beliefs that form part of the background or horizon where the individual situates him or herself in the world —also carries with it a certain ontology attached to it, a particular way of conceiving and situating oneself in the world and with others. According to Taylor, this second use of articulation shows us the various goods by which modern individuals live, will show their plurality and different sources (cf. Taylor, 1989a, pp. 105, 502) and, furthermore, calls us to debate, discuss and recontextualize goods in plural societies (cf. Taylor, 1992b, 1995b, p. 138).

In any case, we can ask whether the theistic framework at the heart of *agape* provides a vision of the good that is more empowering than rival theories for altruistic action.[47] Still, the type of obligation of *constitutive goods* is described very vaguely by Taylor, something that, as we next see, can lead to some misunderstandings when it comes to a proper understanding of the motivating role of

46 For ordinary goals, such as wealth or comfort, however, the agent will have as an end or not, but without obligation. Elsewhere he insists that "a higher goal is one from which one cannot detach oneself just by expressing a sincere lack of interest, because to recognize something as a higher goal is to recognize it as one that men ought to follow" {Taylor, 1985b, p. 238}.

47 We will answer this more specifically when we discuss the Best Account argument in chapter 3.

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agape. *Agape*, in the terms of the notion of articulation given by Taylor "can be offered both as an explanation of our desires and aspirations, but they also offer images through which we read these desires" (Taylor, 2016, p. 195). Yet there is no more about concrete motivation for any prescription of an action. As it can be seen in Arvo Laitinen's criticism: "it is a striking feature of this model of moral motivation, that bearers of intrinsic value have no motivating role" (Laitinen, 2004, p. 94, 2008, p. 288). We take this critique to call attention to the absence of a prescriptive model of action. Of course, a procedural perspective on moral action, as in the case of Habermas's discursive theory, would be at odds with Taylor's own perspective, which focuses on the metaethical level of moral predicaments (cf. Taylor, 1991b, p. 244; DeSouza, 1998). Simply put, the motivating impulse of *agape* for moral action, although experienced by the subject within her framework of understanding, needs a fuller explanation. It is in this sense that we need to go deeper into the nature of *agape*, for which we will need to know more about Taylor's conception of transcendence. This is why, in Chapter 4, we turn to Taylor's conception of transcendence and his reading of the Good Samaritan to clarify how *agape's* "pull" becomes concrete action. However, *agape* is distinct from other moral sources because it opens a receptive sphere to transcendence.

Secondly, and returning to *The Diversity of the Goods*, Taylor states that there is a contrast between *incommensurable goods* and the rest of goods in the fact that *incommensurable goods* usually cause admiration: "people who exhibit higher goods to a signal degree are objects of our admiration; and those who fail are sometimes object of our contempt" (Taylor, 1985b, p. 239). According to Taylor, admiration plays a significant role in our lives and affects our psyche. We often admire individuals for their physical appearance or personal style, even if they haven't earned it. This shows that we value something beyond the ordinary. Taylor calls this "moral admiration" when it relates to someone's moral qualities. Some people may consider this type of admiration irrational and choose not to partake in it.

In any case, "admiration and contempt are bound up with our sense of qualitative contrast in our lives, of there being modes of life, activities, feeling, qualities, which are incommensurably higher" (Taylor, 1985b, p. 240). Coming back to Mother Teresa, there is

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no doubt that, although for many agnostic atheist humanists (and for many Christian believers) the figure of Mother Teresa may be controversial in some of her practices (Hitchens, 1995), the fact is that her attention and dedication to the dying, the lepers and street children has aroused the admiration of very broad layers of society. In general, those who embark on solidarity activities tend to receive some degree of admiration from society: "real dedication to others or to the universal good wins our admiration and even in signal cases our awe" (Taylor, 1989, p. 22).[48] As we shall see, admiration for charismatic persons will appear later on and will be one of the factors that we find in Taylor as articulators of both his vision of transcendence and how it plays a role in the political sphere.

Third, maybe the exceptional motivation that *agape* brings is one of a kind. The way in which the agent is sensitive to the distinctions between different goods explains part of the motivation to act in accordance with these goods because it involves the aspiration to their realization: "for our recognizing the higher value of integrity,

48 An example of this type of admiration can be found in the awe shown for the Spanish health workers who, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the lack of protective equipment against the virus, decided to continue to work and fulfill their duties. Patricia Manrique, inspired by Roberto Esposito's *communitas-immunitas* binomial (Esposito, 2004a, 2004b), wrote that the liberal contractualist vision based on rights has been surpassed by the commitment of healthcare workers: "A nurse or a doctor in the midst of a coronavirus crisis has the right to protect himself or herself and refuse to work, to preserve his or her life first and foremost. However, what we are seeing is all healthcare professionals exposing themselves, assisting those in need, taking on this munus, this obligation to the vulnerability of the sick. This crisis, it seems, could not be solved if we were to stick to contractual terms, if there were not an exposure to the other, even to contagion, of many... (Manrique, 2020; translated by S.G.). Manrique sees a resurgence of *communitas*, of a civic solidarity in our parameters, of reciprocity and mutual obligation prior to a notion of patriotism or State. Beyond this revival, there is a sense of admiration, not so much for the *hypergood* for which the servers were oriented (which can certainly be of any kind and even something as banal as the fear of contempt of their own peers), but for a gesture that can be understood as generous and worthy of admiration. This, in a current context in which it could have been perfectly understood that they would not have committed themselves to that extent, simply by appealing to labor law. It would even be, in the case of many Christian-motivated health care professionals, a gesture of solidarity based on *agape*: putting at the service of a gift received, in this case their training, for the good of others and in face of their pain, even at the risk of their own physical integrity.

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or charity, or rationality, and so on, is an essential part for our being rational, charitable, having integrity and so on" (Taylor, 1985a, p. 237). The aspiration to attain one of these goods is, at the same time, an aspiration to be motivated in a certain way, to be inspired (Taylor, 1989a, p. 92). This way of aspiring to be motivated entails, depending on the circumstances, the renunciation of first-order goods or *life goods*, even going to the extreme of compromising some of the goods appreciated by the modern moral world, such as the avoidance of suffering or the affirmation of ordinary life. Taylor sometimes speaks of "attraction" to these goods, allowing himself to be inspired by Plato's Idea of the Good or Christian *agape* love:

> "For Plato, once we see the Good, we cease to be fascinated by and absorbed in the search for honor and pleasure as we were before, and we will even altogether want to renounce certain facets of these. On a Christian view, sanctification involves our sharing to some degree God's love (*agape*) for the world, and this transforms how we see things and what else we long for and think important" {Taylor, 1989, p. 69}.

Behind the idea of the Platonic Good or the Christian *agape* Taylor highlights "features of the universe, or God, or human beings, (i) on which the life goods depend, (ii) which command our moral awe or allegiance, and (iii) the contemplation of or contact with which empowers us to be good" (Taylor, 1991b, p. 243).

It is perhaps because of this sense of contemplation of the good that Laitinen considers Taylor's motivational approach to realism to be a "inspirational theory", in the sense that it is not the goal of the concrete action that would inspire us, but the attractive force of that which we love. He uses the example of love between two lovers, in which often one of the lovers begins to be interested in the interests of the loved one: by pursuing the same goal, one would feel more attached to the loved one {Laitinen 2004, p. 93; 2008, p. 287}.[49]

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49 Ruth Abbey, for her part, finds in this attraction to constitutive goods an erotic dimension that restores the dimension of love to the center of moral theory: "By underscoring the need to articulate moral sources, or constitutive goods that empower humans because they are worthy of love and respect, Taylor is trying to restore the old idea of loving goodness to moral philosophy. For him it is love that moves people towards goods and love that leads them to value strongly some of the goods in their lives" (Abbey, 2000, p. 49) Other interesting aspects on motivation as understood by Plato, either as pleasure (*Lust*) or joy (*Freude*)

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However, *agape* cannot simply be seen as an inspirational concept. It is also accompanied by a strong sense of commitment and obligation, as exemplified by individuals like Mother Teresa. This sense of obligation is what gives actions stemming from *agape* a meaning similar to that of supererogatory actions. It is not certainly because they exceed the limits of a positive duty, but because they demand, facilitate or make understandable renunciations of (now) lesser goods that within a framework, such as the modern one, are considered to be part of an accomplished or desirable life, while still appreciating their goodness. In that sense, Mother Teresa's religious commitment through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to serve the "poorest of the poor and live among them and like them" through her adherence to *agape*, seems a supererogatory action in the sense to which we are referring.[50] Taylor, in fact, comparing Stoic renunciation and Christian renunciation, affirms that

> "for the Christian, what is renounced is thereby affirmed as good-both in the sense that the renunciation would lose its meaning if the thing were indifferent and in the sense that the renunciation is in furtherance of God's will, which precisely affirms the goodness of the kinds of things renounced: health, freedom, life. Paradoxically, Christian renunciation is an affirmation of the goodness of what is renounced. (…) In the Christian perspective, the loss is a breach in the integrity of the good. That is why Christianity requires an eschatological perspective of the restoral of that integrity, even though this has been variously understood" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 219).

To sum up, therefore, our question as to whether the articulation of *agape* offers a qualitatively different articulation from other *constitutive goods* can be answered only tentatively. On the one hand, *agape*, understood as the experience of God's love that invites or appeals to return that love by doing good to one's fellow human beings, does

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or as an impulse towards an action that aims to alleviate a state of lack (*Zustand des Mangels*) in {Bordt, 2012}.

50 Taylor, personally, does open himself to the meaning of a religious vocation from the affirmation of *agape* in a writing subsequent to *A Secular Age*: "it makes sense for some people to strike out and blaze trails, and they can blaze farther in some directions because they're renouncing others. This can serve to nudge us all upward. Celibacy is just one example of this. There are other kinds of voluntary modes of poverty, stripping down of one's life, which permit one to open out new forms of *agape*" {Taylor, 2011, p. 364}.

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not, for the moment, offer a concrete answer to how altruistic action operates in concrete terms. But *agape* does operate in a qualitatively different way in terms of the way in which it obliges and the way in which it requires in certain circumstances the renunciation of other goods also valued by the moral subject for the sake of its realization. On the other hand, *agape* has to do with the power of admiration for exemplary characters and with a kind of inspiration that leads one to do the same.

As we shall see, Taylor expands on these ideas about the different character of *agape* in his conception of transcendence, by returning to the admiration of morally exemplary persons, the use of inspirational *subtler languages* and through his understanding of hermeneutics. However, despite speaking positively here of the renunciation of life goods by the obligation of *agape*, he is not so positive elsewhere, as for example in his judgment about its role in the drive to Reform and its importance in his narrative of secularization (chapter 5), or when he tries to understand the transformation brought about by *agape* as openness to transcendence (chapter 8). As we shall see, we shall understand this ambivalence from his *catholic attitude*.

That is why in order to understand this kind of Christian love we need to turn to a concept of transcendence that explains to us the nature of *agape* and in what ontological order it is inscribed. This concept of transcendence has to be in line with the view of falsifiable moral realism proposed by Taylor. And, as we shall see, it will be partly so since Taylor will focus on the ways in which subjects experience transcendence and not so much on mapping it. But it cannot be just any concept of transcendence. A renunciation of vital goods requires, as Taylor will say, some kind of openness beyond life, that is, a certain eschatological character, as we shall see. For only the promise that such a renunciation is worthwhile can motivate a person to maintain such a level of commitment to a *constitutive good* as *agape*.

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2.4. Enrique Dussel's critique from the perspective of the alterity and liberation

Having explored Taylor's moral realism from within—through the articulation of goods and the moral significance of *agape*—we now turn to an external perspective that challenges his framework from the standpoint of alterity. This step allows us to test the limits of Taylor's moral ontology: can it adequately respond to the ethical demand arising from the suffering of the Other? Our purpose here is twofold: first, to show how liberation philosophy exposes certain anthropological and historical blind spots in Taylor's moral theory; and second, to examine whether *agape*, as Taylor conceives it, requires a deeper ontological openness to the Other in order to sustain universal solidarity.

As discussed earlier, debates over Taylor's moral realism oscillate between strong and weak interpretations, leaving his position somewhere in between. This intermediate stance has already proved problematic when distinguishing *agape* from other constitutive goods such as Plato's Idea of the Good or Kantian respect. We addressed this tension by clarifying the horizon of meaning that *agape* opens. Now, however, we move from internal analysis to external critique: testing Taylor's framework against a philosophy that begins not from the self and its goods, but from the cry of the oppressed.

This critique comes from Enrique Dussel and the Latin American Philosophy of Liberation, which proposes a radically different ethical starting point—one that defines subjectivity through the perspective of the excluded and the victimized. Dussel detects in Taylor not merely a weak ontology but a more fundamental absence: a missing ontology of the Other. This "forgetfulness of the Other" lies at the core of his challenge to Taylor's moral theory. Alongside his charge of Eurocentrism and his critique of Taylor's focus on the self, Dussel contends that such moral individualism overlooks the suffering and historical reality of the oppressed. Where other critics fault Taylor for an uncertain metaphysical grounding, Dussel instead reproaches him for ignoring alterity as the true axis of moral reflection.

Indeed, Dussel's ethics, mainly influenced by Heidegger and Lévinas, elaborates a theory of the constitution of ethical subjectivity that starts from the *Concrete Other,* which would have been

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forgotten by Hellenistic and Eurocentric philosophy. In this sense, he shares the view that the theoretical concern for the Other only begins with Modernity and the discovery and development of subjectivity. Dussel attempts to bring the Other out of oblivion by critiquing the modern epistemic subject present in the discursive (Appel, Habermas) and communitarian (MacIntyre, Taylor) ethics, as he categorized them. In *Ethics of Liberation* (1998) he reaffirms a different type of subjects denied by the ethos of a Eurocentric culture: the new historical actors, the *Concrete Others* who are part of the community and the *peripheral Others* who provide a different, non-Eurocentric perspective of Modernity.[51]

Specifically, Dussel's critique of Taylor focuses firstly on his expositive method when it comes to analytically examining "the contents of the modern self through its historical sources" (Dussel, 1999, p. 130). On the one hand, Dussel attributes to Taylor's work a poverty of critical results since it focuses too much only on the study of philosophers, leaving aside historical events such as capitalism, colonialism and the constant presence of the use of violence and military aggression throughout history. On the other hand, the very choice of the authors and topics shows that Taylor chooses a Hellenocentric scheme, concentrating on a type of anthropology that focuses strongly on theoretical knowledge and presupposes a strong emphasis on ontology.

Thus, Taylor disregards the possible alternative moral influences from cultures around the Mediterranean region and the Fertile Crescent, such as those from Egypt or Babylon, that have also impacted the cultures that form the foundation of Western civilization. According to Dussel, Egyptian and Babylonian sources ultimately influenced Jewish religion and can also be traced in the Gospels. Dussel quotes textually some passages from the *Book of the Dead*— "I have given bread to the hungry man and water to the thirsty man, and apparel to the naked man, and a boat to the shipwrecked"

51 On Dussel's reading of the History of Philosophy up to the problem of the Concrete Other can be found in (Roldán, 2015). See also (Morello, 2007, pp. 625–626). Dussel discusses altruism and the discovery of the person as alterity in (E. Dussel, 2012, p. 289–309). He also examines these sources of Self and morality extensively and historically in (Dussel, 1998, pp. 19–89).

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(Dussel, 1999, p. 130)[52]—or from the Code of Hammurabi—"I have governed them in peace, I have defended them with wisdom, so that the strong did not oppress the poor and justice was done to the orphan and the widow."[53] These quotations are reminiscent of texts that to anyone with a Judeo-Christian background go back to Is 58 or Mt 25, both fundamental texts for understanding otherness and the love of neighbor.[54]

On the other hand, Dussel accuses Taylor along with Weber or Habermas of narrating the history of the modern ego from a Eurocentric paradigm, which "follows the originary diachronic process of modernity also the linear movement Augustine-Descartes-Locke, et al." (E. Dussel, 1999, p. 131). Eurocentrism would consist in identifying aspects of the abstract universality of the human subject with concrete moments of European particularity. Faced with this Eurocentric discourse, Dussel proposes the counter-discourse immanent to Modernity that includes *peripheral Otherness* (Dussel, 1988, pp. 116–118).

Moreover, Dussel states that Taylor's ethics is deeply inspired by Hegel's (and also Heidegger's) critique of Kantian formalism: Put in a very simplistic way, he would repeat the argument that formal, universalistic morality made from the possibility of a Kantian-inspired reflective distance would be nothing but an empty shell of content and would recall that abstract principles do not govern everyday

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52 Dussel uses a Spanish translation of the Papyrus of Un which has been translated here by Eduardo Mendieta. An English translation of the Papyrus in (British Museum, Lapp, & British Museum, 1997).

53 ["Los he gobernado en paz, los he defendido con sabiduría, de modo que el fuerte no oprimiese al pobre y se hiciera justicia al huérfano y a la viuda" (translation found in Dussel, 1998b, p. 111).

54 On these sources and texts states Dussel: "These material categories and ethical-critical principles will be present, after more than ten centuries, in the critical thought of Israel (Isaiah 58:7), and, after nearly twenty centuries, in early Christian thought (Matthew 25:35–44). These ethical-mythical texts have nothing intrinsically theological for the philosopher's consideration. They are components of a historical "ethic" and nothing else" (Dussel, 2012, p. 45, n. 38). [Estas categorías materiales y principios ético-críticos estarán presentes, después de más de diez siglos, en el pensamiento crítico de Israel (lsaías 58, 7), y, después de cerca de veinte siglos, en el pensamiento cristiano primitivo (Mateo 25, 35–44). Estos textos ético-míticos nada tienen intrínsecamente de teológicos para la consideración del filósofo. Son componentes de una «eticidad» histórica y nada más" (translated by S.G.)].

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moral life, but by inclinations that ultimately derived from the subject's introduction into an ontological framework, in his community, or even in his language.[55]

In fact, he understands Taylor's critique of Habermas practical philosophy as a new version of Hegel's critique on Kant's moral world.[56] Dussel agrees with Taylor when he criticizes Habermas, since it is precisely his assessment on formalism which is the basis of the *Philosophy of Liberation*. In the same way, he rescues the claim to recover the positivity of the moral life-world oriented by the goods of *Sources of the Self* for his project of philosophical liberation. But against Taylor and all kinds of realism in ethics,[57] Dussel opposes his Ethics of Liberation, which places the Other at the center: "The *Ethics of Liberation* calls *principium oppressionis* the ethical criterion that considers the Other as oppressed 'in' the

55 On Hegel's critique of Kant's moral and political philosophy, see (Geiger, 2007).

56 In fact, he understands Taylor's critique of Habermas practical philosophy as a new version of Hegel's critique on Kant's moral world. Moreover, Dussel recalls that Taylor's critique of Habermas focuses on the distinction between ethics and morality: "Taylor puts forth an ethics within a strategic horizon (toward good), of strong evaluation and oriented toward the modern concept of the 'good life,' which 'motivates' the self in order to retrieve, affirming its own forgotten identity, an identity which is sought out of its oldest and most antique sources. For Habermas, this is not the intent of a moral philosophy" {E. Dussel, 1999, p. 143}. Abbey shares the same view "In attacking the formalism of modern moral theory, Taylor is echoing and extending Hegel's attack on Kant. As Hegel sees it, the price Kant paid for the achievement of organizing moral life around the criterion of the right was emptiness; his general principle became so abstract as to have nothing substantive to say about moral life. So for Taylor, the formalism of modern moral theory is achieved at the expense of ontological pluralism" (Abbey, 2000, p. 16).

57 "Any ontological ethics of the 'everyday world' (*Lebenswelt*)" or of 'ethicity (*Sittlichkeit*)' must be founded on the 'good' (Aristotle's *agathon*, Thomas' *télos*, *beatitudo*, Heidegger's Being as *Entwurf*), on the 'virtues', 'values' or moments of the 'world' that must be fulfilled with heroic Authenticity" (Dussel, 1988, p. 44) [Toda ética ontológica del "mundo cotidiano (*Lebenswelt*)" o de la 'eticidad (*Sittlichkeit*)' debe fundarse en el "bien" (el *agathón* de Aristóteles, el *télos*, la beatitudo de Tomás, el Ser como el *Entwurf* de Heidegger), en las 'virtudes', 'valores' o momentos del 'mundo' que deben cumplirse con heroica autenticidad (*Authenticity*) (translated by S.G)].

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Totality, as 'functional part' (not as 'subject') denied in its distinct interests in the 'system'" (Dussel, 1988, p. 44).[58]

In Dussel's view, Taylor's substantive communitarian ethics would not take into account this ethical principle of the alterity of the Other, although he recognizes attempts to get out of modern atomism in Taylor's philosophy. He is also satisfied that he is open to the universal recognition of difference, broadening the horizon of modernity in *Politics of Recognition* (Taylor, 1992a). But Taylor suffers from the same lack of attention to the Other as any kind of ontological ethics: his attempt to reconstruct the identity of the modern Self by orienting towards *hypergoods*, to recover the good life for reflection on morality, to reawaken the operability of moral sources, is done, once again, by ignoring the Other.

Certainly, in *Sources of the Self* there is not a direct reflection on alterity. Taylor tries to make a historical-analytical analysis of the formation of the identity of the modern Self in order to recover the moral sources. He states a moral realism in times of crisis in the foundation of ethics. And he is very honest as he locates these problems already from the beginning in the space of the West. Although Dussel's critique was intended to better outline his own alternative, the *Ethics of Liberation*, it raises an important question for Taylor, as does Laitinen's critique: the omission of the Other and his suffering; in short, the opening to solidarity from the human being's own pain. And he also criticizes him for a lack of attention to the religious sources of the formation of the identity of the modern ego and to the sources of altruism.

In order to assess Dussel's claim on Taylor omission of the concept of otherness, both in his preference for a Eurocentric story and his disregard for the principle of otherness, we can examine various aspects: on the one hand, we ask if it is true that we do not find Taylor's interest in otherness and the suffering of the victims, even indirectly; on the other hand, we will be interested in whether Taylor's moral realism owes so much to Hegel's critique of Kant; furthermore, we will see how Dussel understands *agape* as a source of global solidarity, although not open to grace, as Taylor

58 Liberation Ethics denominates as *principium oppressionis* the ethical criterion that considers the Other as oppressed.

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understands it; finally, we will examine his critique of Taylor's vision of modernity, lacking in alternative narratives.

Firstly, we believe that Dussel overstates his concern about the role that ontology plays in Taylor's ethics, in the sense that his realism would close him off from the suffering of others. It is undeniable that the ontology of *incommensurable* goods plays an important role in articulating the response to the other person's pain. But what is certain is that Taylor's realism is, to say the least, peculiar. For the moral response, at least in the writings that Dussel evaluates, is produced in the moral inclination that is produced in the conflict of goods produced at the moment of the strong evaluation, as we have seen. Indeed, the values on which ethics rest depend on the human being and not only on their existence in an instance outside the agent which can be accessible. It is true that they depend on the centrality of the moral agent (cf. Rosen 1991, 189). But they also depend on the existence of evil in the world embodied in the suffering person. Without the concrete other there would be no inception of articulation.

In addition, Taylor is also concerned about the excessive focus on the subject in moral philosophy, as Dussel also is. Hidden in the dangers derived from the inarticulation pointed out by Taylor is the concern for the oblivion of the Other. In a way, this is how Taylor recognizes the dilemma of modernity in the face of the suffering of the other. As he says in *Ethics of the Authenticity*: "the dark side of individualism is a centering on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society" (Taylor, 1992b, p. 4). The dominance of instrumental reason and limitations on public life contribute to a sense of discontent with modernity. This leads to a feeling of purposelessness, a loss of spiritual values, and a decrease in freedom. Ultimately, this results in a decline of shared values, not only at a political level, but also on a global scale.

Moreover, disregard for the other is transversally present when he points out the problems of *atomism* and individualism (Taylor, 1985c, 1989a, pp. 193–197, 500–506). Oblivion of the other is also present Taylor studies in depth the historical process of the advent of instrumental reason in *A Secular Age* under the name of "excarnation," understood as the process by which one comes to exclude embodied feelings and moral inclinations from moral discernment

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in order to house moral and spiritual life exclusively in reason, procedures and rules (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 288,554; see also Brunkhorst, 2011). In this sense, we can interpret Taylor as reproducing Hegel's critique of Kantian moral philosophy, as Dussel points out.

However, the answer must be tempered if we read Taylor's reading of Hegel. Although some of his concerns and claims in moral philosophy are clearly influenced by Hegel's philosophy, a reading from *agape's* treatment of his very influential study of his work early in his career shows us a differentiated stance. Thus, Taylor evokes Hegel's critique of Kant in his younger years when he points to Jesus as the great reconciler of the letter of the law and human destiny through *agape*, which entails a sacrifice and, at the same time, an openness to spontaneity, certainly beyond Kantian duty (cf. Taylor, 1977a, pp. 41–65; see also Hegel, 1970).

Nevertheless, Taylor departs from his version of the Christian religion within the dialectical method of logic because of his misunderstanding of the grace and freedom of God, giving no room for divine love and human identification with him in an orthodox Christian sense. Coinciding with major figures interested in the nature of *agape* such as Barth (1959, p. 304) and Kierkegaard (1995, 2013), he states that Christian love is to be understood on the scheme of free give and receive of God in his relationship with creation and with humanity. However, this notion does not make sense from the relation of rational necessity of the idea of God abstracted from its embodiment and from the spiritual life of man which is described as "nothing but the unfolding of conceptual necessity" (Taylor, 1977a, p. 490), as seen in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (cf. Hegel, 1807). In any case, the reason we are concerned here with Hegel is not only to point out that Dussel's note about the Hegelian influence on Taylor needs to be qualified, but also to draw attention to the fact that openness to the other through *agape* is not explained only as an inclination of the subject within the parameters of *Sittlichkeit*. Certainly, as we shall see, it influences Taylor's thought. But *agape*, as Taylor notices, has an ontological status and a phenomenological dynamic distinct from the scheme of the confrontational dialectics proper to the Hegelian scheme. This is something that can be traced in Taylor's work, even in that which was available at the time Dussel published his book.

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In Taylor's case, it is a moral ontology open to transcendence and the etiology of moral motivation based on *agape*. On the contrary, even though Dussel also echoes *agape*, we do not find such openness to transcendence. Instead, Dussel presents an immanent realism (in the sense of being independent of any goods-oriented ontology) that has the victims as the center from which moral obligation emanates (cf. Dussel, 1998, pp. 27–28). In that sense, transcendence for Dussel would not be understood from the religious experience but, attending to the phenomenology of the *face of the other* (of the physical exteriority of the poor, above all).[59] Faced with the call of the victims, which, following Lévinas, shows a pre-ontological character, moral obligation emerges to have compassion with them. But the actual compromise for the oppressed comes in the form of deconstructing and transforming the historical and oppressive realities, structures and institutions: "So there will be an a priori pre-ontological solidarity, and an empirical trans-ontological effecting of concrete solidarity" (Dussel, 2017, p. 200). Commitment, therefore, goes beyond material aid to engage in the historical and political responsibility, breaking the ontological order of being manifested in any group or tradition.

In this horizon of understanding, Dussel understands *agape* as a "supra-fraternity" (Dussel, 2017, p. 190) that helps to uninstall and deconstruct the enemy of the victims from its ontological place. In this sense, he preserves the originality of the Christian message contained in *agape*, as we saw already in the introduction. *Agape* is, then, a love of "horizontal responsibility" (Dussel, 2017, p. 199),that forms a global solidarity, a form of alternative political friendship in the form of new universal fraternity à la Kant and in the utopian horizon of hope à la Bloch (cf. Dussel, 2017, pp. 190–191 n.41). The new global solidarity of *agape* points to new historical reality, beyond the currently existing institutions, since it is not a matter of including the victims in the current system, but of conceiving a new political situation based on solidarity. Dussel argues that the source

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59 This would be a point, precisely, where the two currents of the Philosophy of Liberation are distinguished: the one represented by Enrique Dussel himself and the one represented by Juan Carlos Scannone, who takes into account praxis and popular religion as a deposit of divine transcendence and, therefore, with an openness to an ontological realm (Recanati, 2019; Scannone, 1990, pp. 17–20).

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of this global solidarity already originally and distinctively appeared in the Judeo-Christian experience of neighborhood and of proximity. In fact, he presents the Good Samaritan as a model of the new ethics and politics based on *agape*.

However, Jesus would not explain this narrative as a practical correlate of the nature of Christian love, but rather He offers "an ethical-rational account" (Dussel, 2017, p. 192). The Mexican philosopher, then, is not interested in the theological nature of Christian love and its relevance for Ethics, but focuses on "horizontal transcendence" (Dussel, 2017, p. 194). That is, his main plane is the immanent, in front of the Other, from a political interest. Thus, he understands the Samaritan's embodied experience of compassion (*spagkhenízomai*) as solidarity: "and seeing him, He showed solidarity" (ibid.). In his definition *agape* as supra-fraternity will be "critical emotionality turned to the suffering exteriority of the victim" (ibid).[60] Therefore, It is not a feeling, nor is it an experience. *Agape* happens as a willed, conscious and committed response to the cry of the victims (cf. Elías, 2012, p. 134). Although it is open to the transcendence of the Other, it does not cease to be a transcendence that is ontologically and historically prior to the encounter and, in any case, not open to think vertical transcendence.

In fact, both the denial of the historicity of the encounter with the Other and the closure to horizontal transcendence are the main differences with the parallel trend in Latinamerican Philosophy of Liberation in its analectical variant proposed by the Jesuit Juan Carlos Scannone. While agreeing on the methodological starting point of the poor and the victims and sharing seeking new viable alternatives for liberation in a context of globalization as a goal (cf. Scannone, 2009, p. 63), Scannone adds religion to the premises as a way of thinking from the victims: "a dialectic open to transcendence, gratuitousness and historical novelty", based on symbols and culture when approaching otherness (cf. Scannone, 1987, p. 108, see also

60 Later, he clarifies that *agape* "is something radically different from Derrida's mere 'fraternity'; but neither is it Schopenhauer's compassion, nor paternalistic commiseration, or superficial pity. It is the metaphysical desire for the Other as other" (Dussel, 2017, p. 193 n.49) ["es algo radicalmente diverso a la mera 'fraternidad' de Derrida; pero tampoco es la compasión de Schopenhauer, ni la conmiseración paternalista, o la lástima superficial. Es el deseo metafísico del Otro como otro" (translated by S.G.)].

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1990, pp. 17–20; Recanati, 2019). By adding religiosity and openness to transcendence to his interests, Scannone points out the formal reduction of Dussel's image of human being, and its reduction to a few epochs and places as a fruit of his method, showing that he fails to provide an engagement with the victims that takes into account the totality of the moral and cultural experience of the individual. In our view, this is also one of the advantages of considering Taylor's moral realism when examining *agape* moral motivation as a source open to transcendence.

Third, to evaluate the charge of Eurocentrism in the critical apparatus that Taylor uses for his historical reconstruction of modern identity, we should focus on Dussel's claim that Eurocentrism is particularly evident in the emphasis on the *imperative of benevolence* and the *moral exceptionalism* of our times.[61] To describe the high demand for solidarity with strangers in the present, Taylor points to the novelty in moral and political history that involves "the mobilizing of a large-scale citizens' movement around a moral issue, with the intent of effecting political change" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 396). At the origin of this movement lies the great mobilization campaigns against slavery in Anglo-Saxon societies in the 19th century. Taylor highlights the role of Britain in the origin and globalization of solidarity:

> "One has to recognize that the timing of these measures also depended on economic developments, that Britain benefited from its self-appointed position as guardian of international morality in giving a free hand to its navy to intervene in Africa and Latin America" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 396).

Taylor points to the origin of *moral exceptionalism* in the Victorian era with the support of the enormous influence of pietism and the English moral philosophy of the eighteenth century. For Dussel, however, the same scheme of *moral exceptionalism* can be found in the idea of civilization behind the construction of the Hispanic monarchy in the sixteenth century. For Enrique Dussel, for example, the "Spanish project" is a sample of the first modernity and even an example of the alternative narrative to that of Eurocentric modernity

61 We will deal with both concepts later, when visiting the fifth *slippage* in the history of the secularization of *agape* in *Sources of the Self*.

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from the peripheries (Dussel, 2007, pp. 186–226).[62] In Dussel there is no nostalgia for the Spanish Empire, but there is a call to consider authors such as Bartolomé de la Casas, Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suárez in order to reconstruct an alternative history of modernity and to discover in them the first critics of modernity for their treatment of the otherness of the indigenous. In a certain sense, Dussel would say that the imperative of benevolence and the moral exceptionalism of the present have already taken place in a place far from the current political center and well before (cf. Dussel, 2007, pp. 186–240).[63]

To conclude, in spite of the points made to Dussel's criticisms of Taylor, we can state that both authors share an interest in constructing a moral philosophy capable of responding to the challenge that the suffering of others poses to the man of modernity, albeit from different ontological assumptions. They even share the critique of modernity from the recovery of what has been left behind. Taylor's proposal for the articulation of constitutive goods participates in the concern for the oblivion of the other insofar as he wonders if we are not surpassing our moral means in constant fidelity to the parameters of justice and benevolence.

The project of modernity, despite its ethical progress towards universality, has not been able to put an end to oppression, suffering, violence and the persistence of evil. In the last *slippage* of the history of *agape*, which we will see below, Taylor picks up the questions that arise from the persistence of evil in times of the optimism of

62 This construction of a new civilization through a universal Catholic Monarchy, based on the extension of the foundations of Christianity and the moral improvement of society through the mission of "salvation of souls" —at least theoreticall—, has even been called "first globalization" (Gruzinski, 2006). However, the Spanish attempt at civilizational globality, which can be presented as the antecedent of the moral exceptionalism described by Taylor, faces accusations of genocide, ethnocentrism, colonialism and religious obscurantism, etc. Taylor is also aware of this possible drift of any ideal, which carries within itself a destructive component: "Christians, unless immured in blinkered self-sufficiency, will recognize the appalling destruction wrought in history in the name of the faith" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 520).

63 In this sense, Dussel's critique is pertinent and Taylor himself acknowledges in a personal conversation that he is not aware of movements in the construction of modern identity that come from languages he does not master, such as Spanish or Portuguese.

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progress. The paradox begins to be existentially emphasized from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche onwards and takes shape in the literature of Dostoyevsky, one of the authors to whom the Canadian author frequently turns (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 449–455, 516–518, 2007b, p. 389,700–710, 2020a, pp. 59–78, see also 2011e). Taylor puts into question the modern *ethics of benevolence* constructed as a duty to ourselves, regardless of the recipients to whom the action of solidarity is intended. He also questions the naturalistic affirmation of human nature that is behind utilitarianism:

> "Does it move us to extend help to the irremediably broken, such as the mentally handicapped, those dying without dignity, fetuses with genetic defects? Perhaps one might judge that it doesn't and that this is a point in favour of naturalism; perhaps effort shouldn't be wasted on these unpromising cases. But the careers of Mother Teresa or Jean Vanier seem to point to a different pattern, emerging from a Christian spirituality" (Taylor, 1989, p. 518).

Taylor recognizes that he is not neutral when posing these serious questions and he certainly believes that secular humanism is not capable of satisfying the demand for solidarity that it creates for itself. Theism, that is, the experience of *agape* as grace, would be able to satisfy these demands, both in terms of approaching suffering otherness and in terms of the self-affirmation of the moral subject: "I do think naturalist humanism [is] defective in these respects -or, perhaps better put, that great as the power of naturalist sources might be, the potential of a certain theistic perspective is incomparably greater" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 518).

In *Sources of the Self* this plea in favor of theism as the *best account* appears only as a "hunch". That is to say, Taylor is aware that this "certain theistic perspective" must face the same questions posed to naturalism and proceduralism regarding the *articulation* of the moral sources that can sustain the commitments in favor of benevolence, justice and solidarity. Everything remains pending for a new work in which he postulates the access to transcendence as a way to escape from the dilemma between a spiritual lobotomy, which cuts off access to moral sources, and the self-inflicted wounds caused by the implementation of the highest ideals which, in the end, out of resentment or atomism, end up forgetting the Other. In a certain sense, it is the same question of evil and its mitigation, of sol-

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idarity and its justified motivation, of love of neighbor and its correct articulation that leads Taylor to open himself to transcendence.

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3. The Secularization of Agape (I): Moral Slippages in Taylor's Sources of the Self

Having explored in the previous chapter how *agape* functions in Taylor's moral realism as a constitutive good—one capable of grounding moral motivation and opening human action to transcendence—we now turn to the question of what happens to agape in the history of modernity. If grace once named the divine power that makes love of neighbor possible, how has this moral source been reinterpreted in a world increasingly defined by human autonomy, reason, and sentiment? The task of this chapter is therefore to reconstruct, through *Sources of the Self*, what we may call the first history of the secularization of *agape*: the story of how Christian charity becomes translated into the moral vocabulary of benevolence, respect, and altruism that defines the modern self.

Reconstructing moral history, for instance, brings us face to face with a growing pluralism of visions of neighborly love, but also with a plurality of ways of understanding *agape*. Over the centuries there has been no univocal way of understanding it, nor even of securing its place in moral and political thought, which is increasingly reluctant to adopt ontological and normative commitments favoring a religious-based ethics with pretensions of universality, as Taylor has shown. In any event, one of the ways to understand both the multiplication of moral sources at our disposal and the impermeability of ethics to ontology is through the hypothesis of secularization (cf. Drescher, 2019).

The same Christian-based love of neighbor may have undergone its own process of secularization. There is no doubt that Western culture has been permeated with vaster force since Modernity by the feeling of benevolence, the idea of community behind the thought of the Nation, the concern for justice and human dignity and the imperative to reduce suffering. Under the influence of these features of the modern times, God is no longer inescapable to make sense of the duty to help the distant ones (cf. Taylor, 1989a, p. 314, 2002a).

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There are multiple attempts to develop a causal explanation of such a process secularization. For example, in this work, we will visit Ivan Illich's thesis of the "corruption of Christianity" by institutionalization and power-relatedness in the exercise of charity (cf. Illich, 2005b, 2018). Nygren himself offered a history of the intellectual contamination of *agape* with *eros* by the Augustinian-Thomist synthesis in *caritas* (cf. Nygren, 1953; Watson, 1953). More recently, Gianni Vattimo hermeneutically interprets the secularization of Christianity, understanding the weakening of metaphysics as the fate of the Christian religion based on *kenosis*, leaving the affirmation of *caritas* over truth as the only way to resist violence and egoism through compassion and solidarity to others (cf. Vattimo, 1999, 2002, 2007; Reder, 2013, pp. 269–298).

By contrast, the distinctive feature of Taylor's account is his attempt to explain the secularization of morality not merely from the development of neutral epistemic or institutional grounds, focusing on power dynamics or from what in *A Secular Age* he will call "intellectual deviation", that is, "changes in the theoretical understanding" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 774). In Taylor's case, the interest lies in the persuasive force at the spiritual level of secularized alternatives to *agape*: at some point "[...] people no longer feel [...] that the spiritual dimension of their lives was incomprehensible if one supposed there was no God" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 310). the peculiarity of Taylor's story is that it does not abandon the moral and spiritual sphere. This focus on the moral and spiritual level not only allows him to explore history from the assumptions of the articulation of *constitutive goods*, which we saw in the previous chapter, but also allows him to explain the changes in the ethical predicament and the multiplication of sources as currents that affect entire masses of the population and not only intellectual elites.

Accordingly, our aim here is to reconstruct how *agape* is secularized within Sources of the Self, clarifying the parallel processes by which the moral predicament is reconfigured, new sources emerge to underwrite altruism, and contemporary standards of solidarity are established. We will follow Taylor's own admission that "the original root of the demand that we seek universal justice and well-being is of course our Judeo-Christian religious tradition… The orthodox Christian understanding of this universal concern is *agape*, or 'charity'; and the answer to the question of what makes it possible is

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grace" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 410). The guiding question, then, is: what replaces grace as the empowering source of universal concern once the theistic definition is called into question, as in the Enlightenment?

Taylor's answer is nuanced. He tracks how the influence of the supernatural on the natural loses significance in favor of immanent explanations—plural and competing. The result is a broad modern consensus around respect (often juridified as rights) that can be read as a secularization of neighborly love. But this does not exhaust the phenomenon. Taylor offers a historical account of norms, ideals, and moral sources that also explains gradual changes in how agents experience those sources, in tandem with the formation of modern identity. Crucially, secularization is not a linear subtraction of grace nor a simple triumph of science and education; rather, the "issue shifts from the removal of blinkers to the question how these new sources became available" (Taylor, 1989, p. 313).

Within this frame, we encounter substitutes and rearticulations of grace and *agape* which, especially since modernity, often oppose their theological matrix and yet remain intertwined with it. The upshot is that "our ideas about our moral motivation show a confusing mixture of fusion, mutual influence, and rivalry among the different sources" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 412). It is not only that secular replacements stem from grace; they also reshape it:

> "It is not just that the secular replacements issue historically from the Christian notion of grace; they in turn have influenced it. Modern notions of *agape* have been affected by the ideal of austere and impartial beneficence which emerges from disengaged reason" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 412).

Taylor, in fact, speaks of the series of "transpositions" in morality, for example, between Plato, St. Augustine and Descartes—when one speaks of the good now residing in interiority (Taylor, 1989, p. 140–144); the transposition of the idea of generosity from an ethics of honor to an ethics of rational control with Descartes (Taylor, 1989, p. 154); the transposition from a first-person experience to an objective experience also from modernity onwards (Taylor, 1989a, p. 163) which is especially seen in Locke; the increasing centrality of the "human subject as an autonomous reasoner and the sidelining of grace" with deism (Taylor, 1989a, p. 251); the increasing importance of emotion and piety over reason with the pietistic movement (Taylor, 1989a, p. 302); and the accentuation of this last transposition

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towards the expressivist articulation of our inner nature (Taylor, 1989a, p. 389).

To capture this cumulative dynamic, I describe these historical shifts as "moral slippages." As in the case of landslides, in which the movements of a mass of earth, previously considered stable, slides for different causal reasons and gives rise to a different terrain despite retaining the same materials, in each of these transpositions we find a completely different terrain. The ground that was previously trodden and seemed stable has now shifted, resulting at many times in greater instability. Even materials that were close to the surface may now have disappeared on first examination. And what was implied at a deeper level is now surfacing with greater ease.[64] Similarly, we can postulate slippages in the history in the motivation towards helping the other that go from the original position of *agape*, to the terrain we find today, with a plurality of sources and with difficulties in articulating goods. What follows, therefore, is a focused account of five major moral slippages in *Sources of the Self*—five reconfigurations of love, grace, and moral motivation that chart *agape's* path into modern ideals of altruism and rights.

3.1. First slippage: interiority

A first *slippage* takes place in the development of the dimension of self-control and self-knowledge of interiority as reflected in St. Augustine (2010, 2014) and drives through history to reach René Descartes (1984).[65] Taylor reflects the Augustinian distinction, originally Platonic, between interior things (*interiora*), external things

64 Taylor himself elsewhere uses the image of the "earthquake" to describe this state of affairs: "We have grown into a different civilization from our medieval and even early modern forebears. We moderns may differ among ourselves as to what has happened in this phenomenon we call Modernity, but it seems agreed by all that something important has changed. It is as though an earthquake has shifted the fields, and we can no longer enter the forest in the same way". (Taylor, 2011b, p. 15)

65 This movement towards interiority already began with Plato, although without recognizing Christian grace: "Plato's view, just because it privileges a condition of self-collected awareness and designates this as the state of maximum unity with oneself, requires some conception of the mind as a unitary space" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 118).

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(*exteriora*) and finally superior things (*superiora*). The crucial shift is in the glide toward the inner subject: "from the lower to the higher, the crucial shift in direction, passes through our attending to ourselves as inner" (Taylor, 1989, p. 129). The interior would relate to spiritual life and moral perfection, since the path leading from the lowest to the highest passes through human interiority. He made

> "a turn to the self in the first-person dimension crucial to our access to a higher condition—because in fact it is a step on our road back to God—and hence to inaugurate a new line of development in our understanding of moral sources, one which has been formative for our entire Western culture" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 132).

The source of grace continues to be in God, but the individual this time finds it in the interiority. Even, the proof of God's existence is found in the individual, to which the individual arrives by memory:[66] "Augustine's proof of God is a proof from the first-person experience of knowing and reasoning (...). By going inward, I am drawn upward" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 134).

This emphasis on interiority continues to be present in Descartes, according to Taylor's account.[67] But as opposed to Plato or St. Augustine, there is no embeddedness in an order of Being to which the self must conform. By separating *res cogitans* from *res extensa*, all sense of teleology is removed from the material world. Thus, "where the Platonic soul realizes its eternal nature by becoming absorbed in

66 "At its root, constituting this implicit understanding, is the Master within, the source of the light which lights every man coming into the world, God. And so at the end of its search for itself, if it goes to the very end, the soul finds God" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 134).

67 The interpretation of this transition has been historically problematic. There is debate about the elements of continuity and novelty between Augustine and Descartes. At its core, there is a question about the moment of the birth of Modernity and with what characteristics it begins. Commenting on this transition in Taylor, Wayne J. Hankey points out that within the different interpretations on Descartes there are two distinct positions: those who, like Taylor, defend a great influence of Augustine on Descartes -who would be more postmodern, according to his vision- and those who from a more antimodern position preserve Augustine from his affiliation with Descartes, such as the radical theology of John Milbank (Hankey, 2001). However, others have reproached Taylor for forgetting the influence of authors such as Plotinus on Augustine, as well as the relationship between reason and will in Augustinian thought, which would also be an antecedent to Descartes (Peddle, 2001).

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the supersensible, the Cartesian discovers and affirms his immaterial nature by objectifying the bodily" (Taylor, 1989, p. 146).

Although Augustine gives importance to the language of interiority, he maintains the order of things of the Platonic cosmos. Thereby, Augustine continues to believe in a transcendent-based order that must be satisfied to live the good life. For Descartes there is no order of Ideas and the reason is ontologically, therefore, "disengaged" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 143) when compared to the previous order. The reason will be the constructor of orders of reality that have to satisfy the parameters demanded by knowledge and certainty. As for the role of God in Descartes, Taylor tries not to judge his place anachronistically and does not say that Descartes has replaced Augustine's path of ascent from inwardness to the higher, with a new, more self-sufficient theory of knowledge.[68] Such judgments can only be made much later, in view of developments in later philosophy. In this sense, he changes the order of dependence: one does not acquire knowledge by entering into the mystery of God, but God and his existence is a necessary theorem for knowledge.

Regarding morality, Taylor recognizes the Stoic influence on Descartes in matters of mastery and self-control but with the novelty of the development of a model of rational mastery, of instrumental control of the passions. Such a definition of the mastery through reason produces a further internalization of moral sources since they can no longer come from an objective world. Descartes also uses a concept of generosity (*generosité*) as the principal of all the

68 However, Taylor has referred to Descartes elsewhere as the starter of the current that sees knowledge as "mediational", as opposed to the relational realism he proposes. Mediational knowledge understands that the reality we seek to know is outside our mind, while our knowledge is within us. Things are known through ideas. Thus, the difference between interiority and exteriority, between the physical and the mental, is emphasised. This kind of epistemology, however, implies more than the efficiency of elaborating valid and reliable beliefs. "But this is not only an epistemic stance; it is part of a broader ideal, that of freedom and personal responsibility, which determines a way of being in the world in general, and not just a way of practicing science. And indeed, we are aware that this ethic of personal responsibility has been a key component of Western modernity. It is central to the Reformed spiritualities, on both the Protestant and the Catholic side, and then it takes on secularized forms, and comes to expression in the ideals of reason and autonomy, and the political norms of self-government" (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015, p. 24).

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virtues: "generosity is the emotion which accompanies my sense of my human dignity". Dignity and esteem thus appear at the center of the moral vision.[69] In any case, generosity at this time means something different from the current sense of readiness to give more of something liberally, but was understood as showing fair-mindedness and magnanimity in behavior: it "was that lively sense of one's own honour which kept one from doing the base things which might compromise it, and inspired one to the noble deeds which suited it" (Taylor, 1994b, p. 216).

In parallel to the changes in the moral instance, a major shift took place in the ontological order during the change from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era. The ontic and cosmic eschatological order, which dominated the framework of Antiquity and the High Middle Ages and which was at the basis of all orders of social and religious life, was losing relevance and plausibility in the face of the advance of mechanistic science. But, according to Taylor, this clash of worldviews did not occur primarily in the epistemological order, but in the field of morality. Alternative moral sources to moral goodness of divine origin began to appear. A new source was, of course, that which resides in the agent's own faculties, in self-control and self-exploration. The novelty of Modernity is that this interiorization is increasingly centered in the faculties of the subject, especially in those of expression and articulation.

In the same way, nature, that is, the autonomy of things, appears as a moral source. At first, they do so as a reflection of the interiority of the agent, of his own nature, of his desires and feelings. Both "frontiers" of morality, together with the process of disenchantment of the previous ontological order, arise in any case within Christian culture itself, but in a form of transmutation that displaces the ethics exclusively based on an experience of *agape* and grace:

> "Augustinian inwardness stands behind the Cartesian turn, and the mechanistic universe was originally a demand of theology. The disen-

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69 Nevertheless, some of his critics, such as Susan James, accuse Taylor of overemphasizing the major changes that take place in Descartes' philosophy: neither the cut between the internal and the external of the human being is so pronounced, nor the theory of the passions is so simple, nor the vision of virtue so free of past influences (See S. James, 1994). Taylor's response is to recognize that he reconstructs the history of the modern self from "ideal types" in the Weberian sense (cf. Taylor, 1994b, p. 214).

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> gaged subject stands in a place already hollowed out for God; he takes a stance to the world which befits an image of the Deity. The belief in interlocking nature follows the affirmation of ordinary life, a central Judaeo-Christian idea, and extends the centrally Christian notion that God's goodness consists in his stooping to seek the benefit of humans" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 315).

Taylor's arguments around his historical reconstruction are, of course, much more complex. Nevertheless he may appear to make causal connections that, at first glance, would suggest spurious relationships. This way of relating facts at first sight not obviously related is a "trademark" of Taylor's argumentation. But Taylor neither wants to offer a causal explanation nor does he "aspire to provide a complete answer to the question of what brought about these changes" (Abbey, 2004, p. 23). The point here is to understand the moral agency from within: through the examination of human motivations and behavior, through "the search for moral sources outside the subject through languages which resonate within him or her, the grasping of an order which is inseparably indexed to a personal vision" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 510). Therefore, it is not a matter of searching for causal effects, but of searching for shared meanings, often not verbalized: "It is not the exploration of an 'objective' order in the classical sense of a publicly accessible reality. The order is only accessible through personal, hence 'subjective', resonance." (Taylor, 1989a, p. 510).

3.2. Second slippage: ordinary life

The most relevant transformations leading to a disengaged identity occurred in the context of the Enlightenment when the very certainty of God's existence was called into question. It was not only that debates on theodicy and what is nowadays known as fundamental theology intensified, but also that in this time a virtual multiplication of possible moral sources occurred. The new focus on ordinary life, as an immanentization or disenchantment of an old idea of cosmic order, together with greater attention to interiority, transformed moral reflection. Still, the question of the subject, increasingly immersed in the immanent order, also raises the question of the political and, ultimately, of the connection with the rest of human beings,

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with whom we share dignity. The centrality of ordinary life forced to explore aspects previously not taken into account:[70]

> "There were important respects in which the pagan authors failed to capture early modern moral experience: the dimension of *agape*, later sliding into benevolence or altruism, was wholly absent from the pre-Christian writers, as was the affirmation of ordinary life" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 314).

The life-affirming ethics of ordinary life, as outlined by Taylor in *Sources of the Self,* plays an important role. In addition, various doctrines about the Self, society, politics, and the various orders of human life develop in the same vein and become more and more attractive. At the same time, religion's criticism and the impulses towards reform within the Church itself also increased. The affirmation of ordinary life apparently goes hand in hand with a repudiation of the especially Catholic way of understanding the sacred. This rejection, in turn, lies behind the impulses toward reform of the Christian life: sacramental theology, the presence of God in certain places or at certain times, or the sacredness and hierarchy of certain vocations are questioned (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 211–218). Sacred ministers are no longer the only ones in charge of receiving and administering the *agape*. With the affirmation of the ordinary life,

> "*agape* is integrated in a new way into an ethic of everyday existence. My work in my calling ought to be for the general good. This insistence on practical help, on doing good for people, is carried on in the various semi-secularized successor ethics, e.g., with Bacon and Locke. The principal virtue in our dealing with others is now no longer just justice and temperance but beneficence" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 255).

In order to explain the prominence of the notion of beneficence, Taylor also pays attention to the emphasis on "natural affection" particularly in Locke's (1997) and Shaftesbury's (1999) Deism. By *natural affection* Taylor understands

> "the thesis that we by nature love the whole is expressed by saying that our natural affections would carry beyond our immediate family and entourage to a disinterested love of all mankind, if we rightly under-

70 "What this means for the explanation of secularization is that the issue shifts from the removal of blinkers to the question how these new sources became available." (Taylor, 1989a, p. 313)

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> stood our situation. Natural affection is what holds societies together, and rightly understood it would bind the whole species. It is part of everyone's innate endowment, along with the sense of right and wrong" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 255),

Such reliance on the natural inclination towards goodness and love of neighbor is what came to be called as *ethics of benevolence*. Benevolence becomes the main virtue: "The fortunate thing is that our moral sense pushes us to benevolence and benevolence is what works most for our happiness" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 261).[71] Justice, benevolence and happiness are united. In this way, justice is redefined: "a constant study to promote the most universal happiness in our power, by doing all good offices as we have opportunity which interfere with no more extensive interest of the system" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 261). The most virtuous actions are those that tend most to universal justice and happiness.

Yet it is worth noting a fundamental development revealing a shift in the moral accent. Whereas before, understanding right and wrong behavior with respect to our neighbor could be the fruit of a calculation of the consequences in terms of reward or punishment in eternal life, now that understanding is entrusted to our feelings. At the level of moral articulation it is relevant. Earlier, "being in touch with some source—for example, God, or the Idea of the Good—was considered essential to full being. But now the source we have to connect with is deep within us" (Taylor, 1992a, pp. 28–29).

Sentiments, understood as contact with oneself and one's inner nature, are a powerful moral source that is still present in our time. They are, to a great extent, a continuation and an intensification of Augustine's path to God through self-consciousness. Yet this heightened emphasis on agent capacities marks the onset of a turning away from transcendence and, in the moral instance, an escape from the duty to shape one's own life and actions by conformity to an external source.

Taylor studies this moral attitude especially in Hutcheson (2002). For the experientialist philosopher, moral sources, understood as those goods that empower us to a more universal justice and happiness, are to be found in our own benevolent nature and, ultimately,

71 "With the internalization of ethical thought, where inclinations are crucial, the motive of benevolence becomes the key to goodness" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 255).

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in the benevolence of God, the author of the cosmic order, created for our greater happiness. In this order of thing, God is not totally absent, although his place in it seems to be subordinate to happiness and, therefore, to the subject.[72] Yet there is no longer anything like an extrinsic moral law: "our bent towards the good is thoroughly internalized in sentiment and takes the form above all of universal *benevolence*" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 264).

The shift in the level of the articulation of moral sources towards universal benevolence continued with the Anglo-Saxon moralists of the 18th century: if the virtue originally sought by Christianity was a kind of love whose paradigm was the generous giving of oneself for others, even one's own life, benevolence now occupies the place previously reserved for charity, but with an emphasis on the happiness that must accompany altruistic behavior. The center is occupied by the human, not by grace; by human happiness, not by self-giving per se: "The notion that the godly person is one who gives of himself is continued in this new ethic, in which all the traditional virtues are redefined, as we saw above, and related to benevolence. But the content of this disposition is defined in terms of human happiness" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 268).

3.3. Third slippage: the utility of the good and the rationalization of agape

With Radical Enlightenment there is a definitive break with any remnant of the notion of providence or of a cosmic order that came from deism: "Enlightenment naturalism (...) is in part motivated by the sense that in rejecting religion it is for the first time doing justice to the innocence of natural desire, that it is countering the calumny implicit in ascetic codes." (Taylor, 1989a, p. 516).

72 Here Taylor points out that there is even a transformation of eschatology in terms of affection: "Happiness is the attaining of the things we by nature desire, or pleasure and the absence of pain. The rewards of the next life seem to be considered just as more intense and longer-lasting versions of the pleasures and pains of this. Moreover, God's having set up this system of recompense in the next world seems to be designed at least partly to underpin the interlocking system in this one" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 267).

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Prioritizing moral action and utility is now crucial. The new approach differs from the seeking of constitutive good, while still acknowledging commitment to *life goods*. In any case, the focus on benevolence has shifted from social and political aspects presented in the *ethics of benevolence* to impartiality and individuality, while still valuing solidarity on a global scale. According to Taylor, the Marquis of Condorcet (1979) is an excellent example of this practical and selfless benevolence:

> "One thing to describe human motivation in a condition of realized harmony; quite another to attribute to people today a love of mankind which would lead them to work for the good of humanity regardless of the cost to themselves" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 331).

During the Enlightenment, there was a belief that increased rationality would lead to greater benevolence, ultimately freeing human good nature from their own negative tendencies. For Taylor, this is clearly exemplified in the case of Jacques Rousseau and his search for the sources of morality in the nature of humankind. For Rousseau (2008), *listening to the voice of conscience* is the source of the benevolence that will make us escape from self-interest: "To regain contact with this voice would be to transform our motivation, to have a wholly different quality of will" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 358). Scientific reason serves as the foundation of goodness, allowing us to observe and assess situations objectively without any bias. Moreover, human desire for pleasure motivates individuals to engage in selfless acts, resulting in behaviors that benefit others before oneself. The *Aufklärer*,

> "in their insistence on the physical nature of the moral life or on the reduction of all human motivation to pleasure, in their zeal to root out all religious and metaphysical doctrines about "higher" or "spiritual" aspirations, to leave them absolutely no ontological space, seemed also to abolish the space for what I have been calling 'strong evaluation', the recognition that certain goals or ends make a claim on us, are incommensurable with our other desires and purposes" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 332).

Kant exemplifies the idea of enlightened subjectivity and finding goodness through inner motivation. Similar to Augustine, Kant believes that morality involves transforming one's will and subjecting oneself to moral principles. According to Kant, moral laws are solely based on rational human will and impose obligations. Practically,

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Kant believes in universalizing the maxims with which one acts, favoring the maxim that can be applied by anyone. However, Taylor criticizes this approach for abstracting morality, homogenizing norms, and avoiding the question of how to address human motivation. Ultimately, he deems this approach impractical, along with utilitarianism and its model of happiness calculation.

In this sense, Taylor points out that both utilitarianism and Kantianism work with a procedural conception of practical reason: "the rationality of an agent or his thought is judged by how he thinks, not in the first instance by whether the outcome is substantively correct. Good thinking is defined procedurally" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 86). By extension, being right about a decision comes from following the correct procedure. Substantive contents are of no importance—something that contrasts with Taylor's accent on ontology, as we saw in the previous chapter.

Conversely, God is still present but as a postulate of practical reason. Taylor stresses Kant's deep rootedness in Christian theology and finds several places where a strong influence of St. Augustine is evident. But we find in Kant a substitution of the role of grace by a new way of understanding benevolence as *respect*, as we saw already: "in Kant, what takes the place of universal benevolence is something closer to a principle of universal justice, the determination to act only by universal maxims and to treat all rational beings as ends" (Taylor, 1989, pp. 366).

It is, according to Taylor, a "secularized variant of *agape*" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 367) with enormous influence on subsequent centuries. A particularity of this secularization is independent of whether the subject is a believer or a non-believer. What is described is a change that has shaped the moral consciousness of modernity and has been definitive for the configuration of the sources of morality. It is, according to Taylor, the key to understanding the great reliance on ourselves to achieve the altruistic ends that lie behind all the humanitarian efforts of later centuries. The question of the place of universal benevolence, that *secularized agape*, attains great importance in Kantian practical philosophy:

> "Human beings are capable of a universal will to beneficence or justice, which is part of their make-up as rational beings, and which comes to be released in its full power by their acceding to self-responsible reason. There is a kind of secularized variant of *agape* implicit in reason

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itself, which cannot but grow stronger with the development of enlightenment" (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 366–367).

These secularized variants of the *agape* are the ones that have "bulked large in the self-consciousness of moderns over the last two centuries, and (have) fed our faith in ourselves as a reforming civilization, capable of reaching higher moral goals than any previous age has" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 367).

Kant's particularity regarding the history of the secularization of *agape* lies in his internalization of grace in a quasi-secularized postulate of practical reason and in its use as a criterion.[73] However, Kant, unlike theories of Kantian heritage, such as Habermas', still grants a role to metaphysics. For Taylor, current moral theories based on a Kantian model, such a Habermas' or Rawls', reveal a growing inability to hold on to our humanitarian efforts, which 2creates something like a spiritual crisis in our civilization" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 367). Precisely, Taylor points out the weakness of neo-Kantian ethics that have become blind to their own sources by separating the domains of ethics and morality: they seek justice, but ignore reflecting on the good. This fact results in a difficulty to maintain the high expectations on the human being of those philosophies that start from rational discernment for a solidary action, as we saw in the introduction.

3.4. Fourth slippage: historical exceptionalism

Kant's relevance is still manifest in his influence on the expressivist turn of Romanticism, which brings with it another way of articulat-

73 Taylor also describes his moral theory as "criterial" besides recognizing in Kant a procedural model of practical reason. It would be criterial "in the sense that the requirements of reason are determined in advanced by some fixed criterion" (Smith, 2002, p. 106). In this sense, utilitarianism would also qualify as a criterial theory, where the criterion would be the maximization of happiness. Criterial theories are not by definition procedural, as Smith points out, since Taylor finds in Plato a substantive theory where the vision of the good would be the criterion: "Plato offers what we can call a substantive conception of reason. Rationality is tied to the perception of order; and so to realize our capacity for reason is to see the order as it is. The correct vision is criterial" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 121).

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ing the good as the inner motivation. Romanticism "turned to nature and unadorned feeling (...) developed out of the notion that I have called nature as a source" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 461, cf.368). Romanticism represents a revolt against the consequences of rationalism and utilitarianism: "against the classical stress on rationalism, tradition and formal harmony, the Romantics affirmed the rights of the individual, of the imagination, and of feeling" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 368)

The notion that an individual possesses an innate voice or drive, which enables them to discover truth through their own emotions, played a significant role in bolstering the diverse manifestations of the romantic revolt: "The requirement in this new philosophy that I be in tune with the impulse of nature could be seen just as another demand of love: now the nature which speaks through me is the good which must be cherished" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 372).

Feelings are good in themselves; they are no longer good as a function of the action to which they move. And feelings no longer require the attraction of a transcendent pole to the subject: feelings are concerned with how we experience our lives and our desires.[74] They were not separated from the idea of the harmonious order of things, but the accent shifted through the way of accessing that order. It will no longer be rational coldness, but the warmth of feeling expressed in language and art. However, the displacement of this idea implies a radical turn that changes the understanding of the moral sources. Thus, benevolence is considered a natural sentiment, free of prior moral codes.

For Taylor, the French Revolution has more to do with this expressivist turn than with the dominance of reason and is, moreover, the first context where messianic expectations appear completely secularized: "The Revolution offers the hope of a new epoch, not because it proposes to engineer society at last in a rational form; rather the hope is that it can at last call forth the great benevolence

74 In an interview, Taylor referred to Romanticism's lack of a proper metaphysics: "It's even hard to speak of metaphysics with the Romantics, let alone of a common, consensual type of metaphysics (...). The share of indetermination inherent in the relationship between man and things certainly explains, at least in part, why there are no explicit metaphysics among the Romantics. The language of nature can indeed be translated, but the appropriate vector to do so is art, not some philosophical logic that strives toward an illusory clarity, in quest of so-called metaphysical light" (Taylor, 2020a, p. 30)

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latent in virtuous men, once the corrupt servants of tyranny have been swept aside" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 387).

For Taylor, contemporary society stands on the great transformations of the Enlightenment and Romanticism: "our cultural life, our self-conceptions, our moral outlooks still operate in the wake of these great events" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 393). In a manner, he summarizes as follows:

> "Modern notions of *agape* have been affected by the ideal of austere and impartial beneficence which emerges from disengaged reason. (…) But they have also been transformed by Romantic conceptions of spontaneous feeling, of a goodness which flows from inner nature" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 412).

A legacy of modernity that has come down to us and is vividly present in our moral imaginary is the following the moral imperative to reduce suffering, which was formed in the Enlightenment and continues today, shows the combined strength of the two moral ideals on which modern identity is built: the importance of ordinary life and universal benevolence. Together with the latter, a new political ideal based on progress appears, also of unquestionable influence on morality: the ideal of universal justice, reflected from the 18th century onwards in numerous constitutional declarations of rights and international treaties, together with the ideas of liberty and dignity (cf. Taylor, 1989a, pp. 397–398).

Moreover, from the Victorian age onward, a sense of *moral exceptionalism* emerges: the imperative of beneficence and justice coupled with a sense of making history with an unprecedented milestone. Altruism at that time acquired undoubtedly moral primacy, especially subsequent to the anti-slavery crusades, in which the Christian influence was unquestionable (Taylor, 1989a, p. 396ff). Moral historical exceptionalism is a kind of recognition that a new moral conscience is emerging in connection with a collective sense of occupying a unique place in history. As historical bias, it might be sometimes even an illusion, in view of the injustices tolerated, the double standards and the lack of attention to some latent conflicts. This is a sense of historical exceptionalism which also applies to the present time.[75] But it sets very high standards of moral demands, encouraged by the value that

75 Many of the speeches of recent UN Secretaries General can be understood in this way. We can recall the sentence of Ban Ki-moon, receiving the honorary

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equality, rights, freedom, benevolence, solidarity and the desire to alleviate the suffering of others have been gaining. Taylor recognizes in some recent movements in the USA, such as the anti-abolitionist movement or the great American movement for civil rights, this constant that began in Victorian times: "these movements reflect, and have helped to propagate and intensify, the imperatives of universal benevolence and justice and the sense that a recognition of these is integral to our civilization" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 396).

Taylor points out that the present time differs from earlier times, like Victorian era or the civil rights movements of the 1960s in that demands arising from the imperatives of benevolence and justice have increased, at least in Western civilization. Taylor even points out that part of this mechanism of minimizing the effect of the requirement of the moral ideal of solidarity and benevolence is manifested in modern bureaucracy: many of the historical concretizations of the demands of universal justice have become social rights to which resources, both public and private, are allocated; institutions of all kinds have been created and charged with alleviating suffering, defending the marginalized, caring for the worst off in society and on the planet, taking an interest in all kinds of causes: "much of the effort of what we often loosely call social democracy has gone into building universal concern, as it were, into the very fabric and procedures of our societies" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 398)

In any case, although the practice of solidarity today goes hand in hand with the construction of an institutional framework, it is also true that "bureaucracy creates its own injustices and exclusions and that a great deal of suffering is not so much relieved as rendered invisible by it" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 398). There is, therefore, a paradox: the same institutions and structures created and planned to alleviate

degree at the Catholic University of Leuven in 2015: 'We are the first Generation that can end poverty, the last that can end climate change'. (Ki-moon, 2015). This sentiment, both optimistic and of historical exception, is perceived in many declarations and initiatives of international organizations, such as Agenda 2030 or Sustainable Development Goals. Certainly, we may find ourselves in a historical moment in which technical advances allow the accomplishment of those goals (Harari, 2015, 2016). But the moral framework that explains both such moral obligation to solidarity and the human capacity to achieve it, is rooted more deeply in history.

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suffering from an imperative of benevolence also generate injustices and suffering.[76]

Moral historical exceptionalism, the increasing perceived inescapability of demands, and the bureaucratization of responses raise a central question in Taylor's view: "What can sustain this continuing drive? What can enable us to transcend in this way the limits we normally observe to human moral action?" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 398). Again, these questions refer to the capacity to articulate moral responses from the sources of motivation. But, as we already said earlier, the articulation of goods has become increasingly problematic in moral reflection:

> "The question of their (and our) place in history is very important to them (us). And not only because they/we may sense some higher moral standards in ours, but also because of the uneasy sense that something very valuable has been sacrificed in the process" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 576 n.6).

The late was not so much the case in the Victorian era, where the sense of exceptionalism was still rooted in the Christian faith and the idea of civilization. In fact, moral exceptionalism is an aspect of the idea of Western civilization and of the collective narrative of the North Atlantic culture of the last two centuries: "it is part of the newly developed story of the genesis of our culture against the background of the homogeneous time of nature, which relates this culture to institutional and social change over centuries" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 576 n.7).

The components that explain this narrative of Western civilization are rooted, on the one hand, in the Christian inspiration of *agape* but with an enormous influence of the Enlightenment notions of progress and rationally planned improvements. There was a complex interaction between religious and secular sources of morality, for example, when it came to undertaking major social reforms, as happened in the United States with the anti-slavery movements of the 19th century: "the demands of Christian faith were redefined to incorporate a heavy dose of social reform, often conceived in terms of utilitarian calculation" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 399). Thus, although the initial impulse was Christian, the sources to which one turns to

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76 Later, in *A Secular Age* he will describe this fact, in dialogue with Ivan Illich, as corruption of *agape*.

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satisfy the demands are not based on grace, but rather on reason. And this possibility of turning to non-believing sources of morality, without affecting the goals of benevolence and solidarity and the image of civilization, is the great novelty of the nineteenth century: "for the first time an alternative moral horizon was available to belief in God" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 408).

Taylor understands the crisis of deism and the appearance of the possibility of the option of atheism or agnosticism from a novel position. Taylor resorts to the causal explanations of secularization (which in *A Secular Age* he will call "subtraction stories"), that is, the passage to a rational mentality due to the development of science and the development of the economy and the urbanization of society, which distances individuals from apparently less evolved beliefs. Taylor's emphasis is that prior to an epistemological change there is a displacement of the moral accent: "Scientism itself requires a leap of faith. What powers this faith is its own moral vision." (Taylor, 1989a, p. 404). It is a change or a decision, conscious or not, by which subjects resolve to turn to some moral sources and abandon others.[77] The context is already clearly that of a moral pluralism.

A new unbelieving "ethic of benevolence" emerges, with two operative images that perform as ideals: the ideal of the rationally free individual who is self-responsible for his/her moral decisions, and the heroic ideal of unbelief, that is, of the individual who confronts the truth of reality, no matter how discouraging it may be (like Dr. Rieux from Camus' *La Peste*). Moving from religion to science, moreover, "not only betokened a greater purity of spirit and greater manliness but also aligned them with the demands of human progress and welfare" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 405).

The history of the secularization of *agape* could already end at this point with an explanation of the pluralistic panorama of the different sources of solidarity today: from the purely Christian understanding of *agape* as grace, its intimate version, internalized grace operating as disengaged reason, the spontaneous voice of nature within us,

77 The convincing force of scientistic arguments, such as Darwin's, is not found primarily in their capacity to better explain the facts of nature, but in the convincing power of a new moral outlook: "not the simple replacement of non-science by science, but a new militant moral outlook growing out of the old and taking its place beside it as a fighting alternative" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 404).

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no notion of good will, the procedural way of discerning the right decision or action, and so on.

Taylor's point is that pluralism generates a new reality. There is not just a pluralism of different moral sources and ways of motivating that are available to the subject, but "our ideas about our moral motivation show a confusing mixture of fusion, mutual influence, and rivalry among the different sources. Belief and unbelief have been complexly related to each other" (Taylor, 1989, p. 412). Modern ways of referring to *agape*, even the most explicitly believing ones, have been influenced by moral exceptionalism, using a detached reason and by the intimate conception of grace. All moral models, in which the *agape* is different from its original form—or, at least, in ways that call for new ways of understanding grace—hide not only changes in morality, but also in anthropology, in politics and even in metaphysics and theology. However, all these models are vulnerable in two ways: on the one hand, all the sources are interconnected, not only in their historical genesis, but also in real moral life, in the way how the agent finds a variety of sources in him and in relation to others in the community (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 594–617); on the other hand, blindness with respect *constitutive goods* also affects those who try to respond to the demands of *agape*, so to speak, as children of the same modern identity.

3.5. Fifth slippage: expressivism

There is however a final twist in the history of the secularization of *agape* that has come about with Romanticism and the beginning of Expressivism that will increase the drama of the gap between the high demands of solidarity and the lack of articulation of goods. Romanticism brought with it three crucial reorderings in the moral vision and which resulted in the crisis that could lead to blindness towards the sources of morality. First, Expressivism inherits from Romanticism the vision of reality from the nature of the subject and the uniqueness of the artist's feeling, which puts him in contact with the most authentic spiritual and moral forces. This realignment is revived and intensified in contemporary times. Another way of looking at things is the belief that humans are inherently flawed, as exemplified by Baudelaire's perspective. He sees humans as pos-

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sessing a fallen spiritual nature and emphasizes the importance of honor in the hero's journey, detached from the mundane aspects of life. (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 434–441). Finally, Schopenhauer expressed the idea that moral free will, which was once considered a spiritual source of good, is now objectified in nature (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 441–447).

As it can be noticed, the rejection of Enlightenment's view of nature by post-Romanticism is a clear indication of the negative judgement on it, out of the suffering and catastrophic consequences it brought. Nonetheless, Taylor highlights the long-lasting impact of the Enlightenment era, which includes the emphasis placed on human creativity, imagination, and inner emotions. Taylor pays attention to *subtler languages* and nuanced forms of communication, which effectively convey these values and continue to influence us today.[78] Hence, the possibility opens for the denial of all goodness of the human being and of all goodness of life in common, as it is clear in Nietzsche's understanding of the moral predicament. With him, it is also possible to postulate the non-existence of any understanding of the good, even the most immanent, and thus of access to a moral source.

Thus, the contemporary moral landscape offers a range of choices when it comes to grappling with the concept of goodness in humanity and the significance of reducing harm, as advocated by the modern era. One of these choices involves refuting the idea that humanity is inherently good and that minimizing suffering is a crucial goal. This option contrasts with the new expressionist developments, which reaffirms the virtuousness of our own vision of the good, without recourse to any objective order of goodness or any *constitutive good*. Indeed, no longer can the world be seen simply as *good*, for this assessment is reserved for the self-affirmation of the human being. Therefore, the challenge lies in how to find a balance between acknowledging and affirming humanity while also resisting the increasingly tendency of abhorrence of the world and instead seek true reality. This is exemplified in the philosophy of Nietzsche, which calls into question the ethics of benevolence and solidarity:

> "One of the things that makes a doctrine of our affirming power so necessary is just our commitment to an ethic of benevolence, which

78 We will discuss the subtler languages in more depth later.

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is why an inability to affirm the goodness of human beings can be threatening" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 455).

Yet the power of human self-affirmation and expressivism can give rise to a new way of understanding *agape*. So the power of self-affirmation manifests itself in Dostoyevsky's thesis as summarized by Taylor:[79] openness to grace manifests itself in our openness to the world. "What will transform us is an ability to love the world and ourselves, to see it as good in spite of the wrong" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 452). The noble act, the act of compassion and selfless altruism, manifests in the moral order of things that "people are transformed through being loved by God, a love that they mediate to each other, on one hand, with the modern notion of a subject who can help to bring on transfiguration through the stance he takes to himself and the world, on the other" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 452).[80] Whoever acts inspired by God's grace can be saved from the excesses to which deviant human freedom may lead, but also from the fatalistic distrust in the world. Key is to see the free initiative of Christ operating in the world and especially incarnated in exemplary characters: "God's grace and his primordial initiative lie at the base of the distinction between the *sequela christi*, meaning the fact of following Christ, and the imitation of an inspiring persona. Dostoyevsky was quite sensitive to the 'miracle' of charity. He claimed that love, as

79 "From Taylor's perspective, Dostoevsky is among the most insightful thinkers who have explored the problem of self-affirmation in a Christian perspective" (Kühnlein, 2008, p. 165). ["Aus Taylors Sicht gehört damit Dosojewski zu den aufschlussreichsten Denkern, die die Problematk der Selbstbejahung in christlicher Perspektive erkundet haben" (translated by S.G.)]. (cf. Taylor, 1999b, 2011f, p. 366, 2011g, p. 63; see also B. K. Ward, 2014).

80 The noble and generous act as a sign of *agape* from the subject's self-affirmation, without reference to transcendence, allows us to understand Dostoyevsky's famous maxim: "If God doesn't exist, everything is allowed" (see also Taylor, 2011b, p. 13). Taylor understands Dostoyevsky, in many ways, as a romantic, albeit a very peculiar one. With Romanticism he shares its vision of truth, where truth cannot be formulated directly, nor is it a matter of reason alone. Without an objective order of truth, anything can replace it. And so, as shown in The Demons, there are individuals who will no longer find any restraint to achieve their new absolute, even to the point of amputating other human beings of their dignity. It is not, therefore, a relativistic maxim, as if all moral references had vanished. Christ, in this sense, functions as a moral reference.

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Christ experienced it, couldn't be understood from within mundane boundaries" (Taylor, 2020a, p. 73).

With Dostoyevsky, Taylor clearly enters the perspective of the *subtler languages*: a new possibility for understanding *agape* and the role of grace opens up through the expression, from within the subject, of the transcendent basis of compassion without necessarily having to invoke God in the transcendent order.[81] The way of experiencing the world as open to the possibility of transcendence by seeing the grace of God operating in the world—like Dostoevsky—, the existence of exemplary charismatic exemplars and the use of *subtler languages* will be to a large extent the way in which Taylor will see the operability of *agape* as a source of human fulfillment, motivation towards the good of the neighbor and social transformation, as we will see in the last chapter.

3.6. The fate of agape in the age of pluralism

The reconstruction undertaken so far has shown that the secularization of *agape* in *Sources of the Self* is not a story of mere loss but of continuous rearticulation. Across the five moral slippages–from interiority to expressivism–Taylor's moral genealogy reveals how the Christian experience of grace is progressively immanentized, producing a moral landscape defined by pluralism, benevolence, and the affirmation of ordinary life. The outcome is a complex field where *agape* persists under multiple guises: as respect, altruism, justice, and solidarity.

At this stage, several questions arise. Can these rearticulated forms of *agape* still claim moral objectivity, or do they dissolve into the

81 René Girard, considers this type of transcendence a secularized a deviated variant of true transcendence: "Deviated transcendency is a caricature of vertical transcendency. There is not one element of this distorted mysticism which does not have its luminous counterpart in Christian truth" (Girard, 1965, p. 61). Dostoyevsky, according to Girard, constantly emphasizes the analogy between the two transcendences, the deviated and the vertical, only this time "in Dostoyevsky's universe deviated transcendency is no longer hidden behind religion" (Girard, 1965, p. 158). For Taylor, however, there is a type of vertical transcendence that manifests itself in the communion that arises in the act of helping the needy mediated by the experience of *agape*. In this way Taylor would read the noble acts that Dostoyevsky speaks of.

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relativism of cultural pluralism? Does Taylor's moral realism provide sufficient criteria to discern among competing articulations of the good, once the transcendent source has been displaced? And how can one justify, within modern immanence, that certain moral frameworks are "better accounts" of human moral experience than others?

These questions prepare the transition to the next chapter. In chapter 4, we will turn to Taylor's epistemological strategy as the key to evaluating moral articulations. There we will see how Taylor attempts to reconcile moral pluralism with realism, and how the continuity of *agape* as a constitutive good can still be defended within a framework that acknowledges the diversity and historicity of moral sources.

In any case, the outcome of this first reconstruction of the secularization of *agape* leaves us with a pluralism of moral sources, as well as of views on the goodness of the world and of the individual, resulting in the plurality of ethical approaches today. In chapter 5 we will follow his description of our age as affected by a "supernova effect" (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 300). Added to this is the consensus on the respect and dignity of human beings and historical exceptionalism. We will also see in our reconstruction that this view on the fate of the moral articulation on *agape* will be complemented by a closer attention to the social imaginaries and practices around charity and love of neighbor in each period of history

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2. Taylor's Best Account (BA Principle)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.3. The moral maps of Modernity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.5. Some critics against Taylor's theistic argumentation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.6. Is agape (just) a romantic inspiration?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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4.7. Agape and Resonance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.7.1. Resonance and the Good Samaritan

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.7.2. Addressing two difficulties

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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5. The Secularization of Agape (II): Moral Sources and Fullness in A Secular Age

In this chapter, we intend to examine the history of the secularization of *agape* in *A Secular Age*, as we did previously with *Sources of the Self*. In that earlier work, Taylor treats *agape* as interchangeable with grace and concludes with a tentative theistic "hunch": that *agape* may offer the most adequate framework for sustaining contemporary moral commitments to solidarity. *A Secular Age* represents the long-awaited continuation of that problematic (cf. Costa, 2022, pp. 32–33). Yet its central aim is not to develop the theistic map suggested in *Sources of the Self* but to clarify what it means to live and believe in a secular age by reconstructing the historical path that has brought us here (Taylor, 2007b, pp. ix–x).

This historical path is directly connected to the concern raised at the end of the previous chapter: the increasing difficulty modern moral frameworks face in sustaining unconditional concern for the weakest and most vulnerable. As Taylor suggests, once the transcendent horizon of *agape* recedes, moral motivation is progressively relocated within the subject—into conscience, sentiment, and inner discernment—producing what he elsewhere calls the disengaged self. This inward turn does not abolish realism about the good, but it does help explain the growing distance between our elevated moral standards and the motivational sources capable of supporting them, as well as the broader distancing from the world, from the Other, and from transcendence that characterizes modern experience. The question here is: How did we arrive at a moral landscape in which such disengagement became imaginable, and even dominant?

Taylor's answer unfolds through his account of "exclusive humanism,"[111] which charts the rise of a self-sufficient humanism that recog-

111 This term may be borrowed from Henri de Lubac (1995), one of the theologians Taylor admits has influenced him the most (cf. Taylor, 2013b, p. 77; see also Hillebert, 2021, pp. 62–63; Rober, 2018).

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nizes "no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing" (Taylor, 2007a, p. 18). By referencing human flourishing, Taylor draws a distinction between self-sufficient positions and those open to transcendence or "beyond life."[112] Much of *A Secular Age* reconstructs how exclusive humanism, once marginal and elite, came to be widely available and socially plausible. The book thus traces the transition from a social world in which belief in God was almost inescapable to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is "one human possibility among others" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 3).

Indeed, this situation of an optional faith within a situation of pluralism of approaches to belief and morality, in which all alternatives are weakened in their cogency by the others, represents Taylor's distinctive approach to secularization (Cf Taylor, 2007b, pp. 303–304, also 556, 595, 833–834 n.19). Beyond focusing only on debates on normative causes of the decline of belief in the West or on working around the privatization thesis (cf. Casanova, 1992, 1994, 2009), he focuses on the "conditions of belief" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 3) and on the "possibility or impossibility of certain kinds of experience in our age" (Taylor, 2007a, p. 15). In a nutshell, the intention of *A Secular Age* can be summarized as rehabilitating belief by examining its conditions of possibility today from an approach centered on the concept of fullness. In the background program, therefore, is the search for the conditions of the possibility of *agape* as a moral source open to the transcendent at a time when the majority option in the West seems to be that of the sources close to it.

An important part of Taylor's originality lies in providing a genealogy of secularization in which religion and the secular share the same path until our age. Specifically, Taylor's program is to construct "the *Entstehungsgeschichte* of exclusive humanism" (Taylor, 2007a, p. 26), that is, a history of the genesis of a mental frame in which explanations of meaning and significance are possible without appealing to any transcendent entity.[113] Living in a secular age is shaped mainly by a closed-to-transcendence worldview, or "immanent frame."

112 In chapter 8, we will focus on fullness and its relation to transcendence and *agape*.

113 The reference to the concept of emergence in its German word leads us to think of the use of genealogy by Nietzsche and authors who have followed him,

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In any case, the book's ultimate goal is to show the plausibility of the option from the secular world to keep the windows to transcendence open:

> "The immanent order can thus slough off the transcendent. But it doesn't necessarily do so. What I have been describing as the immanent frame is common to all of us in the modern West, or at least that is what I am trying to portray. Some of us want to live it as open to something beyond; some live it as closed. It is something which permits closure, without demanding it." (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 543–544).

However, such a situation does not result from a decline of religion in favor of modernity, as explained by the "master narratives of secularization" or "subtraction stories."[114] Taylor instead presents "an anti-reductionist position whereby religious beliefs cannot be reduced to psychic or social factors, but rather are able to unfold their own motivational power" (Koenig, 2016, p. 30). In that sense, parallel to Taylor's narrative of the emergence of secularism, it is possible to trace a proper story of the secularization of *agape* as a distinctive history of the motivation towards serving the least, as we will try to reconstruct in this chapter.

The story thus runs parallel to the history of the emergence of exclusive humanism. Here the underlying question is still how we have arrived at the present situation of coexisting a great moral demand for the stranger with the suspicion that the secular ethic of altruism has left something behind that is nevertheless essential in the Christian outlook and in the moral articulation oriented to love the neighbor (cf. Taylor, 1989a, p. 22). Hence, our task in this chapter will be to look at the *fate of agape* to better understand its relevance and possibilities today.

Thereby, we can reformulate the question that begins Taylor's historical narrative ("Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?" Taylor, 2007a, p.

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such as Michel Foucault. We will see the importance of this type of genealogy at the end of the present chapter (cf. Nietzsche, 1887; Foucault, 1984).

114 "Concisely put, I mean by this stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 22).

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25, also 539). Let us rephrase it as follows: Why in the 1500s was it almost impossible to understand the love of neighbor from a moral source other than Christian *agape*, whereas today, we find a plurality of sources and high moral standards for altruism?

Taylor's own suspicion is that "somewhere along the road, this culture ceases to be simply Christian-inspired—although people of deep Christian faith continue to be important in today's movements" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 371). As he did in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor finds that exclusive humanism, "in addition to being activist and interventionist, had to produce some substitute for *agape*" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 27). We talked at length about displacements and *slippages*, provoking that *materials* that were present in the Christian *agape* would have been moved sometimes from the surface to the bottom so that the terrain changes completely. Thus we explained the "secularizing transpositions" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 22) that had given rise to the plural landscape of moral sources for the ethics of altruism.

Now Taylor will use a much more complex picture, which he calls a "*zig-zag* account" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 95), as an alternative to the "straight path accounts" given by the subtraction stories. For Taylor, history, seen as a whole, teaches more discontinuities than continuities. It is full of unintended consequences whose meaning can be understood when the entire historical development is seen as a whole (cf. Taylor, 2016, p. 203). Taylor is less interested in historical events, nor is he so interested in the content or normativity of ideas, as he was somewhat more inclined to do in *Sources or the Self*. Rather, Taylor looks at cultural developments that have been profoundly relevant both in the shaping and evolution of interpretive frameworks and in the resulting changes that account for the multiplication of possibilities in the realm of socially shared ideas, personal beliefs, and moral values (cf. Wils, 2011).

Broadly speaking, we might say *zig* would refer to *agape* in this historical narrative, or what Taylor calls "transformation," a way of understanding wholeness that is connected to openness to transcendence, that is, in the case of *agape*, to grace, to the intervention of the divine in the human, of the supernatural from the natural. Nevertheless, as we will see in the last chapter, this transformation is in tension with the fullness we can achieve in this life, even without openness to transcendence. Fast forward to our narrative, this tension will give rise to the "reform," which is the beginning of

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the *zags*. By *zag*, we can understand either the currents that try to counteract the demands and consequences of the *zig* of transformation or, linked to it, the series of transformations that will give rise to structures closed to transcendence and eventually to the sources of immanent morality. Nevertheless, detailing these alternative sources is only part of the problem. In the last chapter, we will focus on two concrete models with which Taylor contrasts his proposal open to transcendence and sensitive to the human good with what he calls "secular humanists," such as Martha Nussbaum, and with the neo-Nietzschean "anti-humanists" (see Taylor, 2007b, pp. 623–656).

The story we will offer is a lengthy excerpt from Taylor's dense and crooked narrative. On the one hand, we will concentrate on how *agape* has been understood, or rather lived, in each of the turns that have given rise to the imaginary of solidarity of the present.[115]

On the other hand, we will dwell briefly at some points on the practice of neighborly love in each period of history. Approaching this practice from the point of view of the formation of moral orders will offer us a history that, while not entirely original to Taylor, is an alternative to histories of humanitarianism (cf. Barnett, 2013; Stamatov, 2013).[116] As we shall see, a*gape* survives through all of the *zig-zags*, but perhaps not in the original form.

Finally, we will end the chapter by assessing Taylor's secularization narrative. We will see that elements of Hegelian dialectic and Nietzschean/Foucaulian genealogy are identifiable in his account. However, understanding the story told by Taylor from the perspective of *agape*, as we are about to do, does not quite explain why this source has survived despite its mutations, eclipses, losses and reappearances throughout the different periods. As we will show, we believe that Taylor's narrative on *agape* is best explained by his *catholic attitude*, manifested in the ontological fecundity of meaning

115 We can briefly outline the story as Taylor later did in *The Language Animal*: "We have come through a long, drawn-out process, which includes Axial revolutions, the great world religions, philosophical developments like Stoicism and the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment(s), and in more recent centuries, the great campaigns against slavery, colonial conquest and exploitation, imperial rule, to this recognition of universalism" (Taylor, 2016, p. 203).

116 Taylor's narrative can be complemented by Paul Josef Cardinal Cordes' account (2008) on the secularization of neighbor-help, albeit his taking has a clear apologetic approach to the role that religion can play in the field of charities and social assistance.

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with which he examines each historical period, the teleological sense that can only be understood beyond history, and the vocation to recover moral sources reminiscent of tradition.

5.1. The Axial Religions

Taylor's narrative begins with the emergence of the so-called "Axial Revolution."[117] Right from the introduction of *A Secular Age*, Taylor emphasizes two relevant points for his understanding of religion: religion is a relationship with transcendence and the search for fulfillment as a human constant. Elsewhere, Taylor locates a fundamental religious-moral shift in the Axial Age, where the greatest good to which man can aspire is in the transcendent sphere. In his words, the Axial Age

> "was a shift from a mode of religious life which involved 'feeding the gods'—where the understanding of human good was that of prospering or flourishing (as this was understood), and where the 'gods' or spirits were not necessarily unambiguously on the side of human good—to a mode in which (a) there is notion of a higher, more complete human good, a notion of complete virtue, or even of a salvation beyond human flourishing (Buddha) while at the same time (b) the higher powers

117 The concept of the "Axial Age" was introduced by Karl Jaspers in 1949 in his *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* based on some of the ideas contained in the thought of the Weber brothers: "It would seem that this axis of history is to be found in the period around 500 B.C., in the spiritual process that occurred between 800 and 200 B.C. It is there that we meet with the most deepcut dividing line in history. Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short we may style this the 'Axial Period' (...) What is new about this age, in all three areas of the world, is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. (...) In this age were born the fundamental categories within which we still think today, and the beginnings of the world religions, by which human beings still live, were created" (Jaspers, 1976, pp. 1–2). Two of those categories are indeed the binomial of transcendence-immanence (see Abrutyn, 2021). Today, the debate around Axial Age has also gained much relevance thanks to the comparative historical sociology of Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt (cf. Bellah, 2005a, pp. 7–6; see Eisenstadt, Werner-Reimers-Stiftung, Makhon le-meḥḳar 'al shem Heri S. Ṭruman, & Mosad Ṿan Lir bi-Yerushalayim, 1986; Árnason, Eisenstadt, & Wittrock, 2005; see also Bellah & Joas, 2012a).

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according to this view are unambiguously on the side of human good" (Taylor, 2011d, p. 268).

The key innovation is thus the relocation of the good: no longer embedded in the cosmic-natural order, but situated in a transcendent moral horizon. This is the beginning of the long process Taylor calls disembedding, a shift that alters not only religious practices but also the moral space in which human action becomes meaningful (Taylor, 2007a, p. 151, 2011c, p. 371).[118] Post-axial traditions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and even Platonic philosophy—develop what Taylor later calls the "way of transformation," grounding human excellence in a good that transcends immanent flourishing.

Although Taylor does not dwell extensively on the implications of the Axial turn for practices of altruism, historical sources show that this shift also reshapes imaginaries of poverty and responsibility. In the Ancient Near East, systems of social assistance were typically embedded in political order, with the king acting as guarantor of justice and care (cf. Assmann, 2012, p. 396, see also 1990). In Israel, however, the moral basis of such care is decisively reframed: responsibility for the poor is articulated not through royal authority but through the divine law of the covenant. As Lutterbach notes, the Torah "deprived earthly kingship of its traditional legislative function," grounding obligations toward the vulnerable in the will of a God described as loving and just (Lutterbach, 2022, p. 12).[119] Laws concerning the immigrant, widow, and orphan (e.g., Lev 19; Deut 15) express a novel linkage between justice, compassion, and transcendence.

What matters for Taylor is the emergence of a new moral grammar: care for the weak becomes tied to a transcendent good, and transformation of the self is inseparable from social and political responsibility. Care for the poor begins to be linked to justice and good that comes from the transcendent. Justice and goodness are achieved through keeping the commandments. Although notions of

118 In that sense, Taylor provides an overview of the axial age from the "idea of an unqualified good around which the other aspects of Axial culture can be understood" (Bellah & Joas, 2012b, p. 4).

119 "Damit war das irdische Königtum seiner traditionellen gesetzgeberischen Funktion beraubt—und die Verpflichtung zur gelebten Mitmenschlichkeit fortan göttlichen Rechts (ius divinum) sowie vor einem von den Menschen als "liebend" identifizierten Gott einklagbar" (translated by S.G.)

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structural evil remain absent at this stage (cf. Hudson, 1993, pp. 11–12), the Axial configuration introduces a moral horizon in which the poor are no longer merely integrated through social order but recognized as subjects of divine justice.

5.2. The novelty of Christian agape

Christianity introduces three innovations central to Taylor's account. First, it reconfigures human flourishing in relation to transcendence in a distinctive way *vis-à-vis* other axial religions. Second, it introduces a new conception of time, cosmos, and social life as a *Great Chain of Being*. Third, it generates a dialectic between the dynamics of the Incarnation and the drive to articulate it in ordinary life, with particular relevance for the practical shape of *agape*.

The tension between transformation beyond life and immanent human flourishing forms the central locus of Taylor's understanding of Christianity in his narrative:

> "The paradox of Christianity, in relation to early religion, is that on one hand, it seems to assert the unconditional benevolence of God towards humans; there is none of the ambivalence of early Divinity in this respect; and yet it redefines our ends so as to take us beyond flourishing" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 151).

From a divine and transcendent affirmation of human flourishing in the axial religions—which contrasts with the arbitrary moral universe of many Neolithic cults—Christianity introduces the certainty that God unequivocally seeks the good of the faithful. Evil no longer appears as a necessary part of the cosmic order. At the same time, the good is not simply available within immanence: its ideal is transcendent, still to be attained, and yet to come. Underneath this paradox lies *agape* and its tension between God's unconditional love for each person and the promise that love of neighbor, taken even to the limit of ultimate self-giving, beyond ordinary flourishing, has the status of a higher good.

In Taylor's account, the way this tension is handled eventually shapes the story of the secularization of *agape*. To attain goodness, Christianity introduces a new distinction between the immanent and the transcendent that invites the faithful to break with mere

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human flourishing and to go beyond it. But this possibility is not open to all in the same way; it appears in intensified form in those who receive an especially grace-filled experience. These experiences crystallize in specific social forms, generating modes of life that hierarchize Christian society according to the degree and intensity of religious commitment. The monastic phenomenon (also present in other post-axial religions) emerges in precisely this context and opens up the possibility of "different speeds" of living the faith.

Protest against this stratified regime will be one of the forces that eventually lead to *Reform*, in the sense Taylor gives to the term. Here he explicitly connects the secularization of *agape* with a tension between different social ways of addressing the Gospel ideal. This tension runs between "higher," spiritual vocations and "worldly," temporal forms of life, and between those who orient themselves primarily beyond flourishing and those whose pursuit of the good is concentrated in ordinary life,

> "between dedicated minorities of religious 'virtuosi' (to use Max Weber's term), and the mass religion of the social sacred, still largely oriented to flourishing, survived or reconstituted itself, with the same combination of strain on one hand, and hierarchical complementarity on the other" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 154).

At the heart of the above-described "perennial tension" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 81) would be somehow an implicit reflection of the relationship between Nature and Grace typical of the Christian—especially Catholic—understanding of reality and life (J. K. A. Smith, 2014, p. 32 note 3).[120] Duality of vital orientations within Christianity lies in the doctrine of the creation of the human being in the image

120 The relationship between Nature and Grace has as its background the doctrine of the creation of the human being in the image and likeness of the Creator and the doctrinal considerations of the dual nature of Christ, God, and human. Both reflect the tension between the freedom of the human being and his ontological relation to the Creator, but also the relationship between an autonomous world and its dependence on God. The human being, "made of body and soul, is one." As a corporeal being, he presumes an intimate relationship with the rest of the creatures but with a privileged place in the world because of his openness to grace (Gaudium et Spes, n.14). This worldview begins to break down with modernity. Many, like Heidegger, saw in the Cartesian distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* the beginning of the rupture of this unity between soul and body in the human being (Heidegger, 1927, pp. 89–92). Of course, Christian theology has understood this tension between

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and likeness of the Creator and the doctrinal considerations of the dual nature of Christ, God, and human. Both reflect the tension between the freedom of the human being and his ontological relation to the Creator, but also the relationship between an autonomous world and its dependence on God, in a way that cannot be explained in terms of functional differentiation or moral correctness alone. In lived experience, this tension takes the form of a duality of ends: on the one hand, a Christian faith directing life toward a transcendence beyond ordinary flourishing; on the other, a complex of institutions and practices oriented to human flourishing in the world (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 44).

In Early Christianity, this regime of hierarchical complementarity corresponds to an underlying metaphysical picture of the cosmos: "created things receive their form through God (...) everything has being only insofar as it participates in God" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 127). This is what Taylor calls the *Great Chain of Being* (Taylor, 2007b, p. 129).[121] In this conception, the hierarchies between ideal forms and material affect how reality is perceived. In this order, all instances complement "and help each other" (ibid Within this order, higher and lower forms stand in relations of mutual implication; each level "helps" the others. Love proceeds from the Trinity, and everything

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nature and grace according to the emphases of the mental frameworks of each time and how the concept of personhood is understood (Greshake, 1997, pp. 172–175). From the "paradigm of substance" of the Middle Ages, we move in modernity to the "paradigm of the subject" to arrive at the new approaches that arise in theology after the reception of the existentialist philosophy of authors such as Karl Jaspers, Emmanuel Mounier, or Gabriel Marcel, who try to integrate subject, world, and God from the paradigm of subjectivity and from a dynamic communicative model between divinity and subject from which Taylor recognizes himself to have been influenced (Taylor, 2020a, p. 25).

121 In *Disenchantment-Reenchantment*, Taylor defines the *Great Chain of Being* as follows: "Being itself existed on several levels, and the cosmos manifested this hierarchy, both in its overall structure and again in its different partial domains. The same superiority of dignity and rule that the soul manifests over the body reappears in the state in the preeminence of the king, in the animal realm in that of the lion, among birds and fishes in the supreme status of eagle and dolphin. These features "correspond" to each other in the different domains. The whole is bound together by relations of hierarchical complementarity, which should be reproduced in a well-ordered state" (Taylor, 2011c, p. 291).

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finds its place in that order through the love that descends from above (Augustine, 1998, XI, 27, 1998, XV, 22).

Augustine's distinction between *amor concupiscentiae* and *caritas*, especially in The City of God, becomes decisive for later understandings of *agape*. He differentiates a love of concupiscence, which binds the person to the world and transforms the desire to give into a fear of losing, from a love of charity, which comes from God and is returned through piety and love of neighbor. These two loves generate two social orders: "Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; and the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self" (Augustine, 1998, XIV, 28). God is loved for himself and through the love of neighbor. But this *agapeic love*, in any case, is a reflection of its origin, which is in the Trinity and not in human beings.[122]

Finally, Christianity introduces the tension between the Incarnation and what Charles Taylor calls "excarnation," the process by which Christianity gradually becomes a more disembodied, de-ritualized, head-centered religion. On one side lies Taylor's concept of the Incarnation—which concentrates much of the dogmatic content of Christianity—a key background for Taylor's approach to

122 The Augustinian vision of the world and love perhaps has had the most significant influence on Christianity, perhaps only surpassed by the contents of the Gospels. It continues to arouse theological commentaries and philosophical criticisms in the contemporary age. Of significant influence has been the doctoral thesis of Hannah Arendt and her accusation of the excessive individualism and sentimentalism of the Augustinian concept of neighborly love to the detriment of its social and emancipatory potential (cf. Arendt, 2021, pp. 84–88; Klevesath & Reese-Schäfer, 2011). For Arendt, historical Christianity and Christian-based neighbor-love have an excessive otherworldliness that stems from their hatred of the body and belief in the end of the world. In terms of Patrick Boyle, "an all-embracing love for God does not reveal the neighbor's relevance" (Boyle, 1987, p. 92). In *Vita Activa*, she will argue that both New Testament *agape* and Augustine's caritas are otherworldly and excessively dependent on the working of divine grace- especially groups of people who are carried away by Christian neighbor-love—and therefore cannot provide a basis for the political (cf. Arendt, 2020, pp. 52–54; Chiba, 1995, p. 525n55). The influence of this critique of the lack of political content of the Christian religion had a strong influence on 20th-century theologians in Germany and Latin America, who, in many ways, have tried to recover the authentic political dimension of the Gospels, often focusing on the eschatological hope and the proximity of Jesus to the marginalized.

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agape. On the other stands excarnation, "the exaltation of disengaged reason as the royal road to knowledge, even in human affairs" (Taylor, 2007, p. 746), in early modern Deism (Taylor, 2007b, p. 288). While Taylor locates the origins of excarnation already in the Axial period (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 613–614), he sees the Reformation as a decisive intensification: religious life moves away from the body—ritual, festival, carnival, "gut" compassion, and even the sacralization of sexuality—toward increasingly rationalized and disciplined forms (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 770–772, see also 2008).

Taylor's contrast between excarnation and Incarnation underscores the importance of an incarnational theology in his thought, already explicit in *A Catholic Modernity?*:

> "Redemption happens through Incarnation, the weaving of God's life into human lives, but these human lives are different, plural, irreducible to each other. Redemption-Incarnation brings reconciliation, a kind of oneness [...]the oneness of diverse beings who come to see that they cannot attain wholeness alone" (Taylor, 1999b, p. 14; see also Cloots, Latré, & Vanheeswijck, 2015, pp. 963–967).

Faith in the Word made flesh, crucified, and risen opens a way of inhabiting openness to transcendence in and through embodied life. God's love for creatures is thus linked to the love human beings can feel and enact: "the Incarnation, the Crucifixion happened in time, and so what occurs here can no longer be seen as less than fully real" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 56). Nothing is more real than God's love for the world and individuals. Hence "in the Christian case, we could think of this as *agape*, the love which God has for us, and which we can partake of through his power" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 20). And it is the will of God that we "participate in his love" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 764).

The Incarnation transforms not only theology and spirituality but also the human relation to self and community. The body is deified; the person is endowed with inalienable dignity; and new forms of fraternity, hospitality, and altruism become imaginable. Christ's "gut feelings" (2007b, p. 640), break with the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* and invite believers to share his compassion. If the Gospels portray him as being moved "in the bowels" (*splangnizesthai*) (2007b, p. 115), then partaking of his love compels us to do likewise even with the same compassion, to share in the same personal love for even the most distant stranger This is what the Good Samaritan exemplifies when he is moved to compassion for an unknown man lying on the

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road, inaugurating "another kind of solidarity altogether" (2007b, p. 158), one that "can take us beyond the bounds of any already existing solidarity" (2007b, p. 246, see also 576, 737–742).

The embodiment of *agape* thus reshapes Western understandings of universal solidarity, communal bonds, and the articulation of moral good, significantly raising the bar for any alternative motivation toward neighbor-love. At the same time, this incarnational force is continually countered by processes of excarnation. Under its sway, a personal relation to transcendence rooted in unconditional love is gradually rendered more impersonal and rational—"a transfer out of embodied, 'enfleshed' forms of religious life, to those which are more 'in the head'„ (Taylor, 2007b, p. 554, see also 613–615). The God-who-becomes-flesh gives way, in ordinary life, to "de-Communioned, de-ritualized, disembodied" patterns of existence (J. K. A. Smith, 2014, p. 67). This process, beginning with Taylor's understanding of Reform, is what Ivan Illich defines as the "corruption of Christianity" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 737, see also 158) that would ultimately give rise to modernity and to ways of understanding solidarity without recourse to moral sources open to transcendence.

The Incarnation-Excarnation dialectic at work between *agape* and other ways of articulating loving one's neighbor will be a constant tension from this point onwards in our narrative, as we will see from the Reform onwards. Moreover, this dynamic will be a hermeneutical key to understanding the place of *agape* in today's society, compensating in large part for the over-coding of justice, as we will see in the following chapters when we discuss the place of *agape* in the field of non-profit organizations engaged in altruism or the politics of recognition and identity.

5.3. Reform and the eclipse of agape

One of the central paradoxes in Taylor's account is that the very tensions internal to Christianity—between transformation beyond life and immanent flourishing, and between Incarnation and excarnation—generate the revolutionary dynamic that eventually destabilizes the old equilibrium between transcendence and immanence and, through many unintended turns, leads toward the secular age. In other words, the force that fuels exclusive humanism is not exter-

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nal but emerges from Christianity's own inner logic. Taylor captures this under the heading of Reform:

> "[the] drive to Reform was the matrix out of which the modern European idea of revolution emerges. [...] What I'm calling "Reform" here expressed a profound dissatisfaction with the hierarchical equilibrium between lay life and the renunciative vocations. In one way, this was quite understandable. This equilibrium involved accepting that masses of people were not going to live up to the demands of perfection. In a sense, they were being "carried" by the perfect. And there is something in this which runs against the very spirit of Christian faith" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 61–62).

The differences in spiritual *speed* among religious elites and lay people in their aspirations for perfection and the dissatisfaction of the latter led to the multiplication of reform movements at the end of the Middle Ages (Taylor, 2007b, p. 67). Taylor understands the Reform as a "long-term vector in Latin Christendom towards Reform" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 786 n. 92; see also O'Malley, 2000, pp. 17–18; MacCulloch, 2004, pp. 27–28), which crystallizes in the tensions over discipline and morals that would begin in the eleventh century with the Gregorian Reformations.

For Taylor, the key to the beginning of those movements was the changes in the practices of piety, which tended to look to Christ as a figure of redemptive suffering and to Mary as a compassionate mother. It was a real "revolution in devotion, in the focus of prayer and love" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 94) that would have two consequences, according to Taylor: a deepening of the mystery of the Incarnation and a new focus on the poor and disadvantaged of the world: "The stress on the human suffering Christ obviously fits with the aspiration to bring Christ to the suffering humans of our time. They are two facets of the same leading idea, that Christ is our brother, our neighbour, is among us" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 93).

Accompanying this turn towards a more incarnational spirituality, open to the pain of others, there was a push by the elites towards moral and social reform. The underlying tension can be described as one between the demand to love God even to the point of renouncing everything, and the demand to affirm ordinary human flourishing:

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> "We could describe [this tension] as lying between the demand to love God, which means to follow him even to the cross, to be ready to renounce everything, on one hand; and the demand to affirm ordinary human life and flourishing, on the other. The two come together in that the path of giving to God often takes the form of feeding, healing, clothing; fending off suffering and death, and thus making human flourishing possible. This is clear in the life of Christ" (Taylor, 2007a, p. 80).[123]

The problem appears when we ask what the Christian life looks like for those immersed in "full human flourishing"—work, family, civic life, building for society and the future. As Taylor notes, the renunciative vocation can directly serve works of mercy, but the ordinary believer "living from the land or from a trade" cannot simply imitate this pattern (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 80–81). A possible way through the tension would be to affirm *agape* and openness to transcendence within ordinary life itself, recognizing a God "which loves all mankind, [and] is ready to give without stint" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 81). As we will see in the last chapter, that is Taylor's personal approach to *agape*. In any case, such a shift in the understanding of the transformation of *agape* implies a novelty, so to speak, a new synthesis. But, then, the transformation of *agape*, which, as we shall

123 The closer union with the crucified through suffering also manifests in the development of piety around death. Close phenomena are the "dramatization of the last moment" around the celebration of burials and the theology of purgatory, so popularly successful in the centuries preceding the coming of the Reformation. Taylor makes little mention of it. The development of piety around death entailed a unique solidarity between the living and the dead, extending beyond life and even beyond the closeness of one's own family. As is well known, this led to sometimes abusive trading of masses by certain clergy. Together with the enthusiasm with which popular piety embraced this theology, this explains much of the fierce struggle of the reformers against these practices. Particularly in the context of death, confraternities and societies of mutual assistance also arose. For example, solidarity is shown in practice in favor of a confrere who is temporarily in difficulty, significantly if he is affected by a life-threatening illness. Or, again, in the practice of brotherhood banquets, where the poor received the same amount of food as the rich. These confraternities, based on evangelical values and read from the social conditions of the time, represented a social compensation for inequalities and, depending on the perspective, a demonstration of the differences between popular religion and the religion of the clerics, between the elite—also the secular—and the people (Chaunu, 1975).

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see, by definition, leads *beyond life*, is now within reach of everyday life. So, this possible synthesis is highly paradoxical to the common people, who would be somewhat "living in all the practices and institutions of flourishing, but at the same time not fully in them" (ibid.).[124]

However, theological disputes and subsequent political changes provide the foreground, but Taylor uses "Reform" as a broader category for those movements "which aimed to remake European society to meet the demands of the Gospel, and later of 'civilization' (Taylor, 2007b, p. 61), or as he also says, "to make over all Christians, so that they meet higher standards of dedication and commitment" (Taylor, 2007b). As Weber (2021) showed, the process at the social and moral level is a long one, and Taylor substantially follows him (cf. Joas, 2009a).

In this context, we can focus on the changes concerning the care of the poor and disadvantaged in societies, shifts in the social imaginaries of solidarity and neighbor-love, and the emerging *ethos* of Renaissance humanism. As a result of the anthropocentric turn, human agency in its relation to the world manifests itself, on the one hand, in a new understanding of ethical improvement and the good life and, on the other hand, in a new way of achieving a just and benevolent society It is striking that only at this moment, as Mollat notes, "contemporaries began to feel ashamed at the sight of people living in a state considered unworthy of human beings, did anyone dream of eradicating it" (Mollat, 1986, p. 1).

The main change concerns a new understanding of the inherited morality from scholasticism, especially around the concept of Will. In Antiquity, however, virtue was pursued through harmony and balance, with a clear distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis*. Taylor's thesis is that the introduction of *poiesis* into the domain of *praxis* eased changes in the conception of the self and in the way of intervening in society.[125] Previously, *praxis* and *poiesis* have formed two

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124 This quotation alludes to the tension between "living in the world but not of the world" (Jn 17:11.16), a tension that recurs in the New Testament, especially in Johannine and Pauline literature (see Eßer, 2010, pp. 1890–1891; Fitzmeyr, 1990, pp. 1413–1416).

125 Undoubtedly, Taylor's thesis has resonances from his dialogue with Martin Heidegger. These connections are also to be found in Hannah Arendt, who argued that the modern way of conceiving the political has tried to corset

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distinct domains, but they began to merge at this point. Significant for that was the development of science and the scientific method, leading to an increasingly instrumental and less contemplative approach to nature. In parallel, good and evil, as traditional Christian categories attached to the will, gradually began to lose interest favoring the distinction between strong and weak will (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 113).

A telling example of the shift away from traditional Christianity and towards instrumental ethics and anthropocentrism comes from the work of Justus Lipsius, probably the most influential neo-Stoic of the 16th century. His concept of *constantia* in *De Constantia* (2010) epitomizes the new Renaissance subject, who seeks harmony through reason and self-control yet moves beyond classical imperturbability toward an active but unemotional engagement in politics and in charitable action. Taylor depicts Lipsius' popular thinking in his time as "a (sort of) Christianized Stoicism," a "(semi)-Christianized Stoicism" or "modernized Stoicism" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 115–117, see also 2008, p. 226, 2011d, pp. 378–379). In any case, Taylor's attention to Lipsius means paying attention to the most popular literature that marked the cultivated elite in a time of particular weakness of the Christian faith, enfeebled in the struggle of confessions after the Reformation. Lipsius would be, in a way, an example of the "third force" ("dritten Kraft," Heer, 1959) of Renaissance humanism seeking to return to the essentials of Christianity and, in a more conscious way, the more jaded they were by corrosive ecclesiastical quarrels.

Particularly important for our interest is Taylor's thesis that Lipsius' neo-Stoicism presupposes the phenomenon of the "eclipse of *agape*" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 117) and the rejection of Christian com-

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action in the form of production, with *poiesis* being introduced into the realm of *praxis*. She, however, traces this movement as far back as Plato. Such an understanding of politics as if it were the work of a craftsman has reached the present day, manifesting itself in problems such as the loss of plurality in the public space, the professionalization of political activity, or the justification of violence if it is the best means to achieve the proposed end (See Arendt, 2020; Di Pego, 2019). The originality of Taylor's thesis, however, is to be read in the union of the two phenomena, i.e., the introduction of the poietic attitude into the realm of practice and the change in the vision of the will (See Wils, 2011, pp. 320–321).

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passion.[126] Although Taylor believes that there is a possibility that *agape* could be conceived as a "kind of passionless condition of strenuous benevolence," the fact is that Justus Lipsius "rejects *miseratio*, or misericordia, the compassion of feeling, in favor of the compassion of active intervention, but on the basis of a full inner detachment" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 115). For Lipsius, compassion is "a vice of a pusillanimous and petty soul, which breaks down at the sight of another's evil"[127] must be distinguished from true Christian mercy, "the inclination of the soul to mitigate the poverty or grief of others" (Lipsius, 2010, I, 12).[128] He continues:

> "Our truly merciful person will certainly not pity, but he will do the same things, or even greater things, than the one who pities. He will look on the evils of others with human, but reasonable eyes; he will speak with a serious, but not a gloomy or dejected face; he will console firmly, help generously, be kind, more in deed than in speech, and will reach out his hand to the poor and ruined rather than give him a word" (ibid.).[129]

At all events, this mercy is devoid of sympathy for the other person's situation. According to this new understanding of mercy emanated as a virtue from constancy, no kind of sentiment or moral source would suggest that the agent is driven by something alien to him. On

126 We have already seen with Taylor that in *Sources of the Self* he distinguished Stoicism from Christianity on the basis of the valuation of goods, whereby a good is renounced in pursuit of a constitutive good through a strong evaluation (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 137–138).

127 "Un vicio de un alma pusilánime y mezquina, que se derrumba al ver el mal ajeno" (translated by S.G.).

128 "La inclinación del alma para mitigar la pobreza o la pena ajenas" (translated by S.G.). It is important to note that the chapter from which these quotations are taken was expunged by the Inquisition in the first translation from Latin into Spanish, no doubt because of Lipsius' strong contrast with the Christian faith (see Lipsius, 1616).

129 "Nuestro verdadero hombre misericordioso, ciertamente, no se compadecerá, pero hará las mismas cosas o incluso mayores, que el que se compadece. Mirará los males ajenos con ojos humanos, pero razonables; hablará con rostro serio, pero no lúgubre ni abatido; consolará firmemente, ayudará generosamente, será bondadoso, más con hechos que con palabras, y tenderá la mano al pobre y al arruinarlo antes que darle unas palabras" (translated by S.G.).

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the contrary, prudence through reason is the accurate inner attitude that moves towards charity.

Taylor, however, does not yet qualify Lipsius' neo-Stoicism as exclusive humanism, for Lipsius still comes from a theistic world. But his morality already reflects an autonomous use of practical reason that results in some elements of *agape*, such as grace or commotion, becoming superfluous. It is, therefore, an excarnation of the incarnational elements of the mercy found in *agape*. Moreover, it was a clear step towards modernity, in which theology and philosophy based on cosmology were replaced by a hybrid that placed the human being, with reason and will, at the center: "The transition can be conceived as one which takes us from an ethic grounded on an order which is at work in reality, to an ethic which sees order as imposed by will" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 130–131).

The influence on practicing neighborly love and charity is reflected in the new approach to articulating moral sources previously unknown in Christianity, despite the Stoic influence of its beginnings. The active intervention disengaged in favor of beneficence does not necessarily reject grace. However, it does eclipse it in favor of the will and the search for harmony as the greatest human good. For Lipsius, *constantia* is to embrace the permanent out of duty, as a Stoic would, but to add activism for the good, as a Christian who believes in free will would (Lipsius, 2010 I,4). Thus, charity "is not a matter just of doing one's duty in the world, but of waging active struggle for the good" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 116).

This disincarnated attitude of the elites toward the good and toward charity coexists with a strong institutionalization of poor relief and, at the same time, with new practices of repression and control of the marginalized—often justified in the name of their own good or of a more evangelical society. There are, of course, many counterexamples of saints and lay reformers whose charitable practice is animated by an incarnated compassion and personal relationship with the poor (cf. Mollat, 1986, p. 265ff). Yet the neo-Stoic imaginary illustrates how, already in the Reform era, *agape* could be partially "flattened" into a rational, disciplined beneficence—one of the first major *zags* in the long history of its secularization.

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5.4. The Renaissance civility

Along with *De Constantia*, Lipsius' book on politics *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae, libri sex* (2004) had a key impact on creating a morality for the new modern bourgeois elites and on the emergence of the post-Reformation disciplined stance. The discipline of society to which Taylor refers stems from the public morality of the elites based on asceticism and self-control, which manifested itself in raising the moral standards for the whole population. Hence, coinciding with the overshadow of the human potential for moral ascent and the "eclipse of *agape*" as a moral motivator towards altruism, political programs emerge in which the theological and pious fatalism and social immobilism of medieval Christianity are abandoned in favor of an optimistic and activist stance towards the order of things. It begins to be believed that endemic violence and disruption can be lessened through the inculcation of "at least some of the norms of civility and a properly ordered life in everyone" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 120).

Now the novelty to note here is that such elite reformist activism coincides with a period of the state's expanding size, competences, and bureaucracies. Taylor speaks dramatically of how the population is being urged towards the Reform of mores and habits:

> "They are precisely not left as they are, but badgered, bullied, pushed, preached at, drilled and organized to abandon their lax and disordered folkways and conform to one or another feature of civil behaviour. At the beginning, of course, there is no thought of making them over utterly to meet the full ideal; but nor did it seem acceptable just to leave them as they were" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 102).

From these attempts to conform the population to civil standards of behavior begins a genuine disciplinary reform program that also includes an interest in regulating and controlling poverty. Profound societal reform programs are exemplarily undertaken in Calvin's Geneva and in St. Charles Borromeo's Milan.[130] In these places,

130 Taylor summarizes disciplinary Reform in five points: a new regulation of poverty, the suppression of superstitious and anti-Christian elements of popular customs such as carnival, the increasing efforts to raise the productive and educational level of the population, the development of government structures organized into ever more effective bureaucracies and, finally, the proliferation

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society becomes responsible for ensuring that everyone attains an entirely Godly life by promoting piety and decency. Moreover, this religious impulse "influences the agenda of social reform, and gives it a universalist-philanthropic thrust" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 105). Consequently, from the 16th century onwards,

> "there was a drive here to make certain norms universal, conceived in part as a demand of charity towards fellow human beings, but given an edge or urgency by the thought that God will punish our community for the blasphemy of its wayward members" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 104).

The contrast between the joint effect of these demands of charity and the drive towards making some norms universal compared to the medieval world is patent concerning helping one's neighbor. And it will also be a contrast with *agape*. In the Middle Ages, the poor were an occasion for personal sanctification, as manifested, for example, in devotions to St. Martin of Tours (see Fürst, 2011; Mertens, 2017). However, helping the poor was no longer seen as an occasion for personal sanctification, but the destitute, the homeless, the sick, the needy, etc., began to be valued from an instrumental-rational point of view regarding their usefulness in the common enterprise.[131]

In this period of the development of civility, the mechanisms of excarnation that began with the eclipse of *agape* are accentuated. The drive to Reform has made neighborly love a systematic and rationalized instrument of social normativization by institutionalizing it through legal figures and, above all, through institutions paid for by the powers that be or by elites dedicated to beneficence and life reform. Thus, while Western Christianity's growing awareness of social problems is evident, the separation between *agape* and the actual practice of beneficence is also worsening. It cannot be denied that *agape* is not articulated as a moral source at this historical moment.

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of "methods" aimed at transforming the individual—from manuals for the physical training of soldiers to spiritual methods to the increasing use of "methods" in philosophy and other sciences (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 108–112). To delve deeper into social attitudes towards poverty in the transition from medieval to modern times, see (Mollat, 1986)

131 For example, legislation began to be passed systematically on the subject of poverty. Through this regulation, the poor who were unable to work were distinguished and separated from those who were able. The latter were forced to work for meager wages, while the former were confined to specialized institutions with rigorous regimes of permanency (cf. Geremek, 1987, 1994).

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Hundreds of saints dedicated to charity testify to this. What is in question is that direct access to the unconditional and gratuitous relationship born of a feeling of compassion that expresses the very love of God is less and less likely.

5.5. Providential Deism

As shown earlier, pursuing a path of transformation or renunciation for the greater good, as exemplified by *agape*, became viable for certain elites at the onset of modernity. However, in the 18th century, a more accessible alternative arose in the form of exclusive humanism, which appealed to a broader population (Taylor, 2007b, p. 221). Prior to the widespread adoption of exclusive humanism, an intermediate phase emerged within the framework of Natural Theology, which Taylor refers to as *providential Deism* (cf. Byrne, 2013; W. Hudson, 2009). Notably, the human being is unequivocally and ultimately positioned at the center of this stance. Consequently, the traditional notion of divine providence underwent significant changes, with God's plan reduced to human beings accepting what has been foreseen for their happiness and well-being. In this context, "The help of grace seems less necessary" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 242–243; cf. Byrne, 2013; Hudson, 2009). Since moral fulfillment can be attained without invoking God, "moral/spiritual resources can be experienced as purely immanent" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 244).

Within the framework of Providential Deism, the expectation of a human transformation toward God has been replaced by the idea that humans will utilize reason to develop what God has embedded within their nature and mind. This notion suggests a shift towards a purely immanent perspective, where human beings are viewed as inherently good and capable of seeking universal justice and benevolence from sources other than Christian *agape* or neo-Stoic disinterested benevolence. This perspective reflects the concept of "new humanism," which asserts that human beings are driven to act for the betterment of others (Taylor, 2007b, p. 246).

Taylor dedicates some pages to noticing the differences between Christian *agape* and the moral predicament of providential deism. Taylor makes use of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37), which we have already referred to in the previous chapter. For

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the present, it suffices to note that, within the Christian *agape*, the act of transcending the boundaries that separate the Samaritan from the wounded—whether these boundaries are national, social, economic, racial, gender-based, or otherwise—is viewed as an eschatological concept. That is to say, it represents a goal that has yet to be fully realized but one which extends beyond this life and immanent human flourishing. Moreover, as Taylor points out, "the paradigmatic stepping beyond of *agape*, the incarnation and submission to death of Christ, is not motivated by a pre-existing community or solidarity. It is a free gift of God" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 246).

The idea of the humanist moralists is radically contrary to this *agapeic* perspective, and they currently acknowledge this fact: "their aim was also to reject the Christian aspiration to transcend flourishing" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 247). This motivation is also reflected in the desire to love one's neighbor. According to humanist moralists, the origins of this motivation toward neighborly love and benevolence are inherent in human nature. Embracing this principle requires, on a personal level, integrating charity into one's behavior and developing the appropriate internal attitudes. On a societal level, it involves caring for all community members.

Taylor notes that enlightened humanism shares a perspective with Christian *agape* regarding the motivation towards solidarity. For both, it is not dependent on any pre-existing ties, whether they are familial, tribal, or national. Additionally, they both aspire towards the universality of the commandment to love one's neighbor. According to Taylor, these shared characteristics are still "the historical trace, as it were, of *agape*" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 247). The ideal of the charitable person prior to the immanentization of *agape* is also part of this trace: "Charity was part of the ideal of personal conduct; good social order must involve taking care of all members of society; and the proper inward dispositions of a decent man included charitable ones" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 247–248). What happens is that, with deism, Incarnation loses its meaning for spiritual and moral life. *Agape* loses its potential. Thus, Jesus is not a transformer of the world or a conductor of the human soul towards the *theioisis*, but a great teacher expounding the demands of God, consisting of a moral to achieve peace and harmony in the inner order of the world (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 736).

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5.6. The expansion of exclusive humanism

Taylor argues that the displacement caused by Deism in the anthropological and moral spheres ultimately gave rise to exclusive humanism. It was, in a way, a positive movement towards modernity that brought about levels of moral universalism never seen before. In his own words: "the discovery/definition of these intra-human sources of benevolence is one of the great achievements of our civilization, and the charter of modern unbelief" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 257). Taylor maintains that the positive aspect of this displacement can be attributed to the impetus it provided to Christianity itself. In *A Catholic Modernity*, he asserts that it is undeniable that the modern, secularized concept of altruistic motivation has its roots in Christianity. However, paradoxically, the immanentization of moral motivation was able to advance the Christian ideal of *agape* beyond what was achievable in the past culture of Christendom:

> "The notion is that modern culture, in breaking with the structures and beliefs of Christendom, also carried certain facets of Christian life further than they ever were taken or could have been taken within Christendom. In relation to the earlier forms of Christian culture, we have to face the humbling realization that the breakout was a necessary condition of the development. For instance, modern liberal political culture is characterized by an affirmation of universal human rights—to life, freedom, citizenship, self-realization—which are seen as radically unconditional; that is, they are not dependent on such things as gender, cultural belonging, civilizational development, or religious allegiance, which always limited them in the past. As long as we were living within the terms of Christendom (…) we could never have attained this radical unconditionality" (Taylor, 1999b, pp. 16–17).

From this perspective, the development of concern for the welfare of others and justice that emerged during the Enlightenment aided Christianity in breaking free from the confines of Christendom, which kept Christianity bound by codes of conduct not compatible with the freedom of *agape* and too closely tied to power. Consequently, this release from the traditional Christendom model ultimately allowed *agape's* motivating force to emerge as a moral source in its full potentiality. Although Taylor acknowledges the positive impact of the rise of exclusive humanism on the proliferation of calls for solidarity, he also identifies it as the true beginning of the

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multiplication of sources and the fragilization of moral articulation, a topic he thoroughly discusses in *Sources of the Self.*

Afterward, in *A Secular Age*, Taylor provides a catalog of purely intra-human immanent moral sources of motivation towards benevolence that arose during this period. The first type of new moral sources followed Lipsius' disengaged instrumental reason. The use of reason in morals allows us to break free from our own personal perspectives, as well as from negative emotions such as envy and egoism, in order to embrace universality, akin to Russell's humanism (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 250–254; Russell, 2002). The second approach is through Kant's concept of the pure and universal will, which commands our awe and respect (cf. Kant, 1999). A third way to immanentize moral sources is through Rousseau's (2008) and later Schopenhauer's (2007) notion of *pitié* and intuitive universal sympathy. Lastly, Feuerbach (1973) proposed the idea of projection, which suggests that the motivation for neighborly love, attributed initially to God's grace, is nothing more than a jut of inner human potentialities.

According to Taylor, the four new modes of purely immanent moral motivation are not simply alternative explanations for the same phenomenon of compassion and the desire to help others selflessly. Instead, they represent new modalities of moral experience that affirm distinctive constitutive goods and a distinct way of conceiving human ideals, society, even the cosmos, nature, or religion (Taylor, 2007b, p. 252). In other words, the modern anthropological turn hides a new imaginary that eventually shapes the conditions of the experience and the meanings constitutive of it.[132] Therefore, we are not simply dealing with different opinions on the same reality or alternative philosophical approaches to morals—human motivation towards doing good for others—, but instead, we are speaking of different perspectives on the constitution of reality and relating to the good.

It is challenging for *agape* to fit into the new models of moral motivation based on immanence and to provide a structure of reality that supports openness to transcendence within this framework.

132 For Taylor, lived experience goes hand in hand with an account of reality, of how we situate ourselves in it (Taylor, 1985d, p. see, 2004, 2016, pp. 255–257; Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015, pp. 167–168).

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Exclusive humanism is closed to grace, at least as it was previously understood in gnoseology and medieval theories of knowledge. So then, the four models of exclusive humanism are based, in that sense, on an epistemology that Taylor calls "closed world structure" (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 551–592), which is consequent with the new worldview closed to transcendence and underlying anthropology that Taylor calls "buffered" (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 262, see also 37–42, 134–42,262–264,300–307, 488–490, 539–542). Both elements—the new anthropology and epistemology—make up the immanent framework.

From the immanent framework, it becomes increasingly difficult to accept the image of a merciful God who intervenes in history through the love inspired by Him towards one's neighbor, as seen in the Good Samaritan. It will now be hard to believe that there is, for instance, a plan defined by God beforehand or that coincidences or accidents do not exist, but only God's providence—like it was not an unforeseen event that the Samaritan passed by there, but that in some way, God corrected the thieves' bad action in this way (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 277). Now, God's intervention in history, not only through miracles but even through the moral inspiration of individuals, is called into question as a superfluous explanation, even sometimes incomprehensible.[133]

Taylor also examines another aspect of the Enlightenment: the creation of a disciplined and united society through legal codes that uphold the principles of equality, human dignity, and freedom without constraint. According to his vision, this process peaked during the American and French Revolutions. Furthermore, Taylor argues that this social and political dynamic also influenced morality, leading to moral perspectives based on obligations and norms, searching mainly for the right action. He even goes so far as to speak of a "code fetishism" or "nomolatry" (Taylor, 2011f, pp. 353–354, 2007b, p.

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133 Peter Berger describes the modern change in the imaginary about God and his intervention in reality when he explains how believers have gone from asking God for a miracle, for example, to cure a very sick loved one, to ask Him for inspiration to take the right action or make the right decision—such as to move the surgeon's hand. Such changes in the imaginary entail a change in the theological predicament and a complex shift of images of the world and the human being (cf. Berger, 2014, p. 57).

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707), which refers to the idea "that the entire spiritual dimension of human life is captured in a moral code" (Taylor, 2011f, p. 353).

The new model of society and its moral predicament have consequences for altruism. The new moral order of modernity is described by the self-sufficient paradigm of a properly ordered society that "brings together individuals in such a way that their reciprocal action redounds to their mutual benefit" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 690). Thus, altruism is paradoxically conceived in a maximalist and minimalist way simultaneously. Although the demand for solidarity with others is raised, it is minimized by the conviction that mutual benefit will flow naturally given the proper structure and conformity to certain rules of reciprocal respect of rights.

In any case, *agape*, continues to serve as a viable source of motivation.[134] Its potential appeal lies in offering an alternative to the impositions of the enlightened system by instilling a sense of freedom. Then, as we will see more profoundly in the next chapter, *agape* can never be captured in a code or a set of rules (Taylor, 2007b, p. 282). Hence, *agape's* fate appears paradoxical: serving as both the inspiration behind the trend which ultimately eclipsed it and also becoming an alternative in response. Additionally, we see how *agape* has multiplied its universal reach through the impulse of exclusive humanism, even though transmuted in new immanent forms of moral motivation toward benevolence.

Nevertheless, in the course of the history being recounted, *agape* has lost two essential components: the incarnational factor, which connects metaphysics and emotions, as well as the openness to transcendence. Nonetheless, Taylor believes that such aspects of *agape* can be revived in contemporary times, akin to past witnesses who demonstrated the prevalence of Christian love across different ages. However, Taylor acknowledges the irreversible influence of Enlightenment ideals which follows a unidirectional "ratchet effect" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 273) in the stadial consciousness after the anthropological shift following the changes accumulated in the past centuries. By means of the *ratchet effect*, which does not allow us to go back to the imaginary prior to disenchantment, all of us, believers and non-believers, share the same immanent framework.

134 It would certainly be pertinent to introduce here the work of Soren Kierkegaard (1995), who tried the challenge that Christian love imposes on thought, even though Taylor does not mention him.

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5.7. The Nova Effect

So far, Taylor presents a historical narrative that depicts the *zig-zag* of Christian *agape*, which has experienced consistent fluctuations since the drive to Reform. These shifts have been marked by neo-Stoicism and providential deism, leading to exclusive humanism and unforeseen outcomes such as increased demands for universal solidarity and multiple moral sources towards altruism. However, with the onset of romanticism in the 19th century, there was an unexpected resurgence of *agape*'s *zig* through attacks on modern moral order made paradoxically by certain opponents of Christianity. In some way, *agape* becomes an alternative, even revolutionary option for personal and social transformation. Furthermore, its reappearance amplifies access to new diverse moral sources—a movement referred to as the "nova effect" by Taylor:

> "Here is not only the traditional faith, and the modern anthropocentric shift to an immanent order; the felt dissatisfaction at this immanent order motivates not only new forms of religion, but also different readings of immanence. This expanding gamut is what I am trying to gesture at with the term 'nova'. So the need for meaning can be met by a recovery of transcendence, but we can also try to define the 'one thing needful' in purely immanent terms, say, in the project of creating a new world of justice and prosperity" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 310, see also 299).[135]

The confluence of moral and spiritual choices exerts a cross-pressure on the "buffered self," which is still called upon to achieve fullness and human flourishing but increasingly experiences unease due to immanence, the disenchanted of the world, and the fading sense of transcendence (Taylor, 2007b, p. 307). Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to assume that a turn toward orthodoxy or transcendent spirituality is the only antidote to this discomfort produced by ennui and the flatness of everyday immanence. Nor should these sentiments be misinterpreted as a latent longing for *agape*—as if the absence of divine love created a void that human existence must fill through a return to grace. Likewise, this sense of absence should not be read as the kind of deficiency that, in Thomistic terms, prevents human nature from attaining the perfection of grace. It would also

135 On the meaning of the "nova" metaphor, see (Seibert, 2018, pp. 91–92)

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be misleading to describe this sensibility as a "mystical residuum" *(mystisches Residuum),* as Seibert (2018, p. 96) calls it.

What emerges is a third way between transformation by grace and immanent human flourishing, which involves rebelling against absence but seeking meaning and fullness within immanence. For this reason, Taylor introduces "resonance" as a new concept in his phenomenological description, which we have already encountered in the chapter devoted to the *Best Account* and Hartmut Rosa.[136] Taylor's point is that the dissatisfaction felt at the loss of resonance is experienced by those who want to return to the transcendent and those who cannot tolerate such a return but seek meaning within immanence (cf. Taylor, 2019c, 2019b; Taylor & Costa, 2021). Furthermore, it gives rise to an even greater multiplication of possibilities in the ways of living and interpreting immanence specific to the *nova effect.*

In this sense, this new third way affects the articulation of constitutive goods and the motivation toward solidarity. Thus, Taylor presents three possible answers to these questions in his development of what happened between the end of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, retracing some of the milestones already visited in *Sources of the Self*: the axis of resonance with the pain of the world, the romantic axis and the axis of counter-enlightenment.

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136 This is a potentially ambiguous phenomenological depiction, as noted by Christoph Seibert (cf. Seibert, 2018, p. 96). Nonetheless, in order to illustrate his concept of resonance between the innermost self and the surrounding world, Taylor offers several examples, one of which involves a doctor who grows weary of the purely materialistic trajectory of his professional life and chooses instead to leave his well-paying job to join *Médicins sans Frontières* in Africa, in pursuit of a more fulfilling existence (cf. 2007a, p. 308). This phenomenological portrayal of the discontentment inherent in immanence due to a lack of resonance is recurrent throughout *A Secular Age*, particularly in relation to science, philosophy (2007a, Ch. 9), and art (2007b, pp. 352–361). Additionally, Taylor's brief anecdote about the doctor bears similarities to the life experiences of Anna and Hanna, as described by Rosa in the opening pages of *Resonanz* (cf. 2016, pp. 13–36), and aligns with Luc Ferry's examination of the question around the meaning of life (1996, p. 19ff). It also corresponds with Taylor's depiction of the ethical dilemma facing individuals in modern society, as presented in *Ethics of Authenticity* (1992b). Despite its imprecision, the metaphor evokes a dimension of lived experience that many contemporaries find unmistakably familiar.

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The first response, identified by Taylor as "axes of resonance" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 311), involves seeking a connection with emotions that demand a higher level of justice or benevolence than what is provided by the moral or legal codes of the time. These axes of resonance strive for moral knowledge that is intimately linked to internal moral sources, often with moral feelings that are discovered to be deeper than instrumental reason or the utilitarian notion of self-interest.[137] An example of this response is the evangelical Christians who devoted themselves to campaigns against slavery, a cause their institutionalized church initially hesitated to lead.

Taylor argues that this resonance axis represents a moral ascent or growth identified with *agape* (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 312). However, benevolence originates not from grace but from human nature in the form of compassionate feelings. The nostalgia resulting from the loss of true religious sentiment and the rebellion against moral codes find their true expression in the duty to others, which is considered the true love of God. This movement, which significantly impacted certain elites and groups, contributed to the modern imperative demand for a response to the suffering of others (cf. Taylor, 2021a, p. 3).

Secondly, Taylor (2007b, pp. 313–317) discusses the romantic axis, which represents a rebellion against the moral divide between duty and desire, nature and spirit, subject and object, and the individual and the community. The Romantics sought unity through higher goals, as exemplified by Schiller's theory of moral elevation through beauty, which defines the true end of human life and life in the state (see Schiller, 1785; also Bach, 2019). Taylor also notes Wesley's Methodist movement as a religious pursuit of unity through the heart, in contrast to Pietism's fixation on doctrine. Although some Romantics, such as Novalis, did not return to Christian or theistic moral sources, they sought to return to Greece "because, at least in the eyes of the Romantics, the Greeks enjoyed forms of unity that have been lost ever since" (Taylor, 2020a, p. 28). In any case, the sense of recovering a lost unity leads the Romantics to have "a

137 In any case, the origins of this first possible response can be traced back to philosophers like again Rousseau (2008), who proposed radical humanism through the sentiment of *pitié*, and Kant, who considered compassion a natural feeling that should be balanced by reason or justice (cf. Kant, 1913, p. 213; see also Marks, 2007; Rudolph, 2011; Villar Ezcurra, 2005).

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strong sense of solidarity: the unity they were searching for implied unity among all human beings" (Taylor, 2020a, p. 39, see also 2020c; Taylor & Costa, 2021). Notably, Taylor does not mention at this point the Romantics' response to the codification of neighborly love that arose from closed systems in modernity.[138]

Thirdly, Taylor discusses the anti-romantic or counter-enlightenment axes, which embrace intellectual groups expressing discomfort with both immanence and the answers derived from the romantic search for harmony. These positions reject any form of reconciliation of tensions and realistically accept that there are unalterable forms of separation that must be recognized in order to appreciate their "depth and grandeur" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 318). At this time, the question of theodicy and the lack of explanation for suffering and tragedy is prevalent, as exemplified by François Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), which criticizes the inadequacy of Christianity in dealing with these issues. Friedrich Nietzsche's (1887) anti-humanism also falls under this category, as he emphasizes the unbearability of pointless suffering and the undeniable human need to give it meaning. Nietzsche sees Christianity as the root of all Western notions of altruism, self-sacrifice, and pity, which will describe slave morality. In chapter 8, we will look in depth at Taylor's response to Nietzsche's attack on Christian neighbor love.

Summing up, these three axes of the "nova effect" constitute a protest, primarily against the outcome of the process of excarnation, of rejecting the transformation beyond life. They are also a reproach against the consequences of the culture of the codification of equality and benevolence, which flattens moral and political life. The complaint manifests itself in a persistent spiritual concern for the transcendent or, at least, for that which is lost by the advance of

138 Ayn Rand, whose defense of egoism and rejection of altruism introduces a bias in her analysis of romanticism, makes an extreme statement: "The archenemy and destroyer of romanticism was the altruist morality. Since romanticism's essential characteristic is projecting values, particularly moral values, altruism introduced an insolvable conflict into Romantic literature from the start. The altruist morality cannot be practiced (except in the form of self-destruction) and, therefore, cannot be projected or dramatized convincingly in terms of man's life on earth (particularly in the realm of psychological motivation). With altruism as the criterion of value and virtue, it is impossible to create an image of man at his best—"as he might be and ought to be" (Rand, 1988, p. 107).

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the Enlightenment and the project of modernity. In many ways, we can speak of nostalgia for *agape*. Moreover, although we may sometimes talk of sympathy for religiously based altruistic sentiment, it is no longer so easy to speak of the effect of grace. The immanent framework of modernity and exclusive humanism, how subjects experience and give meaning to the world and their lives, which at this time is already widespread in broad layers of Western society, may not allow us to open the door to transcendence, at least not in the same way as it is shown in the original experience of *agape*. As we have said, the ontological background has changed radically, so that the spontaneous connection between bodily feelings and metaphysics has been lost, as well as the openness to the transcendence of the whole being, not only from the instance of rationality or sentimentality. In any case, the lines or axes that begin with the *nova effect* and the moral stance of each of them are already very familiar to us. They are still moral sources for the good of the other, which, with various transformations, are still available to us in our contemporary time.

5.8. Altruism in the 19th Century 'Open Space'

Taylor's account continues with the mid-19th century, which "saw a great rise of unbelief" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 322), with an even greater multiplication of varieties of incredulity, for which Taylor uses the metaphor of William James' "open space" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 549–551; see also W. James, 2002, p. 59). These forms of unbelief, Taylor asserts, "are basically the same as those which are held today" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 369). He situates at this moment the "modern schism," borrowing Martin Marty's book title (1969). Taylor focuses mainly on the search for wholeness within the context of changes in the conception of nature and science—in which the latter reaches an unprecedented prestige that shapes the ethical commitment of the elites of the time—and in the development of expressive forms and languages of art. Again, the new conceptions do not necessarily exclude the religious option, but their ethical undertones modify the nature of experience, disrupting the foundation of neighborly love. In Taylor's words,

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> "it could easily appear that the values of the modern moral order could only be carried out fully and radically by the step into unbelief. In the nineteenth century, one of the key values was understood to be altruism. And in this regard exclusive humanism could claim to be superior to Christianity" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 361).

Within this attitude of claimed superiority were the non-believing thinkers Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill, who resonated strongly in the much-expanded Victorian culture in the second half of the 19th century. According to Taylor, both authors gained a wider acceptance for being qualitatively different from what had been seen before. The broader reception of their theories is related to a general perception that they provided more depth than the mainstream deistic humanism in the Anglo-Saxon world (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 323). Their cultural impact was such that we owe them the term altruism, coined in French by Comte in the first volume of *Système de politique positive* (1851) and the first uses in English of the same term by Mill (1865; see also Dixon, 2005a). Moreover, his vision of neighbor-love widens the boundary between acts due for the good of the other and concern for one's transformation, between altruism and self-love. Selfishness will remain an enemy to be fought in clear contrast to altruism, but there is a growing tendency to distinguish the ethics of obligations from the ethics of the good life. However, without going into the details of Comte's positivism or Mill's utilitarianism, both visions had an impact on many people who, without renouncing Christian commitment, saw an independence of altruism from the struggle for the most appropriate self-love and from the need for God's love (cf. Dixon, 2005b, p. 51).

Notwithstanding the perceived innovation, their approach to neighborly love is the natural continuation of the Enlightenment mutual benefit society. Taylor presents the concept of "practical *agape*" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 370), which can be understood as the sequel of the "minimalist" sense of altruism and solidarity born of the trust that respect for the norms of equal rights and the harmony of individual interests will redound to the benefit of all, founded in authors like Locke (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 690). Then, as now in the nineteenth century, practical *agape* becomes an open criticism of Christianity and religion in general, but with a fierce force never seen before. This time relies on the eloquent moral force of science

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and the new modes of expression of art, on technical advances and improvements in life.

In any case, in the line that links the Enlightenment with the movements we are now seeing, whether they are friendly or contrary to the results of modernity, the demand for solidarity reaches unprecedented heights, as we saw at the end of *Sources of the Self.* The inheritance of all this path is, in short,

> "a powerful humanism, affirming the importance of preserving and enhancing life, of avoiding death and suffering, an eclipse/denial of transcendence which tends to make this humanism an exclusive one, and a dim historical sense that the first of these came about through and depends on the second" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 371).

Although the drift towards exclusive humanism began centuries ago, it is only now that this powerful humanism vigorously shows the tendencies that were pointed out earlier, as this quote manifests. A marked lurch of the secular *zag* that continues with these dynamics occurs in post-revolutionary France, which is openly anticlerical and atheistic. Eventually, within this *zag*, one will arrive at the foundations of French secularism and, ultimately, socialism. From Rousseau's foundations, it is thought that "Democracy and human rights are conceived as inseparable from a view of humans as innocent or fundamentally good by nature" (Taylor, 2007a, p. 412). Therefore, the foundations of solidarity and altruism would be found within human nature itself, which must be identified with the general will. On the other hand, the influence of Rousseau is evident in Marx, where the demand for a higher level of altruism, "which is very often conceived as universal, transcending all boundaries" (Taylor, 2007a, p. 690), goes hand in hand with an unambiguous rejection of religion (cf. Taylor, 2011h).[139]

However, movements on the believing side can also be described as a combination of *zig* and *zag*. Thus, openness to transcendence is sought, but the influence of the historical outcome of its eclipse is powerful. Taylor focuses especially both on Victorian England, where secularization is mixed with a return of faith, as well as on the emerging American democracy, where God's providential order goes hand in hand with the development of democracy, denominational-

139 Ian Fraser offers in his work an analysis of Taylor's philosophy from a Marxist perspective (cf. I. Fraser, 2007).

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ism, and civil religion. In both Anglo-Saxon societies, the modern idea of an order of right-bearing, mutually beneficial individuals has gradually entered the social imaginary with evident success. Even by appealing to the transcendent instance, the imaginary is entirely horizontal, egalitarian, and directly accessible (Taylor, 2007b, p. 392). The following text reflects the mixture in the British Victorian era, as Taylor would like to point out, in which altruism is also alluded to:

> "We can see how the Victorian Christianity of self-discipline created a space for the move to a humanism of duty, will and altruism. They had a lot in common, particularly the opposition between egoism and benevolence, but the ontic basis for the move from the first to the second was quite different. For Christian faith, benevolence was possible first, because of the pristine human nature which God created before the Fall. But then since this had been perverted by that Fall, it also required grace to restore it. For humanism, altruism was possible, because once humans rise to it, they see it to be a higher, more evolved way of being (...). A higher self, which can think in terms of universal good, arises out of the process of Enlightenment and character formation. (...) But there also was an important borrowing from Romantic sources. (...) [We] have the power within us to sustain an all-encompassing love. At a certain stage of development, we can bring this power to fruition, and thus come to recognize that what we have previously attributed to the divine is really a human capacity" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 396–397).

As we can see, the Victorian imaginary of altruism would be a decantation of the Christian faith, humanism, and romanticism. But it still retains belief, in the form of "transposition into an immanent key" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 396). Faith is lived intermingled with the new moral perspectives opened up by the Reformation and developed throughout modernity. It is an identity dominated by a model of self-discipline and self-control, where the idea of decency, pride in belonging to the British people —with a mission of civilization over the whole world —and being Protestant reigns. Altruism is lived at this time, with tension and polarization with selfish desire, between the ethics of duty and benevolence, in a way not seen in the Enlightenment. The new ideal of altruism developed by authors such as Comte, Mill, Kant, or Leslie Stephen requires the forging of an iron will, discipline, and constant exercise to keep selfishness at bay (see also Collini, 1994, pp. 91–94).

Nevertheless, the struggle at the moral core of the human being against egoism and for altruism is perceived as worthwhile (see

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Maurer, 2020). Altruism was seen as a form of evolution so that once the "disciplined self" ascends to it and manages to think in terms of the universal good, there is no turning back. Victorian humanist altruism is thus indebted to the advances of the Enlightenment's detached reason but also to that romantic conviction that within us lie the emotional bases of motivation towards that greater good than ourselves. In any case, the difference between this Victorian Protestant Christian humanism and the non-believing variants is minimal from the mindset of the social imaginary. When it comes down to it, God and grace hardly play a role in the motivation towards the good of the other.

5.9. The Age of Mobilization

Taylor refers to the period after the French Revolution up to 1960 as the "age of mobilization." Taylor understands this time as one in which there is an antithetical relationship between the ideal forms or types of the "ancien régime" and of "mobilization" (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 446).[140] By mobilization, Taylor means an intensification of the dynamics initiated at the Reform in such a way that he points to a controlled and intended change of social imaginaries carried out by certain elites. Unlike other times, such as the Reformation, where changes in the social imaginary occurred as an unintended consequence of new social practices and habits, mobilization does entail a massive willingness to change cognitive evaluations of the good life and social practices. In his own terms:

> "process whereby people are persuaded, pushed, dragooned, or bullied into new forms of society, church, association. This generally means that they are induced through the actions of governments, church hierarchies, and/or other elites, not only to adopt new structures, but also to some extent to alter their social imaginaries, and sense of legitimacy, as well as their sense of what is crucially important in their lives or society" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 424).

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140 Forms or types refer to Weber's terminology (cf. 1988, pp. 190–209). The purpose of these types is to represent a heuristic means to present the particular characteristic of a historical course. (see Küenzlen, 2018, pp. 136–137).

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It is also a period of enormous religious mobilization and an unquestionable public presence of institutional religion. Yet the significant difference with the *ancien régime* lies in the place occupied by religious belief and morality within the social imaginary. Now individuals are effectively disembedded from the great embracing cosmos. There is no longer a hierarchical social order mirroring the celestial one; modern moral order is indeed fully operative. Instead of a spontaneous belief in future rewards for acting altruistically, mobilization "calls for society structured for mutual benefit, in which each respects the rights of others, and offers them mutual help of certain kinds" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 447).

Taylor focuses specifically on American patriotism and the French Catholic reaction of the 19th century, both distinct forms of leaving behind the old regime and the revolutionary phase and giving a new form to this movement of religious mobilization (cf. Taylor, 2007a, p. 462). In the first case, God is present in the social imaginary as the author of the Civilizational Design governed by Natural Law. The Christian faith would be essential for maintaining civilization and giving meaning to the nation.[141] On the other hand, Taylor's so-called "Catholic reaction" defines what happened throughout Catholic Europe. Much of it seemed to be a return to forms of the *ancien régime*, namely, a return to the parish and a robust public

141 The fruit of the age of mobilization is the denominationalism of the churches in the United States. All churches—or denominations—see themselves as divinely established to fulfill God's plan. In that sense, they all participate in nation-building and help the nation (and the productive system) and the individual to fulfill God's plan. In general, the general belief is that if one complies with moral demands, he or she will do well, and God will bless him or her. This spiritual understanding stands for a new version of retribution theology. Coupled with capitalism and Protestantism, it will eventually influence how poverty is viewed and perceived and how to help alleviate it. This type of American religious patriotism has been described by Robert Bellah as "Civil Religion" (1975, 2005b), borrowing the term from Rousseau (see Casanova, 1994, pp. 58–63). This concept is still the fruit of much debate because many of the conditions of that religion are undoubtedly being questioned today (see, for example, Bungert & Weiss, 2017; Williams, Haberski, & Goff, 2021). Taylor examines this phenomenon based on the work of David Martin (1978, 1990) and Gordon Wood (1993). In any case, American civil religion is part of the cause of what explains what is known as American exceptionalism and why America is still considered an exception in the general theory of secularization (See Berger, 1999, 2014; Jon Butler, 1990; Casanova, 1994, 2010).

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presence of religion. However, religion also became the new moral order's mainstay, acting as a social cement.[142]

In Europe, perhaps more than in North America, there was an intense social competition between the different movements that formed part of the social structure following the appearance of labor movements. Religious organizations were also part of this contest, either to maintain the cohesion of their members or to defend themselves against an increasingly pluralistic environment that opposed every position. In this context, the philanthropic work of the Protestant and Catholic churches multiplied, but undoubtedly also because the churches were also fully involved in the age of mobilization (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 471).

The time frame to which Taylor refers as the age of mobilization is undoubtedly very complex in many areas, and certainly in the history of humanitarianism and philanthropy, which experienced a veritable explosion in these years (see, for example, Barnett, 2013; Dromi, 2020; Magill, 1927; Zunz, 2014). Thus, Taylor barely refers to the missionary efforts and the currents of defense of the rights of the inhabitants of the colonies that took place in Protestant and Catholic churches at this time, in the shadow of the colonialism of

142 The reference to religion as a social cement leads us to think of the figure of Émile Durkheim. Taylor, in fact, uses the word *paleo-Durkheimian* to give a form to this Catholic reaction. In general, with the epithet *Durkheimian*, Taylor refers to the ideal types that determine a particular location of the sacred in the structure of a society, as a principle of order that guarantees social cohesion, always in relation to power and its justification (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 487; Durkheim, 2008). The *paleo-Durkheimian* conception and design of the relationship between Church and State, between religion and politics, finds its most unambiguous expression in the time of the *ancien régime*, in which the God-ordained and God-guaranteed legitimacy of the king and the church ensured the sacredness of society and, therefore, its cohesion. By *neo-Durkheimian*, he refers to the centrality of God's plan in the political community, as in the United States. There is no longer a "sacral" presence of God in the state, but it is now a matter of recognizing God's plan for a state or a political community and enabling its social-political space. It remains the term "*post-Durkheimian* dispensation" that Taylor uses for the religious forms of the Age of Authenticity, and that would coincide with our time, in which "the 'sacred,' either religious or 'laïque,' has become uncoupled from our political allegiance" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 487). This stage theory of Taylor's is challenged by sociologists like Casanova, referring to the North American case (Casanova, 2010, p. 271ff) and by Hans Joas in the case of the *paleo-Durkheimian* association with the Middle Ages (Joas, 2020, p. 262).

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the nineteenth century. Nor does his account mention the remarkable phenomena of mobilization of people to act on behalf of some specific oppressed groups, such as the British movement between 1904 and 1913 against the cruelties inflicted by Europeans in Congo and which were created, among others, by Quakers and evangelical Christians (see Stamatov, 2013, pp. 5–8, 177–189; Vargas Llosa, 2015) or the anti-slavery movement across the Atlantic already in the 19th century, as well as many others. Nor to how the enterprise of colonization as well as the struggle against the excesses of the dominant over the dominated, was part of the very construction of Western identity and modernity (See Dussel, 1992, 2007). Indeed, little reference is also made to this contradictory dynamic of the *Age of Mobilization* in shaping the high demand for solidarity with the stranger in our time.

5.10. The super-nova effect and the Age of Authenticity

Taylor calls the period beginning around the 1960s and continuing to the present day the *Age of Authenticity*, borrowing this word from Heidegger (1927, div. II, chaps. 1–2). We are dealing with a cultural revolution which he already characterized in *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Taylor, 1992) and which has its roots in the Romantic movement (cf. Taylor, 1989a, pp. 502–513, 1992b, pp. 25–29; see also Abbey, 2000, pp. 86–89). Authenticity is, for Taylor, out of any description of relativistic morality, a powerful moral ideal that seeks the good understood as self-fulfillment.[143] In Somorgy Varga's words, authenticity is "a way of conceptualizing the practice of the self that aims to achieve a good life" (2012, p. 158). According to Taylor, such a search for good life and human flourishment comes with high

143 The interest aroused by this concept of authenticity as self-fulfillment in the academy is great, especially as an alternative to the liberal concept of autonomy and self-determination (cf. Rosa, 2010b; Rössner & Uhl, 2012). However, the concept of authenticity has been questioned for the lack of epistemic basis in this moral ideal and for not sufficiently reflecting the personal existential condition (Cf. Oshana, 2007). On the other hand, Taylor's reliance on authenticity as a moral ideal is also criticized as an adequate means to alleviate the consequences of alienation (cf. Rosa, 2016, p. 301ff; Han, 2019, p. 25ff; see also Reder, 2020).

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doses of expressivism and subjectivism, which put in tension the demands of our ties with others (cf. Taylor, 1992b, pp. 1–12).[144]

Of course, privatization and individuality dominate the moral and spiritual predicaments in our time (cf. Taylor, 2007a, p. 514). Nevertheless, it is not as easy as saying that this is a time of selfishness, relativism, or indifference towards the collective or even the sacred. What is happening is a "large-scale shift in general understandings of the good [which] requires some new understanding of the good" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 474). In that sense, the demands of solidarity continue, perhaps more strongly than ever, as we have seen. However, the demands of the articulation of the good—in a context of fading of moral horizons and the eclipse of ends by the rampant development of instrumental reason—now have to be satisfied more than ever through the self-expression of the subject itself:

> "Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands" (Taylor, 1992b, pp. 40–41).

This new way of understanding good gives rise to a new moral ideal based on the pursuit of fulfillment and free choice, market economy and questioning past values, which gives rise to a new social imaginary based on new notions of what constitutes society and human dignity. This is now also based on human rights, which stands itself a sign of the *Modern Moral Order*. Moreover, personal involvement

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144 Taylor's use of the notion of "expressivism" has a particularly extensive background. For example, his way of interpreting Hegel has at its center this expressivism of the *Geist*. The *Geist* is unfolding a dynamic of self-realization through its externalization and its interaction with its environment through actions and articulations to achieve its identity (cf. Taylor, 1977a, see also 1979; Honneth, 2018). Regarding subjectivity, for Taylor, in a nutshell, the subject is always embodied in a particular culture or society or historical circumstance. This model of subjectivity, heavily influenced by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, appears not only in his view of Hegel but very early in his work (see Taylor, 1964) and continues throughout his work in many places, especially in his attention to the phenomenology of socially situated subjectivity and in his remarks on Romanticism (Taylor, 2020c) and, of course, in describing the age of authenticity. A critical response to this category of expressivism can be found in (Norton, 2007).

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in humanitarian causes will always have a component of personal choice, self-expression, and moral commitment (cf. Taylor, 2007a, p. 515).

Furthermore, Taylor speaks of the fact that nowadays, great emphasis is given to intimate relationships and feeling, not only in the sphere of personal relationships but also in the political inclination, commitment to solidarity, and relationship with God:

> "One can only connect with God through passion. For those who feel this, the intensity of the passion becomes a major virtue, well worth some lack of accuracy in theological formulation. In an age dominated by disengaged reason, this virtue comes to seem more and more crucial" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 488–489).

Precisely, this search for virtue to which Taylor refers, in its relation to the pursuit of fulfillment, supposes a real possibility of a revival of *agape* in this time, even with a renewed authenticity that may have been missing along the way. Thus, in a time that reacts against disengaged reason and its expression in moral autonomy, it will be passion and the importance of the sentimental that also best describe the motivating impulse towards solidarity. In some ways, it resembles the original version of *agape*, which moves "in the bowels" by compassion. Today, the spontaneous outburst toward solidarity is mediated by the shift in the expressive perspective that emphasizes the valuable as the very feeling of compassion, fixing the attention more on the subject than on the Other or the constitutive good behind the motivation. However, Taylor distances himself from feelings of sympathy as the sole moral motivator, as we have seen discussing Rousseau and Hume, despite his sympathy with romanticism (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 694). His position, following his moral realism, focuses on recovering the importance of human meanings and the constitutive power of language beyond its mere expressive faculty (cf. Taylor, 2016, pp. 200–213). In essence, he argues for the rehabilitation of the articulation of the ontological backgrounds behind compassion, as we have seen at length.

In that sense, Taylor understands that the current force of feeling for solidarity is not lived within an imaginary in which the impulse to altruistic action is driven by a force that comes beyond the self, and that is understood to bring the agent (in many senses patient) into another "higher" order of time on the eschatological level (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 54–61,195–196,207–209,712–720), as would be the

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case of *agape*, nor does it make him see in the Other the divinity itself (Mt 25).

Agape, in any case, demands to be understood today from the social imaginary of the *age of authenticity* itself, one in which humanitarianism and institutionalized solidarity through charitable agencies and NGOs play a prominent role. Moreover, given the preponderance of the sentimental, the power of the media in the collective imaginary of pain and the need for solidarity towards those affected by natural disasters or armed conflicts plays an important role (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 691–696, also 371, 1999b). And that may make empathy with the stranger weaker, as we moderns are less capable of narrowing our focus: It makes our philanthropy vulnerable to the shifting fashion of media attention, and the various modes of feel-good hype (...) and then forget all about it next month, when it drops off the CNN screen" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 696). We will dwell on the social imaginary of humanitarianism and solidarity in the next chapter.

In any case, at the end of this story of the secularization of *agape*, with this new *zig* in the form of the search for fullness and authenticity, Taylor shows us the space where *agape* has a place as an impulse of grace towards a gratuitous and disinterested action for the good of the stranger other. It is closely related to openness to transcendence as an experience that brings us closer to the self-perception of the basis of self-motivation towards the good. Furthermore, it also has to do with transformation beyond our ordinary possibilities. As a fruit of all the changes we have gone through, the possibility of *agape* has to do with a more profound reality to which the subject opens himself, and at the same time it is a new life-transforming reality.

Agape, therefore, is to be understood according to the schemes of what it means to live in modernity, that is, taking into account the changes in the conception of the subject and its embedment in reality, and as such, "as distinct both from the object and the continuing nature of the subject (experiencer)" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 730). For Taylor, however, such an experience of *agape* has to do with a paradigm shift, in the sense of openness to the new, perhaps previously undiscovered dimension of transcendence, but always with a surprise at the encounter with God's love. Moreover, as we will see in the following chapters, the experience of *agape*, even within the current parameters of an immanent framework, allows

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Taylor to face dilemmas that have to do with deep motivations and their relationship with good and evil, such as violence, misanthropy, recognition, the relationship of good with justice, the institutionalization of the charism or the very openness to transcendence. Nevertheless, Taylor still thinks it is a possible experience, trusting that the implied openness to transcendence will alleviate the problems of modern morality.[145] As he states towards the end of *A Secular Age:*

> "Christians today (…) live in a world where objectification and excarnation reign, where death undermines meaning, and so on. We have to struggle to recover a sense of what the Incarnation can mean (…) Our faith is not the acme of Christianity, but nor is it a degenerate version; it should rather be open to a conversation that ranges over the whole of the last 20 centuries (and even in some ways before)" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 753–754).

For Taylor, *agape* would remain a possible source of motivation that is still operative in the same circumstances in which the Christian faith can be lived in the immanent framework resulting from the historical narrative above. As we shall see in the following chapters, Taylor's way of arguing will present new formulations of concepts pertaining to the Christian faith's content and praxis. We will see, for example, how the community of saints becomes "*agape-network*s" or how the unitive mystical experience is configured through "subtler languages." Likewise, how some characteristics of the veneration of the saints can be found through moral exemplars. Furthermore, the call to conversion or *theiosis* lies behind the transformation that distinguishes *agape* from human flourishing. Another is how the univocal understanding of dogmatic principles is transformed into indirect hermeneutics aimed at giving human meanings. All these

145 For Holmer Steinfath (2011), however, such an openness to transcendence, particularly faith in a personal God, is not possible because of the same course of history that Taylor has described. For Steinfath, only secularized sources would enable us to fulfill the claims of moral universalism and achieve greater solidarity with the exploited of this world. He even proposes "liberal naturalism" to understand the social and natural world in which we live meaningfully without resorting to transcendence. Taylor's response is to recall that the nature of the question is not to judge which option is better, theistic or secular, but to ask about the nature of the moral conception itself. For Taylor, morality goes hand in hand with the question of the good life and one's own transformation, which is a question that goes beyond the right action or the best source for it (Taylor, 2011i, p. 827).

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elements will show us how Taylor understands the possibility of *agape* in today's world.

5.11. Evaluating Taylor's historical account

In this chapter we have provided an overview of Taylor's genealogy of secularization. In doing so, we have attempted to construct a narrative of the secularization of *agape*, following the breadcrumb trail scattered through the multi-layered argument of *A Secular Age*. Our aim has been twofold: on the one hand, to consider the fate of the experience of transformation associated with Taylor's understanding of *agape*; on the other, to reconstruct the history of altruism through the shifting social imaginaries and moral predicaments characteristic of each historical epoch. As we have seen, despite the *zigs* and *zags* of this history—with its reversals, discontinuities, innovations, and losses—Taylor maintains that the possibility of experiencing *agape* remains open today, albeit transformed by the mentalities and imaginaries of our secular age.[146]

Before assessing Taylor's historical reconstruction,[147] however, we must first identify the kind of history he is actually telling. Our claim is that his genealogy of secularization cannot be adequately framed

146 As Taylor emphasizes, any attempt to articulate the moral sources that shape modern identity requires a historical-genealogical inquiry attentive not only to explicit doctrines but also to the tacit background of cultural imaginaries: "In any case, what this shows is that the path to articulacy has to be a historical one. We have to try to trace the development of our modern outlooks. And since we are dealing not just with philosophers' doctrines but also with the great unsaid that underlies widespread attitudes in our civilization, the history can't just be one of express belief, of philosophical theories, but must also include what has been called 'mentalités'. We have to try to open out by this study a new understanding of ourselves and of our deepest moral allegiances" (Taylor, 1989a, pp. 104–105).

147 There is a vast amount of literature on Taylor's historical understanding, concentrating either on the comparison of his narrative with that of other authors who have taken a similar path, or examining the success or otherwise of the use of historical reconstruction in his argumentation of a modern immanent framework open to transcendence. Some examples are (Brunkhorst, 2011; Jon Butler, 2010; Cloots, Latré, & Vanheeswijck, 2015; Costa, 2016, 2022, pp. 31–52; De Vries, 2009; Gagnon, 2002, pp. 56–87; J. Goldstein, 2011; Gordon, 2008; Jay, 2009; Joas, 2020, pp. 250–271; Ricoeur, 2008, pp. 155–170; Rosa, 1998, p. 487ff;

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either within a Hegelian dialectic or a Nietzschean–Foucauldian genealogy, despite drawing selectively on both. Its structural coherence becomes intelligible only when read through what I call a *catholic attitude* toward history—a hermeneutic grounded in ontological fecundity, moral growth, and the enduring gravitational pull of *agape*.

A Hegelian reading of Taylor is initially plausible. The *zig-zag* pattern structuring his narrative resembles "a particular version of Hegelianism" (Sciglitano, 2019a; see also Hegel, 2021; Berlin, 2014), as already noted in *Sources of the Self*. It begins with an original unity—Axial transcendence and the novelty of *agape*—followed by negation and eclipse in the emergence of exclusive humanism, and culminates in something like a new synthesis, namely the transformation of transcendence from within the immanent frame. The story also bears a teleological trace that seems to aim toward the balancing or reconciliation of opposing forces.

This resemblance has led several commentators to align Taylor with Hegel. Given Taylor's longstanding engagement with Hegel (Gordon, 2008, p. 659), such interpretations are unsurprising: already before *A Secular Age*, William E. Connolly detected a Hegelian teleological impulse, especially in Taylor's work on recognition and multiculturalism (Connolly, 2002).[148] Others have also seen Hegel's influence in Taylor's construction of epochal conflicts age (cf. Calhoun, 2008; Morgan, 2008; see also Thiebaut, 1991).

Yet this proximity to Hegel has been judged problematic by some critics. Ian Angus (2014), for example, argues that Taylor's account of modernity—and especially the unresolved ending of *A Secular Age* —amounts to a form of contemporary Hegelianism in which Hegel's ontology survives as a diagnosis of the problem but not as a solution. For Angus, Taylor offers no *Aufhebung*, only a persistent tension between sharply opposed positions. Emilio Di Somma similarly contends that Taylor's Hegelian inheritance exacerbates the divide between belief and secularity without providing the conceptual resources to resolve the problem of our moral sources (Somma, 2018).

Sheehan, 2010; Vanheeswijck, 2015, 2021; Warner, VanAntwerpen, & Calhoun, 2010; Woodford, 2012).

148 In his own words, "Taylor procedes from rethoric of self-realization within community, though a rethoric of communal realization through harmonization of the diverse parts of an ongoing cultural, to a rethoric of progressive attunement to a harmonious direction in being" (Connolly, 2002, p. 89).

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Conversely, Ludwig Siep acknowledges genuine Hegelian influences but highlights important divergences in starting points, historical emphases, and method (Siep, 2011a).

From our perspective, Taylor's argumentative architecture undoubtedly bears Hegelian traces—something that will become clearer in the following chapters when discussing *Sittlichkeit*, civil society, and the institutionalization of *agape*. But Taylor also distances himself explicitly from Hegelian dialectics. He rejects any "inescapable design at work inexorably in history" (Taylor, 1985g, p. 385), as well as the notion of "a single line of unfolding potentiality" progressing through fixed and necessary stages (Taylor, 1978, p. 135). And although one might be tempted to interpret Taylor's understanding of religion (via the category of fullness) as a reworking of the young Hegel's elevation from finite to infinite life, Taylor does not read *agape* through a Hegelian scheme (cf. Hegel, 2015, pp. 343–351).[149] As he notes, Hegel's mature system ultimately leaves no true place for divine love in the Christian sense, since God's love becomes inseparable from its conceptual expression (Taylor, 1977a, p. 494).

What truly separates Taylor from Hegelian dialectics is his focus on anthropology and moral interpretation rather than on the fate of ideas. Taylor is not tracing antinomies and counter-antinomies unfolding across epochs (contra Nitschke, 2018, p. 117). His concern lies with shifts in human self-understanding: with how people redefine themselves (as explored in *Sources of the Self*), how new moral predicaments arise, and how individuals orient themselves toward strong goods and forms of fulfillment.

For this reason, Taylor's use of history also exhibits affinities with Nietzschean or Foucauldian genealogy (cf. Gorski, 2014).[150] Like these authors, Taylor seeks a self-understanding that is simultaneously destructive and constructive. His genealogy dismantles the subtraction stories—the linear, progressivist accounts that portray secularization as the shedding of illusions—and also challenges the moral and epistemic frameworks of modernity that produced excarnation, code-fetishism, and forgetfulness of moral sources. At the same time, Taylor constructs a narrative that rehabilitates constitu-

149 We address Taylor's concept of religion later in chapter 8.

150 On the historical-genealogical program of Nietzsche's and Foucault's critique of morality, see (Saar, 2007).

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tive goods and their ontological grounding, drawing on the transformative potential of *agape* to recover meaning, incarnation, and openness to transcendence (cf. Sciglitano, 2019b).

That Taylor names his project an *Entstehungsgeschichte* of exclusive humanism is significant (Taylor, 2007a, p. 26). As in Nietzsche and Foucault, he attends to the "sentiments, love, conscience, instincts" (Foucault, 1984, p. 76) that progressive histories typically ignore. And like a genealogy, Taylor shows that exclusive humanism was not inevitable: the path to secular modernity resulted from a web of contingent choices, excesses, reactions, and opportunities. Yet unlike Foucault, Taylor's genealogy does not aim to reveal hidden power beneath dominant truths, nor does it seek a history disengaged from metaphysics or purpose. Rather, it has a double aim: to expose the blindness of modernity's self-affirmation (Taylor, 1994b, see also 1985h, 1989b, 1985g) and to reopen the space for the transformative power of *agape*, in continuity with Taylor's moral realism. In this sense, genealogy is part of his broader argumentative strategy (cf. Lane, 1992) and has an affirmative, constructive character (Joas, 2011, pp. 147–203, 2020, pp. 250–271, see also 2009b, 2017b).

Siep objects that Taylor's use of history cannot justify his theistic proposal in favour of *agape*, since it emphasizes anthropological self-interpretation rather than conceptual argument (Siep, 2011a, p. 292). Yet the purpose of Taylor's genealogy is not to demonstrate the truth of the Christian option but to unsettle false beliefs about modernity and to place believers and unbelievers on equal footing when confronting today's moral sources and their dilemmas. The historical narrative cannot prove that *agape* is the necessary outcome of secularization; rather, it shows that *agape* remains a viable and compelling option amid contemporary cross-pressures—which, as Taylor insists, is already significant.

This originality distinguishes Taylor's approach from other influential genealogies of secularization. He departs from "subtraction stories," which imagine modern subjects waking from a dogmatic slumber into greater freedom or solidarity. But he also resists accounts that portray secularization as the direct result of theological developments alone, such as those proposed by John Milbank (2006, 2009), Catherine Pickstrock (1998), Rémi Brague (2006) or Nygren (1953), or as the destiny of Christianity itself culminating in self-negation, as pointed out, from different perspectives, by Marcel

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Gauchet (1997) or Gianni Vattimo (1998, 1999, 2002). Likewise, Taylor distances himself from narratives in which philosophy progressively appropriates and transforms Christian dogmatics into rational, post-metaphysical discourse (cf. Habermas, 2019a, p. 14).[151] Though a religious thinker, Taylor does not adopt the catastrophic tone found in Berdiaev (1936) or, in a different register, Maritain (1959).[152]

The point, therefore, is not to claim that everything changes only to remain the same, as in a circular or self-neutralizing genealogy. Rather, the *zig-zag* history of *agape* results in a genuine plurality of moral sources—each generating distinct moral predicaments, visions of life, and evaluations of goods. While these alternatives are historically related to *agape* through reinterpretation, displacement, or negation, their outcomes are genuinely diverse and cannot be reduced to a dialectical unfolding. Still, Taylor's narrative makes clear that something has been lost this history of the secularization of *agape* —perhaps irretrievably for many.[153]

However, it is worth asking, in the light of the teleology of this history towards a growing moral universalism and taking into account

151 Habermas writes in the Introduction to his *opera magna* on the history of philosophy: "Therefore, this discourse serves me as a guideline for the genealogy of a post-metaphysical thought, which should show how philosophy—complementary to the formation of a Christian dogmatics in terms of philosophy—for its part has appropriated essential contents from religious traditions and transformed them into knowledge capable of justification" (Habermas, 2019, p. 14). ["Daher dient mir dieser Diskurs als Leitfaden für die Genealogie eines nachmetaphysischen Denkens, die zeigen soll, wie sich die Philosophie—komplementär zur Ausbildung einer christlichen Dogmatik in Begriffen der Philosophie—ihrerseits wesentliche Gehalte aus religiösen Überlieferungen angeeignet und in begründungsfähiges Wissen transformiert hat" (translated by S.G.)].

152 We have simply referred here to some of the genealogical theories of secularization in theology or philosophy. The debate on the causes of secularization is broad in the social sciences. For a good analysis of the state of arts in social sciences, see (C. Turner, 2019). For a multidisciplinary overview, see (T. M. Schmidt & Pitschmann, 2014). See (Lübbe, 2003; Marramao, 1999; Monod, 2002) on the importance of secularization in political philosophy and history. On the variety of uses of dialectical patterns on the history of secularization in social science, see (W. S. Goldstein, 2016).

153 We find a similar idea in William Greenway: "Modern Westerners are largely aware of the reality and reach of *agape*, but this truth, a truth at the heart of the meaningfulness of existing, has been wrenched out of focus by powerful conceptual trajectories in modern Western thought" (Greenway, 2016, p. 2).

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the high moral demand towards altruism of our time that we have already visited, if we are really witnessing a history that explains a sort of ethical growth toward moral universalism despite increasing pluralism. And further, how this is reconciled with the growing inability to articulate goods. In one of his last reflections, Taylor wonders whether this history we reconstructed can be understood as a "history of ethical growth" (Taylor, 2024, pp. 553–587).[154] Taylor recognizes a *telos* in this history of articulation that goes hand in hand with a greater universalization, a greater openness to the good, which begins, as we have seen, with the Axial Age and reaches into our time with "ecumenism," citing Pope Francis as an example, in which a need to broaden relationships from the discovery of one's deep identity is manifest (Francis, 2020, §89; see also Taylor, 2020b). Nevertheless, as a non-Hegelian *zig-zagging* history, a step forward sometimes entails a step backward.

Taylor interprets these advances and regressions not as cancelling one another out but as generating something greater: an expanded repertoire of collective action that brings us closer to the moral ideal implicit in *agape*. For him, the universalism that began with *agape* ultimately culminates in it. Echoing Teilhard de Chardin, Taylor can thus write that "the whole planet, the entire ecosystem is striving, groaning and travailing to some end: to live up to the demands of the space of *agape* (or of *karuna*, or *salaam*, or...)" (Taylor, 2024, p. 554). This trajectory is visible both in the widening demands for universality and equality first prefigured in the Axial breakthroughs and later formalized in the French Revolution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and also in the gradual enactment of these ideals in movements such as the abolition of slavery or the civil rights struggle.

In any case, regardless of the philosophical character of this evaluation, it is noteworthy to keep in mind Charles Taylor's own

154 Hans Joas has also been working on how increasing pluralism of values occurs at the same time as increasing universalism, albeit from a sociological perspective, in *Die Entstehung der Werte* (2017a). In this book we find a thesis similar to the one Taylor uses here. Specifically, Joas argues that values are born through experiences of self-affirmation and self-transcendence that then end up being accepted in the contexts of experience where they originate through new types of actions (cf. Joas, 2017a, see also 2001, 2021; Kühnlein & Wils, 2019).

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Catholic faith. Alongside the traces of Hegelian dialectic and Nietzschean–Foucauldian genealogy, a distinctively *catholic attitude* is more decisive for grasping the architecture of his historical argument, especially given the centrality of *agape*. In the Catholic imagination, history has a meaning and a direction, one ultimately disclosed eschatologically. Reality possesses an intrinsic movement toward redemption—a growth and maturation of creation itself—whose unfolding is not exhausted by empirical events but rooted in a deeper ontological fecundity. As Henri de Lubac noted, "for Christianity [...] the course of history is indeed a reality. It is not mere barren dispersal but possesses a certain ontological density and fecundity" (Lubac, 1988, p. 141).

In Taylor, this Catholic accent takes two principal forms. First, it appears in his conviction that history exhibits ethical growth and is oriented toward an ecumenical encounter among diverse articulations of the good and of fullness. Second, it shapes his interest in identifying the place and destiny of constitutive goods in every epoch. Within such a framework, the contradictions, negations, or reinterpretations of the original *agape* are not merely oppositions; they touch, as Lubac puts it, "the very foundation of religion" „ (1988, p. 153). They reproduce, in fractured form, the history of redemption itself in its relation to human beings, their social worlds, and their quest for fullness.

At the same time, a *catholic attitude* recognizes that no historical period can claim to incarnate the Gospel ideal in definitive form. The Incarnation introduces a standard that no social or cultural formation can fully realize. Hence Taylor's critical stance toward the reforming elites of various periods who elevated the demands of the Gospel without foreseeing the unintended consequences of their initiatives, and toward the Victorian conviction that theirs was the first generation capable of eradicating poverty—a confidence grounded in insufficient moral and ontological foundations. Such judgments become clearer retrospectively but receive their fullest illumination from the eschatological horizon to which Taylor appeals through *agape*. His historical perspective therefore confirms that one cannot "marry the faith with a form of culture or mode of society" (Taylor, 1999b, p. 17).

From this perspective, each historical period constitutes an advance in humanity's self-interpretative capacities, accompanied by a

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multiplication of goods capable of shaping the moral predicament. Taylor's narrative can thus be read as an appeal to tradition in the Catholic sense—not as a restoration of past doctrines or practices, but as a recovery of the original sources of meaning and of the transformative power of *agape*. Tradition becomes the medium through which forgotten or transmuted goods re-emerge and through which *agape* is continually reinvigorated.

A further characteristic implicit in Taylor's account is the continual presence of a "third way of love" ("dritten Weg der Liebe", Balthasar, 2019, p. 33ff), mediating between the extrinsicism of early Christian practice and the immanentism of modern anthropocentrism. This path also avoids the recurrent temptation of Gnosticism—whether in the form of spiritual elites imposing higher moral standards through rationalized codes, or in the opposite temptation of surrendering to the enchanted forces of cosmos, nature, or sin. *Agape*, resisting reduction to codified justice, inhabits this third way: in tension with the world (Jn 18:33–37), yet also requiring the contrast with its negations and mutations. Only in such contrast does the human being appear as the image of God, and only there does the incarnational potential become visible. As explored earlier, moral plurality is indispensable for discerning and articulating strong goods, especially in times of crisis.

Taylor's narrative thereby reveals the discreet persistence of *agape* as a summons to transformation—conversion—and as a higher way of approaching contemporary conflicts. The path of love becomes visible in the emergence of *agape-networks* formed through spontaneous responses of compassion to suffering, and in charismatic figures who, open to transcendence, expand the effective repertoire of ethical action.

It is clear that Taylor approaches *agape* as a Catholic philosopher who deeply understands the modern Zeitgeist. Yet his stance is not a reaction against modernity nor an apologetic for ecclesial authority. Rather, his attitude reflects the integrative, capacious vision of history characteristic of Catholic thought and a desire to bear witness to the love revealed in the Incarnation—poured into human hearts across the centuries and eliciting a grateful response toward God and neighbor, especially the most vulnerable. Still, the primacy of *agape* exceeds what philosophy, even one attentive to human meanings, can fully demonstrate. Ultimately, faith may be the only

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standpoint from which the ethical claim of the stranger can be unconditionally recognized.

For this reason, despite the *Catholic* label, Taylor's attitude does not amount to Catholic philosophy in the confessional sense. He does not explicitly ground his reflection on *agape* in the person of Christ, nor does he develop a theological apologetic. Where he defends anything, it is the integrity of moral sources and the contemporary conditions of belief. His focus on *agape* underscores his fundamental interest in practical philosophy and ethics. Even in his historical reconstruction of the Reformation, he attends primarily to changes in the moral predicament rather than to Luther's theological impetus—faithfulness to Christ. Taylor himself acknowledges this difference in *A Secular Age*: the "Intellectual Deviation Story," centered on doctrinal shifts, and the "Reform Master Narrative," centered on moral experience, are complementary (Taylor, 2007b, p. 775).

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6. The Mutation of Agape and the Charisma-Institution Dilemma

The previous chapter reconstructed the *zig-zag* history of the secularization of *agape* in *A Secular Age*, showing how ethical gains, losses, and profound shifts in the moral imaginary coexist in modernity. This historical itinerary culminated in a paradox: although *agape* has been repeatedly eclipsed within the immanent frame, modern societies display an unprecedented sensitivity to suffering and a growing repertoire of altruistic action. Yet *A Secular Age* contains a provocative claim that unsettles this genealogy. Drawing on Ivan Illich, Taylor describes the institutionalization of Christian love as a "corruption of Christianity". This statement seems to contradict the broader account of historical mutations rather than degenerations reconstructed so far, and raises the question of how *agape* can be mediated—or distorted—by institutions:

> Here's where the corruption comes in: what we got was not a network of *agape*, but rather a disciplined society in which categorial relations have primacy, and therefore norms (…) Perhaps the contradiction lay in the very idea of a disciplined imposition of the Kingdom of God. The temptation of power was after all, too strong, as Dostoyevsky saw in the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor. Here lay the corruption" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 158).

Taylor's remark about the "corruption" of Christianity raises an immediate question: what exactly has been corrupted? He is not simply indicting the whole genealogy he has just reconstructed, but pointing to a more specific distortion. According to his own text, what has been corrupted is the charism of the Good Samaritan—an *agape*-inspired, spontaneous, bodily encounter with the wounded other—which has become institutionalized through codification and categorial relations. In the background lie power relations, into which the Church itself eventually falls. What is lost is the possibility of a new mode of relation that Taylor calls an *agape-network*: a space

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of solidarity and mutuality beyond existing bonds and outside any stable social category or standard of obedience:

> "It is a skein of relations which link particular, unique, enfleshed people to each other, rather than a grouping of people together on the grounds of their sharing some important property (as in modern nations, we are all Canadians, Americans, French people; or universally, we are all rights-bearers, etc.)" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 739).

In this sense, the relationships that arise from the Samaritan's *agape*-based action tacitly question one of modernity's central achievements, namely the rights-based horizontality of a society of individuals. The charge of "corruption" fits Taylor's broader genealogy: the "revolution" of individualism undid the older embeddedness of the subject in cosmos, society and the sacred; the attempt to "make human beings better" and secure flourishing with diminishing reference to transcendence encouraged an ever-growing tendency to legislate, codify and normalize—religion and charity included.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to clarify this apparent contradiction by examining the tension between charisma and institution in Taylor's thought.[155] We begin by analyzing Illich's radical critique of institutionalized charity and its reception by Taylor. While Taylor occasionally adopts Illich's language of "corruption," his wider work points instead toward a more ambivalent notion of mutation, one that recognizes both losses and genuine moral advances. We will argue that Taylor's real target is not institutions as such, but the modern fixation on rules, procedures, and codification—what he calls "nomolatry"—which threatens to sever altruistic action from its deeper moral sources. Against this backdrop, we introduce Taylor's notion of the *agape-network*, a fragile yet generative mode of social relation grounded in compassion and openness to transcendence.

In the second part of the chapter, we turn to a question that has received much less attention: the charisma–institution relationship in the practice of altruism. Taking up Illich's challenge, how is it that we move from the subversive and heroic spontaneity of the Good Samaritan to an almost universal recognition of altruism, pre-

155 The secondary literature on this passage has largely asked how this accusation of "corruption of Christianity" fits Taylor's historical narrative and how closely it aligns with Ivan Illich's work (Arens, 2018; Gregory & Hunt-Hendrix, 2014; Herdt, 2014; Lehmann, 2011).

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dominantly mediated today by "humanitarian aid, and the action of NGOs like Médecins Sans Frontières, but also on the governmental level" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 693)? Put differently: is the institutionalization of neighbour-love—in the form of NGOs and organized charity, faith-based or not—a corruption of *agape*, or can the inspiration of *agape* be embodied in institutions without being exhausted by them? Illich formulates this tension in the starkest possible terms. Taylor receives this provocation sympathetically, yet does not follow him all the way. To see why, we must first reconstruct Illich's position.

6.1. Ivan Illich's challenge to charities

Taylor first encountered Illich's thought when David Cayley invited him to write the foreword to the book collecting the radio conversations in which Illich, near the end of his life, unfolded his views on Gospel, Church and society (cf. 'The Corruption of Christianity: Ivan Illich on Gospel, Church and Society', 2000; Illich, 2005a):

> "In the age of the Church, the idea of the neighbor who constantly lives encountering Christ in the unknown who knocks at his door and asks for hospitality, this idea of acting out of a love which is a gift gets corrupted by being defined as something which can be institutionalized, which charitable institutions can do much better than a bunch of individual Christians" ('The Corruption of Christianity: Ivan Illich on Gospel, Church and Society', 2000; Illich, 2005a, p. 64).

Something essential to the radical originality of the Gospel has been lost in the historical development of the Church and the institutionalization of its practices. Though Illich's immediate focus here is the love of neighbour, his critique reaches the whole institutional construction of the Church and, by extension, of modern society. The uncontrollable radicality and contingent novelty of the Incarnation,[156] he argues, faces a constant danger of institutional capture:

> "The opening of this new horizon is also accompanied by a second danger: institutionalization. There is a temptation to try to manage and, eventually, to legislate this new love, to create an institution that will guarantee it, insure it, and protect it by criminalizing its opposite. So, along with this new ability to give freely of oneself has appeared the

156 I understand "uncontrollability" in the same terms as Hartmut Rosa (2020).

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> possibility of exercising an entirely new kind of power, the power of those who organize Christianity and use this vocation to claim their superiority as social institutions. This power is claimed first by the Church and later by the many secular institutions stamped from its mould. Wherever I look for the roots of modernity, I find them in the attempts of the churches to institutionalize, legitimize, and manage Christian vocation" (Illich, 2005a, pp. 47–48)

This passage concentrates Illich's rich and radical vision of Western history—his "heterodox orthodoxy". The alteration of the original charism is captured in the adage *corruptio optimi pessima*:[157] literally, the corruption of the best is the worst. The novelty and freedom introduced by the Incarnation, and by the ethical revolution of the Gospel, are prolonged in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37). The Samaritan helps the wounded stranger moved by an encounter and by a visceral compassion (*splangnizesthai*). His action is free from prior collective identities and even from a stable modern "I": it stems from the call of the neighbor, behind whom stands God and God's own love, that is, *agape* as moral source. The Samaritan is thus both free and summoned: his freedom is constituted by the call of the other.

Illich describes this as a "new proportionality": a new social relation not grounded in given bonds but in *agape*-love, mirroring the Trinitarian relationship manifested in the Incarnation. In his own words, the parable reveals that "who is my neighbor" is determined by the free act of turning toward the other in love and inviting him into a mutuality that usually goes under the name of friendship (Illich, 2005a, p. 197). The Samaritan discovers himself most deeply precisely by being allowed to love the other; the call of *agape* elevates the proportionality of creation to a level previously unseen. A "new kind of 'ought'" appears here—one that "has a telos" and "aims at somebody, some body; but not according to a rule" (Illich, 2005a, p. 177).

157 Different sources attribute this proverb to Aristotle, St. Jerome or St. Thomas Aquinas. However, there is no evidence that it was used prior to Pope St. Gregory the Great. It is a phrase used to warn that corruption, always reprehensible, is more so when the perpetrator is the one who is supposed to be a model for others. Pope Francis has used it in his writings: "Corruptio optimi pessima, saint Gregory the Great said with good reason, affirming that no one can think himself immune from this temptation" (Pope Francis, 2015, §19).

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For Illich, modernity interrupts this new proportionality. Modern subjects understand proportionality in terms of social contract and freedom as self-determination. The Samaritan, by contrast, neither enacts a contract nor seeks emancipation in the modern sense; he inaugurates a relationship grounded in compassion and call, not in rights and claims. The usual interpretation of the parable, however, has gone in the opposite direction. As a historian of Christianity, Illich surveyed sermons from the third to the nineteenth centuries and identified a decisive shift: the story is read less as an answer to "Who is my neighbor?" and more as a lesson on "how to act", easily integrated into a progressive history of ethics. From within this perspective, as Taylor observes, the parable appears as "a stage on the road to a universal morality of rules" (Taylor, 2005, p. xii). Norms and rules—an ethics of "how" rather than of "who"—thereby corrupt the original message: no rule can predetermine who my neighbor is.

Illich is convinced that a *de-nomolatization*—a liberation from rule-worship—would mean a return to the Samaritan's freedom, dependent only on inspiration and on the contingent, intermittent appearance of *agape*. Yet precisely this contingency and fragility render such freedom unsustainable. As Cayley notes, this form of freedom "stands on a razor's edge", upheld only by trust and forgiveness (Cayley, 2021, pp. 357–358). The tensions that forgiveness introduces into justice, and that love introduces into any social system, make the delicate relational form of *agape* highly vulnerable to being replaced by codified duty, security and control.

For Illich, the institutionalization of neighbour-love—above all, the transformation of the Church into a charity institution—marks this rupture:

> "In the early years of Christianity, it was customary in a Christian household to have an extra mattress, a bit of a candle, and some dry bread in case the Lord Jesus should knock at the door in the form of a stranger without a roof — a form of behaviour that was utterly foreign to any of the cultures of the Roman Empire. You took in your own but not someone lost on the street. [...] And the first corporations they started were Samaritan corporations which designated certain categories of people as preferred neighbours. For example, the bishops created special houses, financed by the community, that were charged with taking care of people without a home. Such care was no longer the

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free choice of the householder; it was the task of an institution" (Illich, 2005a, p. 54).

From a modern perspective, it may seem paradoxical that founding philanthropic institutions could be an affront to freedom. Illich's point is that the gratuity of choice opened by *agape*, as experienced by the Samaritan, becomes impossible under institutionalization. In seeking to secure the supreme freedom of *agape*, the Church transforms it first into an ideal duty, then into a legislated one. As Calley rightly portrays: "The possibility of making a new community out of unrelated people who share their breath turns into the social contract on which the modern state is founded" (Cayley, 2005, p. 36).

Illich calls this process the "mystery of evil" (Illich, 2005a, p. 56): the greatest good becoming the greatest evil, *corruptio optimi pessima*. Modernity thus appears as the offspring of a corrupted Gospel—an inverted form of faith (cf. Cayley, 2021, p. 385). At its root lies the loss of the original vocation through the alliance of Church and power. The founding of charitable institutions does not extinguish the call to love the neighbor, but it does annihilate the original freedom born of *agape* as a desirable, non-imposed duty. For Illich, the attempt "to use power, organization, management, and the law to ensure the social presence" of a love that can only be freely chosen is precisely what justifies speaking of "corruption" and "perversion" (Illich, 2005a, p. 56). The seeds of this perversion, which Illich—like Taylor—locates around the twelfth century, germinate in the corruption of Samaritan morality and in the emergence of institutions that designate "certain categories of people as preferred neighbours" (Illich, 2005a, p. 54): a shift from hospitality to delegated service, and from a free Samaritan to an anxious, "scrupulous" subject (Illich, 2005, p. 193).[158]

158 Modernity, for Illich, wherever we look, is the manifestation of the same internal dynamic. Firstly an authentic freedom born of the Gospel, which brakes with the boundaries of any given culture or society. Out of that experience, a civilization is born whose desire for improvement, expansion and control of the contingent finds no limits. But the original force comes from faith. Its perversion and corruption by institutionalization and normativization is a dynamic that manifests itself throughout his work, an "understatement", as Taylor puts it (Taylor, 2005a, p. ix). To give two examples, in *Deschooling Society* (Illich, 1971), he shows how public education and mass schooling, far from

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According to Illich, then, the institutionalization of charity, missionary outreach and humanitarian efforts has corrupted the original call of Samaritan neighbor-love.[159] It is this diagnosis that Taylor partly adopts and partly resists.

6.1.1. Evaluating Illich's position

David Cayley understands this driving idea of Illich's thought as a conservative and reactionary discourse (cf. Cayley, 2021, p. 382). His description of the deviations from the Gospel that underlie modern institutions and ideologies aims to return to a past time, to an original church, where proportionalities were lived in a natural union between Heaven and Earth and between all human beings. The logic of reactionary thinking is certainly reflected in his writings in what Albert O. Hirschman calls the "perversity hypothesis": "the attempt to push society in a certain direction will result in its moving all right, but in the opposite direction" (Hirschman, 1991, p. 11).

From our point of view, however, Illich's aim is not so much to react and return to a pristine time when everything was better, denouncing ill-constructed good intentions. On the contrary, his *programme* is revolutionary and subversive, defending a social change, trying to go beyond the deceits of the ideologies that justify structures that end up spoiling what the human being is called (vocationally) to be. In a way, he is a Rousseaunian, seeking to humanize human beings by disempowering institutions. He is also a transcendent humanist—an anarchist thinker "at the margins"(cf. Nursey-Bray, 1992, pp. 124–127) —concerned less with political structures in a narrow sense than with the moral core of culture and civilization.

ending inequality and lack of knowledge, increases them. In *Medical Nemesis*, the opening sentence sums it up perfectly: "The medical establishment has become a major threat to health" (Illich, 1976, p. 3).

159 Illich became even more radical in this idea from the 1960s onwards (see Bruno-Jofré & Zaldívar, 2016). In fact, he caused an immense impact in 1970 with his article "The Powerless Church", calling for its withdrawal from specific social initiatives, particularly the US Peace Corps in Latin America at the height of the Cold War. For Illich, the Church's institutional power distances it from the mission entrusted by Jesus to the apostles (cf. Illich, 2018, pp. 134–139). See also "The Seamy Side of Charity", "The Vanishing Clergyman", and "To Hell with Good Intentions" in the same volume (Illich, 2018, pp. 90–127).

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For Illich, the genuine freedom from which a morality of mutuality arises comes from the grace of *agape*.

The charisma–institution dialectic in Illich is often interpreted as a straightforward story of decline: original experiences of grace are inevitably corrupted by their institutionalization. In this respect, his position resembles certain sociological diagnoses. Indeed, authors such as Weber understand the relationship between the charisma of a personality and its institutionalization and bureaucratization (in his words, routinization) as a degradation in terms of suppression of the remnants of enchantment and its changeover as rationalization (cf. Weber, 2013, pp. 497–512, 1996; Miyahara, 1983; Adair-Toteff, 2021). Others, such as Durkheim, distinguish periods of effervescence and the creation of collective values and ideals (with less prominence of charismatic leaders) from other more stable periods of organization and more mechanical or organic solidarity, which also entail a degradation (cf. Durkheim, 2008; P. Smith, 2021).

Francesco Alberoni offers a different perspective that is useful for our purposes. He shifts the focus from individual leaders to entire societies and asks how *nascent states*—moments of collective enthusiasm and founding charisma—are transformed when institutionalized (cf. Alberoni, 1984, p. 7). In Alberoni's account, institutions fulfil a dual function: they "extinguish the nascent state and ensure its continuity in another way" (Alberoni, 1984, p. 216). Some of the original charisma is inevitably lost, but institutions also act as vessels of inheritance. His approach, though criticized as historically thin and conceptually unoriginal (cf. Calhoun, 1986), offers an eloquent alternative to Illich's narrative of unrelieved degeneration. Without denying bureaucratization and rationalization, Alberoni also allows for ethical advancement or growth—precisely what seems absent in Illich's almost uniformly negative reading of Christian history and doctrinal development.

Unlike Alberoni, Taylor does not read rationalization as the hallmark of Western moral progress (cf. Alberoni & Veca, 1988; Taylor, 2011j). On the contrary, rationalization in the form of codification appears, for him, as one of the most visible signs of the degeneration to which institutionalization can lead. Yet Taylor also refuses Illich's stark verdict. Something of the ethical leap inaugurated by Christianity does remain in institutional forms such as the Church. The price of codification, however, is the loss—or at least the obscuring—

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of the state Taylor names the *agape-network*. As later chapters will suggest, the return of such states of *agape* is usually mediated by charismatic figures and leaders with one foot in transcendence and one foot in reality, if the image may be allowed.

In this way, Taylor stands between Illich and Alberoni. He shares Illich's sensitivity to the dangers of institutionalization and to the betrayal of *agape* through codification, but—closer to Alberoni—he insists on the possibility of ethical growth and on the enduring, if transformed, presence of Christian moral sources in modern institutions. It is precisely this mediating position that will allow him to move from the language of "corruption" to that of "mutation", and to rethink the charisma–institution dilemma in terms of *agape-networks* and modern civil society.

6.1.2. Corruption or Mutation?

Taylor openly acknowledges the striking affinity between his own account of modernity and Illich's historical diagnosis: "the basic thesis of my account was similar to Illich's. But I had no idea of the parallels until David Cayley brought Illich's thought to public attention" (Taylor, 2005, p. x). Both trace the origins of modernity to the drive for religious and moral purity characteristic of the Reformation, and both see in the parable of the Good Samaritan an eruption of divine love into the human historical order. Yet their similarities conceal two fundamental differences.

First, Taylor does not describe this history as a *corruption* or *perversion* of Christianity in other places despite occasionally using Illich's term in *A Secular Age*. He prefers the notion of *mutation*: a morally ambivalent transformation within the moral imaginary rather than a straightforward decline. Second, Illich sees institutionalization as necessarily betraying *agape*, whereas Taylor grants institutions a more ambiguous, and potentially indispensable, role—as long as they remain connected to the vertical moral sources that inspired them. In this respect, *agape-networks* become central to Taylor's politics of recognition and to his hopes for democratic renewal.

For both thinkers, the detachment of *agape* from its transcendent source and its relocation within the *immanent frame* marks a de-

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cisive historical shift: what began as transformative, gratuitous love becomes a moral and political impulse to make the world more humane, civilized and egalitarian. Modern altruism retains a trace of grace, but one severed from its embodied origins. This is what Taylor calls *excarnation*. Thus, secularization does not diminish concern for the needy, but it does obscure the freedom of *agape*—a freedom in which the individual is chosen by transcendence and, in turn, freely chooses the other in love. What is lost is the tangibility of love and the mutual presence of embodied persons. Taylor's summary is stark:

> "The enfleshment of God extends outward, through such new links as the Samaritan makes with the Jew, into a network, which we call the Church (...) The corruption of this new network comes when it falls back into something more 'normal' in worldly terms (...) The monstrous comes from a corruption of the highest, the *agape-network*. Corrupted Christianity gives rise to the modern" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 739–740).

The *agape-network* denotes precisely this new mode of fittingness: a dissymmetric proportionality grounded in response to a call rather than in the application of a prior code. It is not reducible to instinct or sentiment—though *agape* involves visceral compassion (*splangnizesthai*)—but anchored in a reference to God and the Incarnation (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 739). Because of this reference, an *agape-network* is not categorical: it does not identify the Incarnation with a particular political order, moral code, or institution. Nor does it supply ontological justification for an ecclesial structure aspiring to worldly power. Instead, it seeks "the further, greater transformation which Christian faith holds out, the raising of human life to the divine (*theiosis*)" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 737), a transformation reaching into the social sphere.[160]

Illich's influence on Taylor is undeniable, but Taylor mitigates the radical discontinuity Illich posits between the Samaritan's *agape* and modern morality. For Illich, every development beyond the original experience of Christianity, including its doctrinal evolution, is a corruption. Taylor, by contrast, sees the benefits modernity has offered to Christianity and solidarity. He affirms the moral importance

160 Taylor uses the theological concept of "communion of saints" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 754) to describe what the *agape-network* consists of, once again with a reference to the *catholic attitude* in his work that we have been defending

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of plural understandings of the good, including those historically derived from *agape*. Thus, although he deploys the language of "corruption" in *A Secular Age*, he elsewhere speaks explicitly of *mutation* (Taylor, 2005, p. x). "Corruption," he notes in another context, has a strongly normative resonance, presupposing a fixed "normal form" from which deviation must be judged (Taylor, 2004, p. 78). By using "mutation," Taylor signals a more neutral, genealogical understanding of moral transformation and safeguards the legitimate role of institutions in modern life.[161]

His judgment of modernity is therefore more ambivalent—and more capacious—than Illich's (Gregory & Hunt-Hendrix, 2014, p. 231; Ricken, 2011, p. 267; Siep, 2011a).[162] Even acknowledging the dangers and malaises of modernity (Taylor, 2004), Taylor can praise Bertrand Russell's universal benevolence as "an important achievement, a milestone in human history" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 255, cf. 572). Similarly, as he argued in an earlier essay, the end of Christendom "made possible what we now recognize as a great advance in the practical penetration of the gospel in human life" (Taylor, 1999b, p. 18). The demands of the Gospel became more effective precisely because they were no longer co-opted by political interests.

This moral advance, however, does not eliminate tragedy. Modernity exposes us to the paradoxes of solidarity: "Amnesty International and Médecins sans Frontières" share the same historical space as "Auschwitz and Hiroshima" (Taylor, 1999b, p. 37). The tension between the heights of moral aspiration and the depths of human

161 He defines cultural mutation in another place: "By 'cultural mutation' I mean a change at once in social discipline, social arrangements and self-understanding which brings about a new human possibility" (Taylor, 1978, p. 133).

162 However, Taylor points out the incompleteness of the project of modernity: "with cultural fragmentation, loss of meaning both individually and socially, and how we might respond to this problem that modernity seems everywhere to create" (Connolly, 2010, p. 43). José Casanova's study is very helpful in situating Taylor's thinking on modernity. Casanova divides accounts of modernity into four types: histories of secularist triumph; defenses of a lost normative age; identification of modernity as a process of internal secularization of Christian principles; and Nietzschean genealogies of the illegitimacy of secular modernity and its moral model as its bastard Christian lineage. Taylor would challenge all these histories but would incorporate into his *zig-zag* history elements of all four types (cf. Casanova, 2010, pp. 267–269; see also Bellah, 2010). For a view of Taylor's modernity and its problems, see (Taylor, 2004, pp. 1–23, 1995d, see also 2017c).

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horror is not a contradiction of Taylor's account but part of the *zig-zagging* history of ethical growth explored in the previous chapter. In this light, Taylor's shift from "corruption" to "mutation" reflects a refusal of Illich's stark dualism. It allows him to hold together two insights: institutions can obscure *agape* through codification, yet they also carry forward—however imperfectly—the moral energies unleashed by the Gospel. This ambivalence is precisely what opens space for the *agape-network* to reappear in modern society, not as a replacement for institutions, but as their necessary critique and renewal.

6.1.3. Institutionalization as nomolatry

Taylor's engagement with Illich allows him to deepen a theme already implicit in *Sources of the Self*: the fetishism of rules characteristic of modern morality. Illich interprets the attempt to convert the *agape-network* into "a code of rules enforced by organizations erected for this purpose" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 737), as a profound betrayal of the relational novelty introduced by the Gospel. Taylor develops this insight by contrasting the *agape-network* with the modern moral order:

> "*agape* [...] can't ever be understood simply in terms of a set of rules, but rather as the extension of a certain kind of relation, spreading outward in a network. The church is in this sense a quintessentially network society, even though of an utterly unparalleled kind, in that the relations are not mediated by any of the historical forms of relatedness: kinship, fealty to a chief, or whatever. It transcends all these, but not into a categorical society based on similarity of members, like citizenship; but rather into a network of ever different relations of *agape*" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 282)

Yet Taylor does not conclude, as Illich sometimes appears to, that codes themselves are the problem. "We can't live without codes, legal ones which are essential to the rule of law, moral ones which we have to inculcate in each new generation" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 743). Illich's point is, according to Taylor, that codes "is not all there is" (ibid.). Reliance on objective norms alone risks a dehumanization of moral agency and obscures the deeper moral sources capable of

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transforming entrenched conflicts. Taylor thus warns that even the most progressive codes can conceal numerous traps:

> "Codes, even the best codes, can become idolatrous traps, which tempt us to complicity in violence. Illich can remind us not to become totally invested in the code, even the best code of a peace-loving, egalitarian, liberalism. We should find the centre of our spiritual lives beyond the code, deeper than the code, in networks of living concern, which are not to be sacrificed to the code, which must even from time to time subvert it" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 743).

In modernity, citizenship among equals replaces the *agape-network*, and code fetishism or nomolatry gains strength (Taylor, 2007b, p. 707, cf. 2011f, pp. 353–354). Code fetshism or nomolatry means "that the entire spiritual dimension of human life is captured in a moral code" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 353) —a reductionism Taylor detects in Kant and in contemporary moral theories such as Rawls's or Habermas's. This reduction impoverishes motivation toward charity and benevolence, which become, in Taylor's words, "too pale and tame" (Taylor, 2007, p. 311) when severed from embodied devotion to God. It also occludes the "vertical dimension" of human life: the articulation of goods and the openness to transcendence shaping interpersonal and social relations.

Within this framework, *agape* acts not as a replacement for justice or codes but as a counterpart capable of transforming hardened situations of violence, injustice, and mutual mistrust. This becomes especially relevant in the politics of recognition, where purely horizontal solutions often fail. In line with the New Testament's freedom from the Law, Taylor's approach seeks to move beyond moralism without dismissing the legitimacy of codes altogether (cf. Herdt, 2014, p. 208). We need moral (and legal, by extension) codes; the point is precisely that no code can capture all situations. Even within the broader structure of ethical life, codes are incapable of accommodating the full range of dilemmas—such as those involving freedom and equality, or justice and mercy.

In this sense, Taylor speaks of two dimensions in which conflict resolution at the social and political levels can be carried out. One is the horizontal dimension, which seeks to find a "fair" point of resolution between the parties, after negotiation, by giving each a fair price to pay for peace. An example of this is the case of Bosnia

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and the partition of the country into two separate communities after the Dayton Peace Accords.

By contrast, vertical horizons have a different transforming potential: "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 or damaging for both parties" (Taylor, 2011f, p. 350). Here Taylor refers to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and the leadership of Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela.[163] Vertical dimension "is one of reconciliation and trust" (Taylor, 2011f, p. 350). It moves in history, like those of Mandela and Tutu, or like that of the Samaritan. This is the horizon of Christian *agape*: unshaped by a fixed code, without formulaic prescriptions, and capable of opening new moral possibilities that no legal framework could predefine. The difficulty, of course, lies in how this primordial freedom coexists with institutional forms within modernity, generating tensions between charisma and institution.

Taylor's conviction is that openness to the vertical dimension, in which *agape* is found, can make us more capable of resolving entrenched conflicts in which all parties have a claim on each other. The application of codes and justice, although necessary, cannot restore the necessary trust between the conflicting parties to allow for the possibility of a new communion. The example of the Truth Commissions shows that *codes are not all there is*.

6.2. Hegelian explorations

The preceding section has shown how Taylor partially receives Illich's critique of institutionalized neighbour-love while deliberately shifting from the language of *corruption* to that of *mutation*. We also explored how Taylor's reading of Illich is tied to his defence of *agape-networks* as relational spaces that stand as an alternative

163 We shall return to this specific case later in our discussion on recognition. In any case, various reports confirm that adopting only the horizontal dimension for conflict resolution is insufficient, as is clearly seen in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina (See, for example, Avramovic, 2017; Wilkes, 2022). In addition, several reports and academic works see the potential of religion and faith-based organizations to achieve higher rates of reconciliation and trust between conflicting factions (See Peruaka, 2003; see also Uysal, 2016).

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to moral codes and resist the "code fetishism" of modernity. Yet this leaves an important question unresolved: how does Taylor understand the role of institutions themselves? To what extent does he share Illich's suspicion of institutionalization, and how does his own account of social order complicate or correct Illich's radical diagnosis? At stake is John Milbank's penetrating question:

> How do we acknowledge the truth of Illich's insights while still saluting the uniquely practical bent of Latin Christianity? How do we allow that some procedure and institutionalization is required without destroying the interpersonal?" (Milbank, 2009, p. 103).

One route toward an answer lies in returning to Taylor's long-standing engagement with Hegel. From early in his career, Taylor has drawn on Hegel to illuminate the interplay between particularity and idealization and to describe how "ethical substance" persists even as its expressions mutate. These insights help clarify Taylor's view of the charisma–institution dilemma. Moreover, Taylor's reflections on Hegelian civil society and political alienation shed light on the institutional spaces—such as NGOs—that arise within the modern *social imaginary* and that bear a complex genealogical relation to *agape*. Nevertheless, as we shall see, however significant Hegel's influence on Taylor may be, it is not sufficient to explain the function of the "*agape-network*".

With this in mind, we turn first to Taylor's reading of Hegel's distinction between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit*.

6.2.1. Moralität and Sittlichkeit in Taylor's perspective

It is generally known that Taylor understands Hegel from both the influence that Romanticism had on him and from the expressivist character of his philosophy as a reaction to the detached character of the rationalist trends emphasizing instrumental reason (cf. Taylor, 1989a, pp. 384–385, 1977a, 1979, p. 72; Browne & Lynch, 2018, p. 66; Honneth, 2018). Moreover, Hegel's concern with overcoming alienation and realizing *Absolute Freedom* provides Taylor with analytical tools to parse political and social alienation as well as the limitations of institutional performance within the immanent framework at work in the modern social imaginary (Cf. Taylor, 2004, 2007b, pp.

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159–211; see also Rosa, 1998; Kühnlein, 2008). By and large, albeit with nuances, Hegel's influence is clear in the importance of Romantic expressivism, the importance of "ethical life" and community in shaping one's identity, and in Taylor's own view of the crisis of representative democracy (Cf. Browne & Lynch, 2018, pp. 67–71).

The latter three aspects can be found in *Hegel's* Sittlichkeit *and the Crisis of Representative Institutions* (Taylor, 1978), a paper given at a conference on the philosophy of history in 1974—that is, shortly before the publication of his well-known works on Hegel (1977a, 1979). The article deals with the crisis of representative democracy, i.e., the lack of adherence of citizens to its institutions. Its thesis is straightforward: "My suggestion is that the present malaise in Western representative democracies can most fruitfully be seen in the language of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit and* the corresponding notion of alienation" (Taylor, 1978, p. 147).[164]

Alienation occurs when rules, as expressed in social practices, cease to command people's allegiance either because they are regarded as irrelevant or are seen as a kind of threat: "alienation arises when the goals, norms or ends which define the common practices or institutions begin to seem irrelevant or even monstrous, or when the norms are redefined so that the practices appear a travesty of them" (Taylor, 1978, p. 141).

This anticipates Taylor's later critique of the fetishism of norms. The crisis of legitimacy in democracy mirrors, analogously, the tension between charisma and institution: institutions lose their animating sources and become hollow, procedural, or coercive. Yet unlike purely structural accounts, Taylor emphasizes that alienation ultimately stems from the *difficulty contemporary people face in defining their own identity*, which is itself shaped by these alienated structures.[165]

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164 The context of the article is also interesting. Taylor is concerned with clarifying the consequences of social fragmentation, i.e., the increasing lack of connections between individuals and society as a whole, applied specifically to participation in the institutions of democracy.

165 Taylor also deals with the problem of legitimacy in *Legitimation Crisis?* (Taylor, 1985i), where he answers in some way to the proposals that explain the crisis of legitimacy of capitalist societies by the contradictions they face (cf. Habermas, 1973). Here Taylor is again Hegelian, in the expressivist and moral sense: "what we need to get clearer [...] is the family of conceptions of the

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Crucially, for Taylor, community, institutions, and shared values are constitutive of self-identity. Human beings are always socially situated; there is no fully atomized self. Sociability is "an essential constitutive condition of seeking the human good" (Taylor, 1985j, p. 292). Institutions and social practices express shared understandings of the human being, society, the natural world, religion, spirituality, and solidarity. These shared understandings form part of what Taylor elsewhere calls our "inescapable frameworks" of morality and spirituality (Taylor, 1989a, p. 3ff).

Yet, it is worth noting that community, including its institutions and common values, is essential for the expression of one's own self-identity, according to Taylor. The individual is always situated, is within society. There is no place for a full human being completely atomized and isolated from society. Sociability becomes "an essential constitutive condition of seeking the human good" (Taylor, 1985j, p. 292). Hegel's distinction between *Moralität*—the sphere of articulated norms and theoretical claims—and *Sittlichkeit*—the pre-reflective ethical life embodied in practices and values—helps Taylor articulate this dynamic. As he writes: "it is of crucial importance whether or not men (sic.) define their identity at least in part by the values and ideas expressed in their common, public institutions, and by the way they are expressed there" (Taylor, 1978, p. 145).

Solidarity with strangers can thus be understood, in Taylor's terms, as part of the *Sittlichkeit* of modern societies: a pre-political moral intuition that precedes legal codification. This aligns with the genealogy traced in previous chapters: the secularization of *agape* has produced a historically fragile but persistent concern for the suffering of the other.

Returning to the charisma–institution dilemma: the existence of NGOs and humanitarian institutions—the "third sector"—can be viewed as one way modernity expresses this moral identity. These

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good life, the notions of what it is to be human, which have grown up with modern society and have framed the identity of contemporary men. This set of conceptions is, of course, essentially linked to the economic and political structures which have developed in the last centuries [...]. It is only by articulating these conceptions that we can identify the conditions of a legitimation crisis of contemporary society. For these will define the terms in which institutions, practices, disciplines, structures will be recognized as legitimate or marked out as illegitimate" (Taylor, 1985i, pp. 248–249).

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institutions are ambivalent products of the *zig-zagging* history of *agape*: they retain a genealogical trace of their origin, even if much has been lost through mutation. They also respond to the modern dilemma of solidarity: high moral demands combined with a diminished articulation of moral sources.

Illich insists that the institutionalization of *agape-networks* constitutes a corruption of Christian identity. We do not suggest here that NGOs are *agape-networks*; rather, they stand downstream from the historical force of *agape*. Despite the losses introduced by institutionalization, NGOs persist as significant sites of self-interpretation for modern subjects—spaces where people seek to satisfy high moral expectations and articulate aspirations toward the Good. Taylor himself notes similar trends in religious identity: younger generations often pursue spirituality and authentic self-expression outside institutional structures, in privatized or fluid forms (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 513–522, see also 1992b, 2003b, 2008). Not infrequently, the channeling of altruistic desire occurs through NGOs and some volunteer work, something that has remained constant and intensifies at times when the need for social cohesion and solidarity is manifest, as most recently in the COVID pandemic (ILOSTAT, 2020), the reception of refugees in Germany in 2015 and throughout Europe during the Ukraine crisis. Philanthropy has been battered by cultural capitalism (Žižek, 2010) and corrupted by power (Illich), but it still invites human beings to seek and do the Good.

6.2.2. Civil society and the role of charitable institutions

To assess how Taylor departs from Illich, we must examine his understanding of civil society, a notion deeply informed by his reading of Hegel. In particular, the genealogical analysis of the *mutations* that led to the separation of state and civil society can lead us to understand the role of entities such as charitable institutions as sites of expression of modern identity and as vehicles of modern high standards of solidarity with others.

For Taylor, civil society refers to those spheres of social life that enjoy relative autonomy from the state. Civil society and voluntary association play an important role in articulating freedom in society: “No society can be called free in which these voluntary associations

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are not able to function" (Taylor, 1995e, p. 258). In several places, Taylor shows Hegel's influence on his vision of civil society. For Hegel, according to Taylor, civil society would be "a separate sphere, but not self-sufficient" (Taylor, 1990b, p. 114, 1991c, p. 132, 1995f, p. 222). Indeed, the sphere of civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) appears in *Philosophy of Rights* within the *Sittlichkeit* as a middle ground between the family and the state (Hegel, 1802, §§ 158–256).[166] For both Hegel and Taylor, it is not only about the existence of autonomous associations free from the tutelage of the State but defines "a pattern of public social life" (Taylor, 1990b, p. 111, 1991c, p. 129, 1995f, p. 219).

What is this pattern? For Hegel, as well as in the debates of his time, two areas were of importance regarding civil society which gave rise, gradually, to the "public", that is, independent of the state: the self-regulating economy and opinion. Moreover, Hegel extended this pattern to include independent associations with non-political ends that "form the basis for the fragmentation and diversity of power within the political system" (Taylor, 1990b, p. 114). It is a third space, then, between the subjectivization and sentimentalization of family life and the objectivity of the State. It is a third sphere, in any case, to escape from the tendency of the State to absolutization, routinization, bureaucratization and the excessive weight of rules. But it is also a space for the construction of one's own identity, collective ties, effective action, and care.

166 Especially in the German speaking context, a distinction is made between *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* and *Zivilgesellschaft*. The former usually refers to society as a whole with emphasis on social structure, private rights and associated institutions. In contrast, *Zivilgesellschaft* refers more to citizen participation and the formation of networks, social movements, organizations and non-governmental associations that seek to influence public affairs with a clear interest in the exercise of citizen rights and responsibilities. Although their meanings are often overlapping, the emergence of the second concept can be understood as the fruit of criticisms of the Hegelian concept of civil society, initiated especially by Karl Marx (1983) and Antonio Gramsci (2014). We note that in this part of our study the meanings overlap, whereby we sometimes refer to Hegelian civil society from the parameters of *Zivilgesellschaft*, where the role of non-governmental organizations involved in altruism has a better fit. On the history of the concept on the German scene, see (Strachwitz, Priller, & Triebe, 2020).

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Taylor expands this view, emphasizing, after Montesquieu and Tocqueville, that civil society is "amphibious": while formally independent of state power, it also penetrates and decentralizes it (Taylor, 1990b, p. 117). This amphibious character of civil society is manifested in *Modern Social Imaginaries*, where Taylor explains the mutations that gave rise to civil society as something independent of the sphere of power (non-governmental, therefore) but forming part of the public space, so that political power is "supervised and checked by something outside" (Taylor, 2004, p. 90).[167]

Taylor also warns of the dangers posed by the adoption of moral codes by the state, especially in the debates about the separation of Church and state. The French model, he argues, is tempted to claim "moral supremacy" out of, basically, fear of, hatred or misunderstanding of religion (Taylor, 2011k, p. 39, see also 2011l, 2017d; Bouchard & Taylor, 2008; Maclure & Taylor, 2011; cf. Gauchet, 1998, pp. 47–50; Ungureanu, 2022). Taylor also argues for the state's neutrality in religious matters and adheres to the need for the state to be based on principles such as the rule of law, human rights and equality. However, the *fetishization* of these principles must be avoided. Fetishization may happen if formulas were used that falsely cover up the dilemmas facing States, including how to integrate the different conceptions of the good life or human fulfillment. Thus, these arrangements—part of the historical sediment that forms our modern moral order—must be applied in practice not as ideological prescriptions but as instruments enabling the state to pursue its aims: the integration of all citizens through liberty, equality and fraternity.

167 Undoubtedly, the amphibious character pointed out by Taylor is manifested in the increasing role given to love in current debates in spheres beyond the family. The more expressivist interpretations of freedom, in which, to some extent, Taylor also participates, and the democratization tendencies of the private sphere reflect the amphibious character of the civil sphere and the interdependence and permeability of its boundaries. Thus, today, family and state, which in Hegel have an antithetical relationship, are increasingly understood as two spheres that are not separated and that are at least "contaminated through each other" (Werner, 2008, p. 123), as expressed by feminist authors such as Luce Irigaray or Judith Butler (2015) who reduce the traditional distance between the political and the private. Taylor, however, has always been more focused on the new valuation of the ordinary in modernity, without really engaging in such debates (cf. Browne & Lynch, 2018, p. 62).

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Within this broader framework, several social theorists have turned to love as a resource for social integration and recognition. In the dialectical space between the self-regulating economy and the sphere of public opinion, civil society offers a domain in which justice and goodness intersect, giving rise to mutual aid, solidarity and altruism. It is here that actions analogous to the Good Samaritan—breaking inherited bonds and inaugurating an *agape*-network—can meaningfully take place.

Debates in contemporary recognition theory deepen this insight. Scholars influenced by Hegel, such as Axel Honneth (1992) or Paul Ricoeur (2005) have sought to recover the role of love—and in Ricoeur's case, *agape*— as an alternative to justice and to the absolutization of norms within each social sphere. As we shall see, their work highlights how *agape* can appear in political and social movements as a transformative force capable of reconfiguring relations, fostering reconciliation and opening new moral horizons.

In this sense, civil society becomes a space where disinterested help, solidarity and altruistic action emerge as genuine possibilities. The symbolic power of the Good Samaritan's act—breaking kinship networks and initiating an *agape-network*—finds here its contemporary analogues.

6.3. The imaginary of solidarity and moral transformation

The preceding discussion may leave the impression that Taylor lacks a fully worked-out theory of institutions. Strictly speaking, this is true: there is no systematic doctrine of institutions in his work. Yet, following Costa's remark about Taylor's "unsystematic esprit de système" (Costa, 2017b, p. 623) we can reconstruct important aspects of such a theory by drawing together his reflections on civil society, social imaginaries and moral sources, especially as they bear on institutions of solidarity and humanitarianism. As we have seen, civil society and sociability are essential spaces for the development of the identity. There, we find the structures that allow some procedure and institutionalization without destroying the interpersonal, answering Millbank's question. To address this problem, it is essential to consider Taylor's notion of the social imaginary, which is the locus of lived ethics (*Sittlichkeit*).

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According to Taylor, "the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely sense of legitimacy" (Taylor, 2004, p. 23). In other place, he refers to it as "background", that is, "a context or framework of the taken-for-granted, which usually remains tacit, and may even be as yet unacknowledged by the agent, because never formulated" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 13; see also Baran, 2013; Dreyfus, 1991; Searle, 1997).[168] The mutations affecting our standards of solidarity and helping others can be explained in terms of shifting social imaginaries. Once the importance of the civil sphere for the construction of collective identity is acknowledged, we can better understand the existence of NGOs, humanitarian agencies and philanthropy as expressions of the modern ideal of social order. Like civil society more generally, these institutions possess an amphibious character: they occupy an intermediate space between the private sphere and constituted power. The legitimacy of their existence, i.e., the faith that people show towards some institutions and which is the basis of their authority (*Legitimitätsglauben*, Weber, 2013, p. 450ff), is associated with how social practices allow the expression of the modern ideal of solidarity and its high moral standards.

In this sense, the legitimacy of institutionalized solidarity is, in a specific historical way, the fruit of successive mutations of the social imaginary. One might say that this story has a "mythical" origin in the parable of the Good Samaritan and develops into modern forms of organized solidarity and their theoretical articulations:

> "Our Outlook is dominated by modes of social imaginary that emerge from what I called the long march and has been shaped in one way or another by the modern ideal of order as mutual benefit. (...) virtually unchallenged benchmarks of legitimacy in our contemporary world —liberty, equality, human rights, democracy—can demonstrate how strong a hold this modern order exercises on our social imaginary. It constitutes a horizon we are virtually incapable of thinking beyond" (Taylor, 2004, p. 185).

Here Taylor does not mention altruism as a benchmark of legitimacy out of our social imaginary. However, as we have seen in the histor-

168 It is important to recognize that social imaginaries rely on an image of pre-ontological knowledge of representations with a clear Heideggerian root (cf. Taylor, 2006).

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ical reconstructions of both *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*, these are part of how human beings make sense of their life together, through the avoidance of suffering and the advent of the *NGO era*.

In any case, in the literature, we find a debate about "humanitarian social imaginaries".[169] Craig Calhoun, in particular, reconstructs the modern imaginary of humanitarianism in explicit dialogue with Taylor (Calhoun, 2008b, 2008c). He deconstructs the "humanitarian imaginary": a vision in which the world is assumed to be progressing and humanitarian emergencies appear as exceptions or accidents. In this imaginary, humanitarian action attempts to respond to the imperative of reducing suffering, but it would be based on the same optimistic bias. Calhoun's historical account shows how humanitarian action as an ethical response to the suffering of strangers has become detached from political action aimed at strengthening human rights. This split between ethically and politically based action can be read as a new version of the charisma–institution dilemma: on one side, an apolitical, morally self-justified response that risks accommodating the status quo; on the other, more structural, lobbying-oriented work that is less immediate but potentially more effective for long-term transformation.

Nevertheless, as several critics note, clarifying the moral order behind humanitarian action can end up merely naming dilemmas without generating real critical leverage over the status quo or the "ideologies of humanitarian space" (Gregory, 2017, p. 105; Fassin, 2012). Somehow, being able to explain solidarity within an unjust moral order justifies that moral order and softens criticisms coming from the system itself (cf. Wilkinson, 2013). Returning to Taylor's framework, social imaginaries and moral orders remain useful tools for interpreting the moral, political and sociological meanings of humanitarianism—provided they are paired with a serious engagement with strong moral sources such as *agape*. However, this step

169 Especially of interest in this discussion is the focus on the mass media impact of distant humanitarian disasters and their negative consequences for the construction of sound thinking or proper political judgment (cf. Boltanski, 1999; Bruckner, 2000; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2013; Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2010). Also of interest is the modern notion of how distant emergencies demand response, along with debates of how to channel the ethical impulses that motivate solidarity with strangers (cf. Ignatieff, 2004, 2017; Rieff, 2002; also of an interest Rawls, 2003; Pogge, 2008).

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must not result in eroding the critical and transformative capacity of organizations engaged in solidarity.

Clearly, the ascendancy of the modern order over the imaginary of solidarity is also shown in its excesses and defects, but this does not have to exhaust its critical power (Taylor, 2004, p. 184, 1999b, p. 25ff.). The social imaginary functions as a pre-normative background that both grounds and exceeds explicit norms, in the manner of hermeneutics. Although this prescription is a source of legitimacy and evaluative judgment, it does not exhaust the normative character (cf. Taylor, 2004, p. 9). The paradigm of the mutation of social imaginaries allows us to understand the changes in what Taylor calls the "normative picture" (Taylor, 2004, p. 159) and its contradictions, false justifications and mismatches. Identifying and deconstructing all of them allows us to point out where action can have an impact in order to be transformative. Thus, the transformative capacity of recognizing imaginaries can take us even further in this task than the critique of ideologies, precisely because we reach the anthropology behind common life, social practices and how human beings take their decisions. Yet imaginaries have limits: they describe the expression of goods within a social order, but not the deeper moral or spiritual transformations that sustain them—a point noted by critics of the imaginary concept, such as Habermas (1988) or Rawls (2005).[170]

The Good Samaritan illustrates how *agape* can interrupt an existing moral order and open a new horizon of meaning. In Taylor's terms, it discloses an *agape-network* within, rather than outside, the world—one that transforms without retreating into nostalgia for past forms of life. However, looking at the phenomenology of what happened to the Good Samaritan, it can be noticed that the first transformation took place in the moral sphere, that is, at the level of his motivation to help the wounded person out of compassion and

170 Maili Steele summarizes the evaluation and criticism of social imaginaries: "Theorists of the imaginary have enabled us to think about normatively charged collective imaginaries as logically prior to the construction of normative principles. What theorists of the imaginary have not done is make specific connections between the ontological background of social imaginaries and the normative utterance" (Steele, 2017, p. 1046). On Habermas' critique, see (Kompridis, 2019). For the critique of Rawls, see (Voice, 2014; Brunkhorst, 2011)

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its connection to a greater good. The Good Samaritan lived within a moral order, which, as always and everywhere, forms "inescapable frameworks for social life" (cf. Taylor, 2008, p. 225, 2011d, p. 374). *Agape,* however, allows him to glimpse another distinct moral order, the *agape-network*. It allows him not to abandon the world but to transform it. It is also what allows those who today are inspired by *agape* to remain motivated toward altruism without falling into excesses of trust, misogyny or the use of the weak for their own personal satisfaction without having to give up the incarnational spirituality that encourages them to transform the world, seeing its goodness and struggling to reduce its harmfulness. But above all, the Good Samaritan reveals that the real driver of transformation, even of any change in the social sphere, is the articulation of moral sources, that is, according to Taylor, in the way human beings give meaning to experience and make decisions concerning their lives.

This dynamic also allows us to understand the specific role played today by faith-based organizations within the humanitarian field. Located within the amphibious space of civil society, these organizations offer a concrete illustration of how mutations in the social imaginary and the moral order shape institutional responses to suffering. They show how *agape*-inspired motivations can be mediated by institutional forms without being extinguished, and how the charisma–institution tension central to Taylor's account reappears within the humanitarian field.

NGO's organizations exemplify the broader Taylorian claim that the modern moral order undergoes mutations rather than simple corruptions, even when their genealogy is entangled with Illich's critique. As we have shown earlier, Taylor sees the rise of civil society—including the proliferation of humanitarian NGOs—as a product of the same historical forces that shaped modern solidaristic imaginaries. These organizations participate in the moral demands of the age and also contribute to defining collective identity, since altruism and concern for the vulnerable have become characteristic markers of modern moral life.

From this perspective, it becomes possible to ask what distinctive role faith-based organizations may play in a secular society, as institutions grounded on a specific altruistic motivation linked to *agape*

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as a moral source.[171] Faith-based organizations constitute a particularly illustrative case of how *agape* continues to operate within the modern social imaginary. Situated in the amphibious space of civil society, they channel motivations rooted in religious traditions into institutional forms that respond to humanitarian suffering. In doing so, they show how *agape*-inspired action is not exhausted by the secular moral order but persists as a living moral source capable of informing contemporary practices of care and solidarity. Although their genealogy is inseparable from the broader mutations that gave rise to modern humanitarianism, their distinctive contribution lies in sustaining a vertical orientation—an openness to transcendence—that can deepen the meaning of altruistic engagement.

At the same time, these organizations face the same pressures that shape the modern imaginary of solidarity: professionalization, bureaucratization, and the trend toward codifying humanitarian action in secular terms (cf. Ager & Ager, 2011; Hollenbach, 2019). Such developments can weaken the charismatic impulse that originally animated many of these institutions, sharpening the tension between witness and effectiveness, compassion and managerial rationality. In Taylor's terms, these dynamics reflect the long process of *excarnation* and the drift toward an *immanent frame* that risks severing *agape* from its embodied, transformational roots. Yet they also highlight the continuing relevance of the charisma–institution dilemma:

171 Faith-based (non-profit) organizations may be defined as "those humanitarian relief and development organizations formed by or with a direct or indirect relationship to a specific faith community" (Khafagy, 2020, p. 3). Such definition, however, is too generic and may include both JRS or Caritas International, but also other organizations that may use violent or anti-human rights means, such as jihadist organizations that threaten personal and global security. Or, more specifically, organizations with very offensive and aggressive methods of proselytizing, which display religious fundamentalism, an instrumentalization of religion for political purposes and a very sharp differentiation with respect to non-believers or those not belonging to the group (Cf. Dietrich & Müller, 2007, pp. 12–13). By faith-based organizations we mean those entities with principles and ideals based on a particular faith dedicated to humanitarian work, providing assistance in areas such as health care, education, community development and disaster relief. Although they may include evangelization or missionary practices in their humanitarian work, here we will focus on their exercise of assistance and advocacy without regard to their possible religious proselytism (cf. Ferris, 2005).

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the challenge of institutionalizing altruism without reducing it to procedural norms detached from its moral sources.

Precisely for this reason, faith-based organizations can play a critical role in today's humanitarian landscape. By remaining connected to strong moral sources, they are able to resist the complete absorption of solidarity into a purely secular, instrumental logic. They function as sites where *agape*-oriented individuals articulate their motivations, renew the background understandings that sustain solidarity, and project their commitments into the wider civil sphere (cf. Uríbarri Bilbao, 2022, p. 47). In this sense, they illustrate the broader Taylorian claim that genuine moral transformation begins at the level of sources and self-understanding, and only subsequently shapes social imaginaries and institutional forms.

6.4. An argument in favor of the non-translatability of agape

The role of faith-based organizations already suggests that *agape* can still find institutional footholds within the modern social imaginary, even under the pressures of secularization and procedural rationality. Their capacity to sustain strong moral sources and to project them into the wider civil sphere reveals how *agape* remains operative as a transformative force, not only in interpersonal relations but also in public life. This observation leads naturally to a broader question: how does *agape* reappear in the contemporary public sphere, amid deep diversity, competing articulations of the good, and the demands of democratic coexistence?

Taylor's answer begins from a recognition of the profound pluralism present in organizations dedicated to the common good and to helping those in need (cf. Taylor, 1994a). He is aware of the diversity of articulations of the good, potentially as many as possible committed individuals, even in a faith organization.

> "Thus we see how today in the sphere of humanitarian work, people of all convictions, religious and non-religious, work side by side. They are in a sense actuated by the same impulse, but some very different ethics lie behind the common dedication in each case: different views of human life, of the possibilities of transformation, of the modes of

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spiritual or mental discipline that are to be engaged in, and so on" (Taylor, 2011c, p. 299).

Shared action here does not imply shared articulations of the good; rather, a common moral impulse is underwritten by divergent ethical backgrounds, different accounts of transformation, and distinct conceptions of the disciplines required to sustain moral life. Many Catholic organizations dedicated to the third sector are, in fact, pluralistic meeting places where people with different ideals converge to work together to pursue a common noble goal.

Such cooperation, however, always faces the risk that deep moral sources will be muted under the pressure of institutional neutrality, efficiency, or the demand for a minimal, supposedly universal "overlapping consensus" (cf. Rawls, 2005, pp. 133–171), Taylor warns that this consensus, while necessary for democratic coexistence, can easily become fetishized, obscuring the plurality of principles at stake and preventing genuine confrontation with the dilemmas facing contemporary societies—including those of diversity, recognition, and the articulation of constitutive goods (Taylor, 2011k, p. 42). In this respect, the experience of humanitarian organizations mirrors a wider structural tension in modern democracies: the need to coordinate action across profound ethical differences without silencing the sources that make such action meaningful.

Taylor uses this argument by referring to the debates on the different models of secularity, particularly focusing on the French model of *laicité* (cf. Maclure & Taylor, 2011). Thus, on the one hand, "we are condemned to live an overlapping consensus" (Taylor, 2011k, p. 47) since it is part of the modern social imaginary, even apart from its establishment in operative principles in a constitutional state. But on the other hand, it is something relatively recent in history, something problematic and still open to adjustments, but which runs the risk of fetishization and of slamming shut many of the dilemmas facing today's societies, such as diversity and recognition (cf. Taylor, 1992a).

In any case, a sample of the fetishization of overlapping consensus comes through the use of neutral languages (see also Taylor, 2011j). Taylor, in dialogue with Rawls (2005) and Habermas (2005), questions the expectation that all democratic participants adopt a single neutral, rational language. Thus, religious speech ends up being asked in these accounts to leave out of its discourse those "extraneous premises that only believers can accept" (Taylor, 2011k,

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p. 49) or demanding their translation into an intelligible language that everyone can understand. Taylor is tough on this pretension, which he even calls *tyrannical*. Taylor points to the pretensions of this language of neutrality as evidence of the difficulties of many rational discourses to truly accept diversity and channel it into a diverse society. The problem, he argues, stems from a persistent Enlightenment prejudice that treats religion as inherently dangerous and views revelation as illegitimate in matters of public concern (cf. Taylor, 2011k, pp. 52–53).

Having recognized this bias, Taylor sees no need to demand of a believer that he should not aspire to articulate and practice in the public sphere the normative contents of his discourse on the grounds that only neutral language can resolve moral-political issues:

> "If we take key statements of our contemporary political morality, such as those attributing rights to human beings as such, say the right to life, I cannot see how the fact that we are desiring/enjoying/suffering beings, or the perception that we are rational agents, should be any surer basis for this right than the fact that we are made in the image of God" (García Caladín, 2010; see Mestiri, 2008; Reder & Schmidt, 2008; Sepúlveda del Río, 2018; Taylor, 2011k, p. 54; Ungureanu & Monti, 2018).

Indeed, in the heat of a discussion with Habermas following these statements, Taylor spontaneously acknowledges that he cannot agree with this distinction between ethics and religion and with discriminating discourses on the basis of deep psychological background (cf. Taylor & Habermas, 2011, pp. 62–63; see also Hoyeck, 2021). Meanwhile, Habermas constantly draws attention to the capacity of religious language to inspire semantic content, even to motivate toward the common good and altruism. But he does not abandon the idea of the existence of a more neutral language that would allow a greater consensus on ethical issues in the public sphere by fulfilling some condition of universality (cf. Holzienkemper, 2016). Hence the requirement of translation of religious language because of its incommensurable character or, in the case of this discussion, because of its significant relationship with just a very small community of speakers:

> "The difference is that religious influences belong to a kind of family of discourse in which you do not just move within a worldview, or within a

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> cognitive interpretation of a domain of human life, but you are speaking out, as I said, from an experience that is tied up with your membership in a community" (Taylor & Habermas, 2011, p. 63).

Taylor's response is remarkably pithy: "The difference is that I'm saying you can't have translations for those kinds of references because they are the references that really touch on certain people's spiritual lives and not others" (ibid.). Religious language refers to articulations of the good, which result in a specific type of normativity unique to a particular spiritual community. The story we have narrated with Taylor shows us that, even if we understand it as a series of mutations in the social imaginary, any translation of concepts that refer to the spiritual heritage, such as *agape*, goes hand in hand with a loss. This loss refers not only to its meaning but also to the possibility of unfolding the full potential of its articulation.

Thus, following the commandment to love one's neighbor through an *agape*-based experience such as the Good Samaritan is undoubtedly not easily translatable into another kind of articulation of good or reasoning that motivates toward philanthropy. Today the parable of the Good Samaritan is typically interpreted through the lens of an *overlapping consensus*: most modern readers praise the Samaritan and fault the priest and the Levite. Not so in Jesus' time, as we know. Any attempt to translate this compassion into alternative moral languages inevitably entails some loss of semantic nuance. *Agape* is not a moral motivator comparable to others that also motivate toward the love of neighbor, for example, natural sympathy, altruism as social interest, the rational vision of the dignity of every human being, or indignation in the face of injustice. *Agape* and the spiritual experience that sustains it are therefore only partially translatable into alternative ethical frameworks. To make *agape* comprehensible, we have only analogy, adaptation, or the use of other translation procedures such as compensation or paraphrasing. However, more is needed to exhaust the semantic meaning of *agape* and its specific way of motivating us to charity.

This would open us to theological problems about the adequacy of spiritual languages or the issue of private languages, which are beyond the scope of this research. Remaining to add is that Taylor sees untranslated religious language operating far more unproblematically within the public space on its own terms and being easily understood by people than Habermas's or Rawls's cautions seem

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to allow. Moreover, religious language provokes political motivation and mobilization. Here Taylor draws reference, not without irony, to Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement:

> “Were Martin Luther King’s secular compatriots unable to understand what he was arguing for when he put the case for equality in biblical terms? Would more people have got the point had he invoked Kant? And besides, how does one distinguish religious from secular language? Is the Golden Rule clearly a move in either one or the other?” (Taylor, 2011k, p. 58, note 13).

In our study, we can understand this allusion to the power of religious language in politics as a plea for *agape* and its effect on the public sphere and civil society through the admiration generated by the person inspired by it and the motivation or elevation of horizons it fosters. The fact that the public understood MLK despite he used religious language is not only an example of an inclusive interpretation of non-public reasons (cf. Rawls, 2005, p. 250), but somehow, he was able to connect those who listened to his speeches with a source of meaning strong enough to mobilize for social change (cf. Johnson, 2001). Beyond the argument of respect for religious language and the limitation of neutral language, there is behind Taylor’s conviction that religion helps in the construction of the collective narrative and that there are certain charismatic figures who manage to elevate conflictive situations to a different order largely because of their connection with transcendent moral sources.[172]

Beyond this, it is important to clarify that speaking of the “untranslatability” of *agape* does not mean that its effects or its practical expressions become opaque within a secular context. What remains untranslatable, in Taylor’s sense, is not the action inspired by *agape*

172 Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly, for their part, describe Martin Luther King’s speeches as a moment of the sacred, which they describe as a “physis phenomenon," drawing on Homer and his description of the way real things appear before us, as experiences in which they appear, take us over and hold us for a certain time and finally let us go: “Many people, for instance, felt their sense of themselves and their world come into focus during the speech by Martin Luther King Jr. on the National Mall” (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 202; cf. Taylor, 2011a, p. 123ff). The “I Have a Dream” speech is an example of sacred as physis at its best: “paradigms will shift and the culture will come to understand itself in new and more shining and meaningful ways” (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, p. 220).

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—such as compassion, hospitality or neighbor-love—nor the capacity of secular interlocutors to understand or even admire such action, as the case of Martin Luther King illustrates. What resists translation is the full spiritual articulation that gives *agape* its meaning for believers: the reference to Incarnation, grace, *theosis*, or to a divine call that constitutes the agent's freedom. Actions motivated by *agape* can enter the shared space of an *overlapping consensus*, but the moral source from which they arise cannot be rendered into neutral moral language without loss. Thus, there is no contradiction between *agape* functioning as a powerful motivator of unneighborly love in a pluralistic society and its conceptual irreducibility to secular categories such as sympathy, humanitarian concern or respect for dignity. The practical convergence that takes place in humanitarian or civic action coexists with a deeper divergence of moral sources. The idea of untranslatability therefore marks the limits of conceptual equivalence, not the limits of mutual intelligibility or cooperation in the public sphere.

The role of religious language—and of those who speak from within it—should not be underestimated in the public sphere. In this sense, charitable organizations can be that space where individuals can express the way of life (*Lebensform*) that is born of the love of neighbor motivated by *agape*. Beyond the possibility of using rational language for dialogue with others or using instrumental reason to achieve ends, the possibility of the spontaneous use of religious statements in the public space is important for the identity of individuals and thus for organizations within civil society. Taylor's point is that such spontaneous exercise is also for the benefit of society as a whole.

Taylor's reliance on religious language stems from his general view of language. Language allows for a kind of reflective consciousness that goes beyond its merely designative or agreement-facilitating function (cf. Taylor, 1991a).[173] Language facilitates the transformation

173 Language includes speech and writing, designation, discussion, agreement, of course, but also bodily actions, enactments, gestures, posture, tones of voice, art, the way of giving meaning to what is lived, and openness or closedness to transcendence. Each of these modes expresses, but more crucially, they constitute and signify. Language, including religious language, encapsulates culture and value (cf. Taylor, 2016, p. 333). With his vision of language, beyond its role of facilitator of agreements, Taylor wants to point out the importance

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of the human being and social reality. Furthermore, it makes it possible to give meaning to what is beyond life, "metabiological meanings", among which is *agape*, as we shall see when speaking of transcendence. These meanings, also called human meanings,

> "concern goals, purposes, and discriminations of better or worse, which can't be defined in terms of objectively recognizable states or patterns. If what I seek is a meaningful life, or a profound sense of peace, or to be at one with the world, to be reconciled with things, to enjoy deep communion with my loved ones, and the like, what I'm after can't be captured in some objectively identifiable pattern" (Taylor, 2016, pp. 91–92).

Beyond a theory about language in the public space and the use of *subtler language* capable of inspiring and motivating,[174] Taylor draws attention to the need not to be too fixated on the use of codes. Hence the importance of civil society institutions inspired by religious values based on *agape*, which facilitate and bring closer the normative articulation of strong evaluations at the individual moral level, as well as at the social and political level (cf. Taylor, 2016, pp. 192–193).

6.5. The place of agape in social philosophy

The analysis developed in this chapter has shown that *agape* does not disappear in modernity but undergoes a series of mutations that shape both the social imaginary of solidarity and the institutional practices that embody it. By examining the charisma–institution tension from Illich through Taylor, we have seen how *agape* can be obscured by codification and proceduralism, yet also mediated—however imperfectly—by the institutions of civil society, including humanitarian NGOs and faith-based organizations. These organiza-

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of giving meaning to our lives and also to why we care for others. That is why language defines and redefines "our desires and longings in order to be able to live with the pattern of fulfillments and frustrations we undergo. This turns out to be an unending human task, which in its later modes we could describe as: finding the meanings which can make sense—bearable sense—of our lives" (Taylor, 2016, p. 63).

174 We will take a closer look to charismatic characters and their use of language in chapter 8.

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tions demonstrate that strong moral sources can still find expression within the modern imaginary and that *agape* retains a social and cultural presence even under the pressures of secularization and excarnation.

This insight opens the way to the next stage of our inquiry. Until now, we have considered *agape* primarily as a moral source that animates individual motivation and shapes social imaginaries indirectly through practices, institutions, and collective self-understandings. In the following chapter, we turn to a different but complementary dimension: the place of *agape* within social philosophy, particularly in Taylor's theory of recognition.

Taylor's work on recognition is one of his most influential contributions to contemporary political theory. Yet, as we will argue, this discourse also implicitly presupposes elements that resonate strongly with the logic of *agape*: the possibility of moral transformation in and through relationality, the opening of new horizons beyond entrenched conflicts, and the role of generosity, forgiveness, and the vertical dimension in reconfiguring social bonds. These themes—already anticipated in Taylor's reflections on the Good Samaritan, the *agape-network*, and the vertical space of reconciliation—reappear with particular force in debates on identity, multiculturalism and the politics of recognition, where Taylor's authority is widely acknowledged (cf. Iser, 2019; Browne & Lynch, 2018, p. 35; Abbey, 2000, pp. 55–99; N. H. Smith, 2002; Stahl, 2013, pp. 72–94; Correa Román, 2022).

As we have already introduced in this chapter, *agape* can play a role in conflict resolution and social transformation. Through openness to the vertical dimension, it is possible to foster relationality within society, collective articulation of goods, and forgiveness and generosity as a way of opening new horizons. As we will try to show, these elements found in Taylor's theory can best be understood as the presence of *agape* in his approach, even though he does not explicitly mention its role. To a large extent, the next chapter will attempt to show that, as other authors have explicitly attempted to do in their theories of recognition, we can trace the influence of *agape* in Taylor's thinking on recognition and multiculturalism. Indeed, we think that understanding his position on recognition from *agape* may rekindle some lost interest in his theory.

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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

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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).[175] 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

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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).[176]

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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.

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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;[177] 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.[178] Such an account would need, at a

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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

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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.

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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; Reder & Finkelde, 2014, pp. 262–265).

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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:[179]

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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

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> "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).[180]

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.

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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 interesselosen Hilfeleistung ergänzt" (translated by S.G.)].

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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).[181]

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).

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situations threatened by disrespect and cycles of revenge.[182] *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).

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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).[183]

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.).]

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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).[184]

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 Abschot tung gegenüber einer Welt, zu der es

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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.)].

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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,[185] 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)

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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)[186] to the importance of the recognition of others in the construction of one's own subjectivity, as Honneth also points out.[187]

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).

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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

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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.[188] 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.

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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 goal". 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.[189] Thus,

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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-

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> "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

cusing 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.

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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.[190] *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).

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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

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the limits of the present" (Gadamer, 1975, pp. 287–288).[191] 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).[192] 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)].

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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*[193], 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).[194] Taylor

193 Roughly put, the principle of charity says that, when interpreting someone, you have no choice but to ascribe to her overall logicality 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

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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).[195]

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

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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.)

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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.[196] 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).

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a merely ecumenical "reconciled diversity" (Haus, 2011, p. 211),[197] 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).[198]

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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

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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 Hoyeck, 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.[199] 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;

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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][200] 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.

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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 Kymilcka's view, contains in itself the good of the state, the good of society, and the good of the people.[201]

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).

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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).[202] 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).[203]

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.[204] In his solution, religion

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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

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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).[205]

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).[206]

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

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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)].

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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). he 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.[207] 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 be gives to the scapegoat phenomenon" (Taylor, 1999b, pp. 28–29).[208]

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).

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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

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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—[209] 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).

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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.[210]

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).[211]

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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

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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-

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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).

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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).[212] 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.

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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

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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,

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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 Desmon 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.[213]

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).[214] 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).

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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-

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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*.

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8. Agapeic Transcendence

Throughout our study, we have referred to transcendence as a key to understanding *agape* in Taylor's usage. A dedicated examination is therefore needed to clarify *agape's* distinct nature as a moral source, its ontological specificity, and its transformative power within Taylor's framework. This problem was clearly seen in both the examination of moral realism and in the history of the secularization of *agape*, for *agape* differs from other immanent sources by the transformation brought about by its openness to transcendence. Moreover, delving into transcendence should help us to better understand how *agape* functions as a moral motivator.

In this chapter, we will approach how Taylor explicitly comes closer to the definition of transcendence, especially in *A Secular Age*, where we will see its linkage with concepts such as transformation or the afterlife. Regardless of the endless debate surrounding the relationship of transcendence and imminence in Taylor, we will examine it from the category of *catholic attitude*. Moreover, we will examine Taylor's central trialogue debate with Martha Nussbaum and Friedrich Nietzsche on transcendence and fullness by refocusing it on our main question: the love of the neighbor from *agape*. As we will see, we will not get much clarity in Taylor's explanation of what we will call *agapeic transcendence*, agreeing with many of his criticisms. In any case, we will examine Taylor's trialogue debate with Martha Nussbaum and Friedrich Nietzsche on transcendence and fullness, however, by refocusing it on our main question, that is, on the love of the neighbor from *agape*. Finally, we will mention several important points of Taylor's later works better to understand *agape* and its relationship with openness to transcendence: the invitation to use indirect hermeneutics as a way of using reason in the domain of faith and human meanings, the importance of morally exemplary charismatic characters and the use of what he calls *subtler languages*.

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8.1. The concept of transcendence according to Taylor

Defining transcendence is always a dicey ground in both philosophy and theology. The search for *transcendence* in the history of philosophy is associated with the search of human beings for the substratum of reality. *Transcendence* and *immanence* are correlative terms, and their definitions, therefore, must also be associated with each other: if tangible reality is characterized as *immanence*, the term *transcendence* would be its correlative as that which is beyond that reality. Throughout the history of ideas, there have been different ways of understanding transcendence: "Transcendence can be described as God, the absolute, Mystery, the Other, the other as other or as alterity, depending on one's worldview" (Kolmer, Wildfeuer, Krings, Baumgartner, & Wild, 2011, p. 1540; see also Dalferth, 2012, pp. 147–153; Stoker, 2012; Poláková, 1995, pp. 16–24).

Rather than rehearsing these typologies in detail, what matters for our purposes is how Taylor seeks a notion of transcendence grounded in lived self-interpretation. By using *transcendence*, Taylor tries to find a generic term to give an account of religion as it is lived by individuals, that is, from the perspective of the self-interpretations with which individuals try to understand themselves and "give meaning" (cf. Abbey, 2010, p. 10; see also Taylor, 1977b, 1985p, 1985d, 1985q, 2003b, 2012b). By "give meaning," Taylor does not refer to the linguistic meanings contained in a religious creed or morality but rather refers to the hermeneutics of the "life meaning," the "meaning for us," the "landscapes of meanings" that are part of human understanding (cf. Taylor, 2016, pp. 216–219). In that way, he tries to avoid engaging in debates concerning philosophical theology or onto-theology.[215] This is why the whole question around belief and unbelief is approached from the articulation of the conditions

215 However, in *A Secular Age,* we find a reference to postmodernism and its moral motivation towards the good with the stranger based on universal human dignity: "the farther one moves to a 'post-modern,' 'anti-humanist' position, the more a passionate commitment to universal rights is without grounding in the nature of things, and without hope of reward or fulfillment, the more unmotivated in traditional terms this commitment is, as with Derrida for instance, then the more it is plainly powered by a sense of dignity, the sense of a demand laid on us by our very lucidity" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 695, see also 586).

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of moral and spiritual experience, not from the specific normative content of these experiences, whether believing or not:

> "In order to get a little bit clearer on this level, I want to talk about belief and unbelief, not as rival *theories,* that is, ways that people account for existence, or morality, whether by God or by something in nature, or whatever. Rather what I want to do is focus attention on the different kinds of lived experience involved in understanding your life in one way or the other, on what it's like to live as a believer or an unbeliever as a first rough indication of the direction I'm groping in, we could say that these are alternative ways of living our moral/spiritual life, in the broadest sense." (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 4–5).

Notwithstanding, he regards this as only a provisional, even "prudent (or perhaps cowardly)" understanding of religion (Taylor, 2007b, p. 15), acknowledging the need to find, perhaps, a better one in the future (cf. Taylor, 1999e). Despite that, he fits the dichotomy between transcendence and immanence, typical of the "particular Civilizational site of the former Latin Christendom" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 21), into his definition of religion. Thus, he speaks in a traditional way about the idea of

> "an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, or whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it" was "the great invention of the West" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 15).

In any case, transcendence and immanence are examined from the perspective of moral articulations. What interests him, therefore, is how the world is lived in our social imaginary, especially in the contemporary world, where a closure to transcendence coexists with a discomfort within the immanent, due to the fragility of sense, the monotony of life, and the emptiness of everyday life (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 299–321). Against this modern malaise, it makes sense that Taylor speaks of religion from how believers and unbelievers give meaning to their lives, that is, from what frameworks or imaginaries they understand themselves. Taylor finds the universal presence in the moral and spiritual experience of every human being that is the search for fullness:

> "We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity,

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> or condition, lies a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worth while, more admirable, more what it should be" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 5).

Fullness, then, brings together a moral and spiritual aspect that unfolds in the meaning we give to our life or certain aspects of it and, at the same time, to some kind of activity, place, or condition that leads us to use terms such as deeper, richer, more admirable. To speak of fullness in these terms, in any case, opens the door to transcendence (cf. Halsema, 2012; Schweiker, 2014; Liebsch, 2018). Thus, it links the discussion of the goods and ways of living with the sources of fullness in a way that these do not become alternatives to modern values but as a possibility in the face of the lack of articulation of modern goods and their relevance in making ethical claims (cf. Sciglitano, 2019b). Taylor accepts and reconstructs in his historical narrative why we have arrived at a plural and secular age in which both moral sources and sources of meaning have multiplied. In that sense, he concedes the plausibility of experiencing fullness from a non-transcendent source. By all accounts, it is within the parameters of fullness that Taylor understands transcendence: "instead of asking whether the source of fullness is seen/lived as within or without, […] we could ask whether people recognize something beyond or transcendent to their lives" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 16).

If the answer is positive, and if *agape* is what we are referring to, then Taylor introduces a way of understanding fullness that is distinctive with respect to other ways. Taylor speaks of "transformation." The uniqueness of this kind of experience of fullness links with his twofold conception of religion. On the one hand, religion as openness to transcendence refers to the belief in a force that is beyond life. On the other hand, such a force is accompanied by "the connected aspiration to a transformation which goes beyond ordinary human flourishing" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 510).

The second criterion distinguishes between transformation and human flourishing. While the latter refers, simplistically, to human development "with no relation to anything higher" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 151), transformation, as Taylor understands it, is what we can call *agapeic transcendence*.[216] We are dealing with a form of transforma-

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216 The term "agapeic transcendence" is taken from (Vanheeswijck, 2012). Many references to this way of understanding transcendence from *agape* are found

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tion that may be understood in terms of the dynamics of renouncing *life-goods* for the sake of a greater good, a *hypergood*, motivated by the articulation of a *constitutive good*. However, in the context of openness to transcendence within moral and spiritual life, it can be understood that by Transformation he refers to the moral predicament of the spiritual experience of *agapeic transcendence*: "the love which God has for us, and which we can partake of through his power. In other words, a possibility of transformation is offered, which takes us beyond merely human perfection" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 20).

Indeed, we already referred to transformation as a distinctive feature of *agape* earlier when we spoke of the secularization of *agape*, more specifically, to the difference between Christianity and the neo-stoicism of Justus Lipsius. He also alluded to this transformation in *Sources of the Self* when referring to Dostoyevsky, who brings together the central idea of transformation through the love of God of the Christian tradition. (Taylor, 1989a, p. 452).[217]

The transformation is coupled with the aforementioned openness to *beyond life*.[218] In this way, the transformation that *agape* suggests

in the thought of William Desmond, for whom God is the "agapeic transcendence" (Desmond, 1995, p. 195; see also 2008; Duns, 2020). On the relation of transcendence, *agape*, and the sacred in Taylor, it is worth reading his dialogue with Richard Kearney (2016, pp. 76–92).

217 Dostoevsky is perhaps one of the authors who has most influenced Taylor throughout his career and in shaping his Christian faith (Taylor, 2020a, pp. 59–78). Taylor himself affirms this when he acknowledges that his theistic perspective or openness to transcendence owes much to the dramas and characters presented by the Russian author in some of his novels, especially The Brothers Karamazov (Dostoyevsky, 2002). As he said in *Sources of the Self,* Dostoevsky "has framed this perspective better than I ever could here" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 518). For parallels between Taylor and Dostoevsky, see (B. K. Ward, 2014).

218 Roberto Esteban Duque distinguishes five distinct aspects in Taylor's concept of transcendence: "first, going beyond; second, positioning oneself from a new point of view from which the existing order of the world is questioned; third, putting under the critical prism the formulations in use in the world, putting oneself beyond in order to make an evaluation; fourthly, to assume the implicit universality, that is, the possibility of weakening the link with one's own community in order to generate new ways of thinking, practicing philosophy and living religion; finally, transcendence expresses the possibility of opening up to a way of being in life and in the world where something beyond opens up for the human being, moving from human prosperity alone

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comes from outside the subject and takes him beyond himself, beyond life, and beyond human flourishing. In his own words:

> "I want to focus (...) also on the perspective of a transformation of human beings which takes them beyond or outside of whatever is normally understood as human flourishing, even in a context of reasonable mutuality (that is, where we work for each other's flourishing). In the Christian case, this means our participating in the love (*agape*) of God for human beings, which is by definition a love which goes way beyond any possible mutuality, a self-giving not bounded by some measure of fairness. We grasp the specificity of this belief only by taking it from two sides, as it were, in terms of what it supposes as a supra-human power (God), and in terms of what this power calls us to, the perspective of transformation it opens" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 430)

Once again, Taylor's nuance about *agape* is much broader than the appeal to grace, self-denying love, and the invitation to supererogatory acts. The route of contact with an external moral source remains, but with the added meaning of *beyond*. This qualifier alludes, on the one hand, to an eschatological aspect of hope in a life beyond the biological one (Taylor, 2007b, p. 20). But, on the other hand, also an openness to the meaning of one's own life by turning to experiences and narratives open to transcendence. In a way, it is to move from "first person" narratives, where experiences have meaning only for me and what moves me, to the perspective "in the second- or third-person," where we speak of meaning as something obtained in dialogue and encounter with something external to me (cf. Taylor, 2016, p. 183). Here is what lies behind the transformative experience of *agape*, of God's love, which opens the way to the encounter with the other and the love of the neighbor, as well as the transformed

as a goal to a salvation of complete virtue" (Esteban Duque, 2020, p. 95; cf. Sepúlveda del Río, 2019, pp. 78–95). ["primero, ir más allá (going beyond); segundo, posicionarse desde un nuevo punto de vista desde el cual se cuestiona el orden existente en el mundo; en tercer lugar, poner bajo el prisma crítico las formulaciones al uso del mundo, ponerse en un más allá para evaluar; en cuarto lugar, asumir la globalidad implícita, es decir, la posibilidad de debilitar el vínculo con la propia comunidad para generar nuevos modo de pensar, filosofar y vivir la religión; finalmente, trascendencia expresa la posibilidad de apertura a un modo de estar en la vida y en el mundo donde se abre un más allá para el ser humano, pasar de la sola prosperidad humana como meta a una salvación de virtud completa" (translated by S.G.)].

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possibility of conviviality and reconciliation between human beings and warring communities (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 736–744).

If we look closely at *agape* from the perspective of moral motivation, transcendence is both the origin and the goal, as we already saw talking about the phenomenology of the action of the Good Samaritan. In words that we already visited, "*agape* is both path and destination" (Taylor, 2007a, p. 604). That is, what is sought with *agape* is not the right motivation for achieving an act that was previously judged as just or good, as in the Kantian morality of duty. Rather, what is pursued by being motivated by *agape* is to be more in contact with the love of God through acts and attitudes as the meaning of one's life.

Taylor also describes agape phenomenologically as a "call," a gentle pressure by which divine love invites a response (Taylor, 2007a, pp. 20, 739). This call generates a "movement of love," a desire to participate in what is given (Taylor, 2007a, p. 81). Although such language may evoke Levinas's account of transcendence as relation to the Other, Taylor rejects a heteronomous reading: the call is always mediated through the subject's own self-interpretations. Hence agape operates bidirectionally—toward the transcendent, as origin and goal, and toward the immanent, as the source of moral motivation that moves the agent beyond self-enclosure.

Moreover, in the case of *agape*, compassion toward the stranger is reinforced by a bodily experience, described as embodied pity, as moving "outward from the guts" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 115), as a reaction "in the bowels" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 741), as we already mentioned before. Such a bodily reaction is captured in the New Testament verb *splangnon*, used by Taylor in its middle voice, *splangnizesthai*.[219] In Taylor's view, the incarnational movement of *splangnizesthai* enables the new compassion-based interpersonal relationships of *agapeic*

219 This is indeed how the compassionate movement of Jesus is described in the Gospels, as distinctive and qualitative of divinity. The verb appears in diverse inflections, for example, in Jesus' encounter with the widow who lost her son (Lk 7:14), when he is moved by the death of Lazarus (Jn 11:33–34) in the story of the prodigal son (Lk, 15:20), when Jesus saw the hungry multitudes following him (Mt 9:36, 14:14; 15:32; Mk 8:2), around several healings (Mt 18:27, Mt 20:34; Mk 1:41; Lk 7:13), certainly also in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:33) and elsewhere in the Gospel. It is, therefore, an incarnated response to the pain of the other from an inward affection that becomes the model for forming the *agape-network* of which we spoke earlier.

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transcendence, not the "excarnation" of agency, rules, and rational standards (cf. Redick, 2018; Kühnlein, 2019, pp. 138–141).

Through participation in *agape*, new social horizons are also achieved "fitted together in a dissymmetric proportionality (...)which comes from God, which is that of *agape*, and which became possible because God became flesh" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 739). In Taylor's understanding, this incarnational perspective of the morality of compassion provides a rediscovery of how "life in our natural surroundings, as well as bodily feeling, bodily action, and bodily expression, can be channels of contact with fullness" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 766). Fullness, here understood as the impulse towards something greater, beyond life and profoundly transforming human life, inter-human relations and social coexistence.

In taking stock of this vision of *agapeic transcendence*, Taylor is making a central argument of his philosophy and even of his own Christian point of view. By appealing to what is beyond life, transformation beyond fulfillment, he tries to eliminate the dangers of exclusive humanism and atomistic, reductionist, or excarnated anthropological versions of human nature and its moral, political, artistic, and religious expressions. However, it is not just a matter of pious considerations and of presenting his own way of living his faith.[220] Indeed Taylor admits that *agape* "cannot be a matter of guarantee, only of faith" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 701).

8.1.1. The eschatological perspective of agape

One of the fragilities of the *agapeic transcendence* concept is that it can only be posited from the standpoint of faith. Although Taylor fights for the normalization of religiously based motivation and even has an open and generous position towards the use of reasoning with theological content in the public sphere (cf. Taylor, 2011a; Taylor & Habermas, 2011), the truth is that the potential of *agape* can only be felt and unveiled in its completeness by those who are already on a moral map oriented towards the transformation of

220 Richard Bernstein eloquently describes it as "nondogmatic (…), open to new forms of lived experience, flexible, pluralistic, and sensitive to the political and social conditions of the ‚immanent frame'" (R. Bernstein, 2008, p. 16).

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divine love. In any case, following Taylor, the only ethics that can foster personal and social fulfillment is one that is open to divine transcendence (cf. Crittenden, 2021, pp. 5, 250–251). Only ethics open to transcendence provides an effective basis for respecting the dignity of every human being in every possible circumstance. Yet this would seem to exclude all those who do not have faith. However, Taylor believes that all of us, believers or non-believers, are fully imbued with an existential dimension that leads us toward encounter and communion.

For Taylor, moral crises and interpersonal encounters often open us—believers or not—to a "vertical" dimension in which love grows through vulnerability and mutual recognition. Whenever a human being opens up to both dimensions, "love calls for growth in openness and the ability to accept others" (Francis, 2020, §95; cf. Taylor, 2020b). Therefore, for Taylor, "authentic and mature love and true friendship can only take root in hearts open to growth through relationships with others" (Taylor, 2020b).

This anticipatory confidence is at the root of the eschatological dimension of *agape*: "suppose the highest good consists in communion, mutual giving and receiving, as in the paradigm of eschatological banquet" (Taylor, 2007, p. 702). Taylor illustrates this with parental love as communion: "where a bond of love arises, (...) where each is a gift to the other" (Taylor, 2007, p. 702). He also refers to the sphere of "reconciliation and trust" into which charismatic leaders lead whole societies, which "points beyond any merely intra-historical perspective of possible reconciliation" (Taylor, 2007, p. 706).

In the same way, anyone who feels the demand to strive for solidarity with the neighbor, even within an immanent frame, is imbued by the same sense of communion and bond of love and feels a non-categorized desire to achieve fuller expression of the demands of the Gospel. This generates what he calls an "ecumenism of friendship," a shared struggle—across belief and unbelief—for justice and human dignity.(cf. Taylor, 2021b, pp. 495, 505). Here lies the outflow of love in the union of believers with other beings of goodwill who work for justice and human dignity, as is the case in many faith-based charitable organizations. This level, in short, expresses that we are all made for love, that the same desire for the union of all human beings, in its different levels of universality and particularity, manifests the same

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love of Jesus Christ that will reach its culmination beyond life (cf. Taylor, 2003a, p. 15).

Finally, the eschatological dimension of *agapeic transcendence* not only allows us to unite individuals and communities on a broader level than consensus and agreements or the confession of the same faith can reach. It would also succeed in uniting the mental-emotional space of personal ethics, where we orient our decisions and our identity to our relative position toward the good on our moral map, and the broader and deeper space of shared ethics and moral frameworks in which higher ends and models of human fulfillment are discovered (cf. Ricken, 2011, p. 369). Taylor calls the latter "agapeic space" (Taylor, 2021a), which we can understand as a synonym for the *agape networks*. From this perspective, human history can be read as a slow growth of the ethical vision that leads teleologically back towards *agape*, as we saw above. Thus, whenever any individual succeeds in living from a deep and harmonious articulation of his or her identity, or whenever a community is able to overcome divisions by reaching broader and fuller levels of human coexistence, the *agapeic space* opens up. A space of communion, dialogue, exchange, mutual enrichment, recognition of the other, of giving and receiving generously. Until finally, both individuals and societies are up to the standards of the demands of this *agapeic space,* which are the same demands of the Gospel (cf. Taylor, 2021b, pp. 501–505).

Such a union of personal stories and History as a whole towards a focal point beyond time and life is a characteristic that puts us, once again, before the *catholic attitude* of Taylor, who perhaps here more clearly accommodates the Christian message to his philosophical endeavor. As Lubac says, "Christianity alone continues to assert the transcendent destiny of man [sic] and the common destiny of mankind" (Lubac, 1988, pp. 140–141). The unfolding of history, full of ontological density and fruitfulness, is "the penetration of humanity by Christ" (Lubac, 1988, p. 141). In Taylor, however, such a point of destiny is *agape* (Taylor, 2024, p. 554).[221] Individuals walk towards

221 Sciglitano (2019a) thinks that the fact that the story's focal point is *agape* and not Christ would separate Taylor from a theologically orthodox Catholic view. For a complementary view on this and other points on the eschatology used by Taylor, see (G. Ward, 2010).

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agape when they have "points of contact with fullness," described as moments of being "surprised by love" (Taylor, 2007, p. 730).

At the social level, we approach our destiny when we read the "signs of the times (...) where a chance seems to offer itself to extend the area of compliance with these [the Gospel] demands" (Taylor, 2021a, p. 502). Even modernity and its occlusion of motivation and transcendence can be seen as a sign of the times by elevating the moral demand for the love of neighbor. Thus, Taylor maintains that "religious longing, the longing for and response to a more-than-immanent transformation perspective, (...) remains a strong independent source of motivation in modernity" (Taylor, 2007, p. 530) and remains so today.

8.1.2. The ambiguity of Taylor's concept of transcendence and the catholic attitude

The above may shed light on the evaluation of some of the criticisms of Taylor's view. Ian Fraser (2003, 2005) and, more sharply, Thomas Rentsch (2011) have criticized Taylor's account of transcendence for its lack of ontological clarity and its avoidance of classical problems such as the immanence–transcendence relation. Their surprise is understandable, given the centrality Taylor assigns to religion and to *agape* in his moral anthropology. Somehow, many demand that he provide his own moral proof of the existence of God. Kant himself, in perhaps the most paradigmatic formulation of this argument, already admits that this argument does not provide objective proof of God's existence (Kant, 2001, 5:450; see also Ricken, 2004; Tomasi, 2016). Kant links accepting the premise that there is a God, as *Summum Bonum* and as the moral cause of the world, with the postulation of happiness, human flourishing, as the highest possible good in the world. As for Taylor, the challenge is somewhat more significant, as his argument somehow implies the existence of a transformation related to the transcendent and goes beyond happiness or fullness as the highest immanent good in this world (cf. R. J. Bernstein, 2009).

Taylor, however, is not concerned with these questions. Instead, what underlies Taylor's reflections on religion and transcendence is the search for an anthropology that makes sense of how human beings give meaning to their moral predicament and social practices,

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with a narrow relation to other philosophical disciplines, especially drawing from hermeneutics. That is, by the way in which human beings make sense of their lives. Furthermore, he is concerned with the possibility of openness to transcendence within the immanent frame and the modern social imaginary, following the transformations we have observed throughout our historical reconstruction, including the collapse of the transcendent into the immanent through the rise of naturalism and the decline of moral articulations. In any case, as we have said, Taylor is not particularly concerned with studying these aspects from a purely theoretical approach. As he himself says, in response to Rentsch's criticisms:

> "Now to 'transcendence.' Here there are numerous misunderstandings—the essential one is that I am often accused, by referring to my book, of having a certain view of what transcendence is and what it consists of Rentsch is hence not alone here (though he adds the novelty that my conception of transcendence is onto-theological!). Only I did not take such a position in my book. Nor am I sure that I would want to resort to it at all to describe my own theological views (especially after the discussion that has taken place around this term)" (Taylor, 2011i, p. 846).[222]

As we will show, although Taylor does not want to show his own theological views, they are manifest from the attitude he takes, at least if we take his approach to *agape*. But undoubtedly, Taylor's vision of transcendence has given rise to many misunderstandings. The very plurality of references to which the term transcendence points, which we mentioned in the previous paragraph, makes it difficult to make sense of Charles Taylor's definition of it as *beyond life*. In fact, this metaphorical reference to space and time does not seem to be helpful in speaking of a reality that is, by definition, beyond time and

222 ["Nun zu »Transzendenz«. Hier gibt es zahlreiche Missverständnisse—das wesentliche besteht darin, dass man mir häufig mit Verweis auf das Buch eine bestimmte Ansicht darüber zuschreibt, was Transzendenz ist und worin sie besteht. Rentsch ist hier somit nicht allein (obwohl er die Novität hinzufügt, meine Vorstellung von Transzendenz sei onto-theologisch!). Nur habe ich in meinem Buch eine solche Position nicht vertreten. Auch bin ich mir nicht sicher, ob ich auf sie überhaupt zurückgreifen möchte, um meine eigenen theologischen Ansichten zu beschreiben (speziell nach der Diskussion, die um diesen Terminus geführt worden ist" (translated by S.G.)]. Taylor also apologizes for his lack of clarity in this regard in the face of similar criticism.

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space (cf. Fiorenza, 2021, pp. 381–384; Luling Haughton, 1999). On the other hand, we have already seen the difficulties in understanding Taylor's moral realism and how difficult it is to understand its *robustness* without appealing to any experience of transcendence, however much Taylor's interest lies more in human self-interpretations. In any case, Taylor himself is aware of this difficulty when he apologizes:

> "How could I ever have used such an abstract and evasive term, one so redolent of the flat and content-free modes of spirituality we can get maneuvered into in the attempt to accommodate both modern reason and the promptings of the heart? I remember erasing it with particular *gusto*. Why ever did I reinstate it? What pressures led in the end to its grudging rehabilitation?" (Taylor, 1999e, p. 105).

The challenge becomes particularly acute when *agape* is presented as a driving force of morality. Agape intertwines an origin that transcends the world with an operative role in concrete domains of human existence—moral motivation toward the stranger, ethical self-understanding, political reconciliation, and the history of moral sources. To clarify this tension, Taylor repeatedly circles back to the problem of articulating transcendence and immanence in a way that does justice both to the experience of transformation and to the hermeneutic conditions under which modern agents interpret their lives. His difficulty stems in part from the fact that any definition of religion framed through the categories of transcendence and immanence must capture not merely doctrinal content but the lived orientation toward a good perceived as "beyond" ordinary flourishing. It is precisely here that Taylor's otherwise ambivalent use of the term "transcendence" becomes justified: although he later admitted that he would have preferred another word, "transcendence" remains, for his anthropological purposes, the least misleading way to name this experiential orientation toward a higher good without committing himself to a theoretical or metaphysical account of what lies beyond.

This also helps to dispel a possible misunderstanding. Taylor's acknowledged hesitation regarding the term "transcendence" does not signal an intention to abandon what the term seeks to name, but rather a resistance to fixing it within a determinate theoretical or metaphysical framework. The indeterminacy of the concept is therefore not a weakness accidentally incurred, but a consequence of the anthropological register in which Taylor deliberately operates.

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Within his moral realism, experiences of orientation toward a good "beyond" ordinary flourishing are taken to be real and irreducible features of human life, even if their ultimate ontological status remains indeterminate. In this sense, the continued use of the language of transcendence is not an inconsistency but a methodological necessity: Taylor lacks a more adequate term that would preserve the reality of these experiences without prematurely resolving their meaning at the theoretical level.

Taylor's approach to *agape* from the category of transcendence is also an attempt to account for the paradoxical dynamic of a relationship of humanity with divinity that runs through the concept of incarnation, as we have seen: God is not only beyond the world, but at the same time in it. His main attribute is love. His action is visible in history and in the social imaginaries that traverse it. In spite of the *zig-zag* and *landslide* changes, the presence of *agape* has not been absent in the lives of the saints, both known and anonymous. Therefore, its role in moral articulation is palpable, even being the origin of other sources that deny openness to transcendence. From this point of view, its origin is in grace, but its dynamism is etymologically describable from a phenomenology of one's own experience, which is embodied, open to feelings, but also to the mystery of transcendence, as in the Good Samaritan. Just as the mystery of the Incarnation itself is corporeal, in which the attributes of the divine and its dynamic of love become history in space and time, in flesh and in relationship. And beyond any possible logical juxtaposition between the infinite and the finite, there is a unity—an "identity," Rahner would say (2005)—between love of God and love of neighbor, mysterious to believers and non-believers alike, but at the same time both intuitively real for the former and superfluous or questionable for the latter.

In our view, the tension between transcendence and immanence in relation to *agape* can be seen as another characteristic of Taylor's *catholic attitude* in the concept of *agapeic transcendence*. Typical of the Catholic interpretation is the tendency to see transcendence as embedded in the world of nature and human life, present in forms that point to the sacramental character of certain realities or rites and to the sacred character of certain human behaviors.

Thus, the Catholic tendency will strive to see love of God and love of neighbor as united in a relationship that goes beyond the domain

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of moral discernment to reach spirituality. Behind this movement lies a way of seeing the world as created and sustained by God in such a way that all reality participates in transcendence and reveals his presence. Thus, sensitivity to those in the worst circumstances, even respect for pluralism, are aspects of the same way of understanding incarnate transcendence. In a sense, the origin of pure selfless love for the other is the outpouring of the Trinitarian love for the world in the whole history of salvation and in every person—and here we can perhaps find the greatest difference between Catholic and Hegelian thinking—. So much so, in fact, that for Rahner every positive act of charity presupposes a positive act in the supernatural order.[223] In a way, the *catholic attitude*, though not affirmed in doctrine, is that every act of charity, even that which is not inspired by *agape*, actually contributes to the advancement of the universalism of love, to its final victory at the end of time (cf. Taylor, 2021a).[224]

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223 "This theologoumenon says: Wherever man, in the full use of his free self-disposition, sets a positive moral act, this is, in the actual order of salvation, a positive, supernatural act of salvation even if its a posteriori object and the expressly a posteriori given motive do not tangibly derive from the positive word-revelation of God, but are in this sense 'natural'" (Rahner, 2005, pp. 82–83) ["Dieses Theologoumenon besagt: Wo immer der Mensch im vollen Einsatz seiner freien Selbstverfügung einen positiven sittlichen Akt setzt, ist dieser in der tatsächlichen Heilsordnung auch dann ein positiver, übernatürlicher Heilsakt, wenn sein aposteriorischer Gegenstand und das ausdrücklich aposteriorisch gegebene Motiv nicht greifbar aus der positiven Wortoffenbarung Gottes stammt, sondern in diesem Sinn ‚natürlich' ist" (translated by S.G.)].

224 As is well known, this thesis has been contested from within Catholicism itself, in a particularly notorious way by von Balthasar, who went so far as to accuse the famous Rahner's thesis about anonymous Christianity—which throbs behind the theologoumena we have quoted (cf. Rahner, 1965)—as Christian atheism (cf. Balthasar, 1987). For his part, Balthasar, while also affirming the necessity of the unity of both loves, prefers to accentuate the difference between the two from the primacy of the love of God over the love of man (cf. Balthasar, 2019). As Ángel Codovilla says, "while Rahner tends to stress the indivise, Balthasar stresses the inconfuse" (Cordovilla, 2009, p. 45). However, both authors, when they describe the daily life of the average Christian, that is, how both loves are intuitively combined in reality beyond the theological exercise, stress the importance of simple experiences in which grace is experienced naturally, as happens in the love of neighbor based on *agape*. Both, then, underline this *catholic attitude* informed by the intuition born of a way of seeing the world created and sustained by grace. On the

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Again, the *catholic attitude* seeks to understand the two poles of a tension by affirming them in a way that maintains balance.

A similar tendency can be detected in Charles Taylor, for example, in his measured judgments of modernity. Or in his tendency to always perceive a transcendent depth in acts of charity, manifested both in his encouragement to recognize many alternative moral sources to *agape* as originally grounded in it, and in his constant call for an articulation of goods capable of sustaining our ethical commitments. Also his confidence that *agape* is somehow manifested in the plurality of goods that motivate those who work together for the good of the neighbor, in what he has recently called the "ecumenism of friendship" (Taylor, 2021b, p. 495, cf. 2015). But his conviction, from his *catholic attitude*, is, as Rahner also put it elsewhere, that Christianity in its true understanding must defend openness to transcendence ("Vertikalismus" for Rahner), because without such openness the modern high demands of solidarity cannot be sustained in the long run.[225]

However, returning to the pitfalls of understanding the concept of transcendence he uses, we believe that looking at Taylor's treatment of transcendence from the perspective of neighborly love can help us understand more of the particularities of *agapeic transcendence*. To this end, Taylor proposes a three-way debate between his transcendence-open humanism with Martha Nussbaum and Friedrich Nietzsche. In dialogue with them, Taylor offers a deeper insight into their perspective on the specificity of the *agape* transformation.

possible connections between Rahner's and Taylor's thoughts see (Horan, 2014).

225 That is why we find in the following Rahner's quotation a similar concern to that expressed by Taylor in *A Catholic Modernity*, though this time from theology, albeit based on the same *catholic attitude*: "Christianity, in its true understanding, defends verticalism because it knows that without it horizontalism cannot exist in the long run, or at best will exist in a happy inconsistency in which God is expressly denied or renounced in order to affirm him again implicitly, even in the absoluteness of charity" (Rahner, 2002, p. 721). ["Das Christentum in seinem wahren Verständnis verteidigt den Vertikalismus, weil es weiß, dass ohne ihn der Horizontalismus auf die Dauer nicht bestehen kann oder höchstens in einer glücklichen Inkonsequenz bestehen wird, in der ausdrücklich Gott geleugnet oder von ihm abgesehen wird, um ihn implizit, Eben in der Absolutheit der Nächstenliebe doch wieder zu bejahen" (translated by S.G.)].

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As we shall see, Taylor seeks to defend openness to transcendence against the effects of its "mutilation" by both Nussbaum's exclusive humanism, open only to horizontal transcendence, and Nietzsche's immanent counter-enlightenment and his reluctance to recognize *agape* as the authentic motivation source for human action.

8.2. A trialogue on Christian neighborly love

To approach Taylor's debate with Nussbaum and Nietzsche, it is useful to adopt the perspective of the *Best Account* argument. As we know, the *BA*-Argument seeks the most comprehensive and falsifiable explanation—the one that offers the "richest account" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 326)—of how human beings make sense of their lives and respond to the dilemmas of modernity. As we did with Hartmut Rosa and Taylor's moral realism, we will approach the hermeneutical triangle he draws in the early sections of chapter 17 of *A Secular Age*, where he confronts Nussbaum's secular humanism and the exclusive humanism of Nietzsche and his successors with his position of *agapeic transcendence* (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 636–637, also 1999b, p. 29; B. K. Ward, 2014).[226]

Taylor's debate with them revolves around the concept of fulfillment lying behind each of the proposals and the considerations about human nature behind them. The question is, therefore, to elucidate "who can make more sense of the life all of us are living" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 635), bearing in mind that it is necessary to find the "best phenomenology with an adequate ontology" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 609).[227] In addition, the reconstruction of the two authors will consider their vision of the Christian motivation toward neighborly love.

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226 Shearn describes this triangle as "agonistic" (Shearn, 2016, p. 271). Taylor himself, elsewhere, characterizes this debate as a "three-cornered battle" (Taylor, 2011b, p. 22).

227 This is an addition to the original Best Account question of which moral account best serves our moral commitments, which is added here to the question of how to fulfill our life (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 607).

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8.2.1. Martha Nussbaum and the Mutilation of Transcendence

The debate begins with Taylor's discussion with the philosopher Martha Nussbaum. He maintained a lengthy discussion with her, precisely on the subject of transcendence. From the outset, the positions are divergent as to the basis of morality. Overall, she has been critical of the ontological commitments implied by Taylor's insistence on a transcendence "beyond life" and beyond the meanings we can find in it. Taylor, for his part, already in his Review of *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), believes that Nussbaum falls into the same error as the Stoics or Kant by introducing the good under the pure view of the Will, which has a tremendous cost for the goods of human life:

> "What is against them? Simply that they involve us denying and forgoing central human good. This is in any case what we can plead against them, and what Nussbaum in the end pleads very convincingly. What above all falls victim to [Nussbaum's strategies] are the goods of friendship and love. To love humanly is to love particular people, and hence to be terribly vulnerable to fortune; it is to be open and receptive, and is incompatible with the drive to dominate; and it places us squarely in the realm of the incommensurable: someone really loved is precisely not replaceable by another with the same universal properties. The three strategies—f restriction, commensuration and control—all sideline or denature love. If this is an important good, then these are strategies of mutilation, rather than the preservation of the good" (Taylor, 1988c, pp. 807–808).

At the center of Taylor's critique lies the concept of love that Nussbaum uses. She would begin her book with a favorable opinion towards the aspiration to transcend one's humanity, agreeing with Plato's *Republic* that aspiring to the life of the gods is something beautiful and valuable (Taylor, 1988c, p. 813). But restraint and commensurability in the face of the weakness caused by love appear more clearly in his view of Aristotle, at the center of the book. According to Taylor's interpretation, Nussbaum's understanding of the Stagirite excludes transcendence life and takes up only a view in which the whole human good is immanent. There is no place for seeking the good itself. A harmonious life would consist of various forms of excellent activity. Love (*philia*) remains, if there is no other impediment, "within the reach of any good and moderately

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fortunate man" (ibid.). In this sense, the question Taylor leaves to Nussbaum is whether the human good includes the desire or aspiration for transcendence.

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor returns to the debate, alluding to Nussbaum's response to his Review in *Transcending Humanity* at the end of *Love's Knowledge* (cf. Nussbaum, 1992, pp. 365–391). On the one hand, her desire for transcendence is rooted in the deep discomfort and fear we experience in sensing the finitude and contingency of our lives. Transcendence would be then a way of compensating for human limits and vulnerability, but at the price of renouncing many of the elements that are part of the experience of being human: having a history, the possibility of overcoming oneself, of loving (cf. Nussbaum, 1992, p. 366). Such an escape from the limits of the world would leave behind even the possibility of feeling compassion, the basis of human justice (cf. Nussbaum, 1992, p. 375).

In that sense, Nussbaum does recognize in this moment that Christianity represented an advance over the image of the impassibility of the Greek gods in the face of human problems. The Christian God is at once human and divine and understands human life not from above but having fully known it from incarnation. Thus, she adds that "surely, at any rate, the universal compassion for human suffering which one associates with Christianity at its best is difficult to imagine apart from the paradigm of human suffering and sacrifice exemplified in Christ" (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 376). Indeed, other religions also believe in gods who die, but what is unique to Christianity is that it "links this conception to a new idea of the moral example God provides to humans" (ibid.).

Such proximity to a type of compassion open to transcendence like the Christian one—even though focused on a plain moral approach to it— soon vanishes, however. According to Nussbaum, the desire for transcendence would incapacitate us to achieve human fulfillment, not in the hereafter, but *hic et nunc*, also in agreement with Nietzsche. She places St. Augustine and the doctrine of original sin at the center of this critique. Thus she understands that based on this element of the Christian faith, repugnance to our natural and ordinary desires would justify openness to transcendence (cf. Nussbaum, 1992, pp. 286–313).

Rather than paying the price of rejecting the body for vertical transcendence, Nussbaum prefers to explore horizontal transcen-

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dence, namely that which takes place within the immanent limits of the human character. Accordingly, she rejects any standard for human excellence that is different from the immanent realm: "what my argument urges to reject as incoherent is the aspiration to leave behind altogether the constitutive conditions of our humanity, and to seek for a life that is really the life of another sort of being-as if it were a higher and better life for us" (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 379). Consequently, Nussbaum says that "there is a great deal of room for transcendence of our ordinary transcendence—transcendence, we might say, of an internal and human sort" (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 379). Hers is thus a transcendence within immanence, open to the internal of the human being without pretending ever to leave it (see also Kavka, 2003; McInerny, 1997; Gordon, 2008, p. 665ff.)

Elsewhere, Nussbaum asserts that the very moral-spiritual experience of transcendence applies only insofar as it is interpretatively human-centered. That is, those aspects of divinity that human beings find illuminating for their flourishment are those that human ethical experience has proven practicable in their own lives, not those aspects of the experience of transcendence that are beyond human control: "The aspect of divinity that proves morally illuminating is the part that has been modelled on human excellence; but that is the part that would not figure in a divine and unlimited life, consistently imagined" (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 446). For this reason, the good would have no putative character detached from life. Therefore, even if Christian compassion is admirable, she neither considers a notion of the transcendent good that illuminates compassion nor that what motivates the transcendent is, in essence, distinct from the immanent force that motivates empathy (cf. Nussbaum, 1985).

Again, the question Taylor asks at this point is whether we can really renounce the aspiration to transcend and return to "immanent" life" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 626). Taylor does not want to disparage Nussbaum's position, for he too wants to liberate faith from the hyper-Augustinianism that hypostatizes the human body and sensuality (Taylor, 2007b, p. 652, see also 2007c, 2012a). Furthermore, he values Nussbaum's highlighting that the line between internal and external transcendence appears slender at times so that she may see an open door to go beyond life in matters such as heroism, dedication, or the defense of the weak (Taylor, 2007b, p. 632). On the other hand, he also affirms in several places that secular ethics has

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allowed significant advances and that even God's will is that human beings flourish in this life.

Nevertheless, he does not understand Nussbaum's need to renounce any external transcendence to attain fullness as long as she wants not to abandon whatever is inherent in human nature. Moreover, as far as our question is concerned, he is not sure that giving up the advance achieved by *agape* universalism will leave us in a better position. In his own words:

> "The question arises, is this a desirable goal? Is it even a possible goal? In view of the importance of Christian universalism and *agape* in the constitution of the modern idea of moral order, ought we really to hope for the utter uprooting of all the beliefs and desires which Christianity has inculcated in our civilization?" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 626).

Taylor also poses this question to Nietzsche. Nevertheless, in his view, to renounce *agapeic transcendence* would be a "mutilation" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 631) because of the loss it would entail and the possibilities that would be closed. Above all, the opportunity to give meaning to our lives and direct them toward higher ends and even acts of heroism. We are, therefore, back to the same concern with which Taylor closes *Sources of the Self*. And yet we are also left with the same lack of clarity and ambivalence, for it is not easy to draw the line that divides internal transcendence from external transcendence or "good" transcendence from "bad" transcendence.

Similarly, it is not easy to determine what parts of human life are worth bringing to fullness while still considering the harmful effects of doing so. Or what is worth giving or renouncing in a generous and selfless act for a stranger. Taylor, at this point, makes a defense rather in favor of tolerating pernicious effects in order not to mutilate the good to be pursued, "a genuine and valuable aspiration, one to a fuller love" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 631).

In any case, the latter leads Taylor to point out a lack of consistency in Nussbaum. For instance, Taylor alludes to the fact that erotic love often goes hand in hand with jealousy and anger and that this does not mean that the goodness of love should be denied, as Nussbaum also asserts. He goes further by saying that the horror of war goes hand in hand with human excellence, such as heroism, dedication, and the defense of the weak. Nor is it easy to draw the line between selfishness or legitimate self-interest, and at what point these may be at odds with a more universal and decentered

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concern. To paraphrase the Gospel, it is not easy to sort the wheat (the virtues) from the tares (the vices) without damaging the harvest (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 646). Thus, Taylor cannot simply condemn renunciation that is done in the name of a greater good: "renunciation was part of an attempt to find a fuller response to the *agape* of God as seen in Christ, to take part in a fuller, more all-embracing love" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 631). Nor, therefore, can he understand Nussbaum's argument against vertical transcendence.

Again, for Nussbaum, *agape* achieves an advance over Plato's vision by offering an idea of love that is "more vulnerable and humble" (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 563). But in discarding any essentialist or transcendent concept of love, she also diminishes the transformative power that *agape* love can show through the new horizons it imagines. The horizon envisioned by *agape* would not, on principle, fit in with the prevailing moral and political convictions of the moment, which would be, for her, on the other hand, the criterion of validation (cf. Nussbaum, 2013; see also Wischmeyer, 2015, pp. 235–240). *Agape* will constantly challenge our emotions—for Nussbaum, compassion is one of them—and, above all, the judgments we make from them. *Agape* challenges reason by leading the individual to higher things, sometimes even heroism or self-sacrifice. Even *agape* can challenge the structures of injustice present in social relations.[228]

For Taylor, to deny as a matter of principle the transformative capacity of human nature allowed by *agapeic transcendence* is a self-mutilation. Thus, Taylor denounces the inconsistent character of Nussbaum's immanent humanism because it annuls *agape* and transcendence by not wanting to assume their negative consequences but tolerating them concerning other human realities, as happens regarding erotic love. In short, Taylor points out that she has a persistent suspicion toward religious sources of moral motivation

228 Moreover, Taylor seems to actually reference Nussbaum when in *The Language Animal*, in addressing the moral force of feeling for benevolence of Hume and Hutchenson, he refers to *agape* as a way out of the mundane mediocrity in which these authors seem to indulge: "Someone might think that this heroic, even '*agape*-istic' mode of benevolence is asking too much of the fragile, self-bound creatures we are; that this striving after an impossible perfection can only lead to self-mutilation, and perhaps to an even nastier form of felt superiority. Such a person would recommend that we be satisfied with the less disinterested benevolence of *l'homme moyen sensuel*, and eschew the search for higher perfection, repudiating the 'monkish virtues'" (Taylor, 2016, p. 20).

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that is sometimes not very well concealed. In any case, Nussbaum's vision of altruism detached from transcendence and ontology is an example of the impoverishment of ethics that occurs when reason forgets the attachment to higher things and when one attends only to motivation by emotion, without a vision of the value that lies behind the good.

8.2.2. Friedrich Nietzsche and the lack of articulation of the good

However, immanent humanism's double standard does not appear in immanent counter-enlightenment, on the other side of the hermeneutic triangle, where Taylor locates Friedrich Nietzsche. Both he and a follower of his philosophy, Michel de Foucault, later endorse the debauchery in sex and the ambiguities of violence as an expression of the Will to power (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 634, see also 1985h, 1989b). Taylor places at the corner of the triangle those mainly postmodern currents and authors who contest the Modern Moral Order and its rejection of the heroic dimension of ethics and tragedy as belonging to the drama of human life.

Although Taylor rejects the idea of Will for power, he agrees with Nietzsche and those who follow him in doubting the mutilation of aspects of human character in the name of happiness and fulfillment. He also joins Nietzsche's lucidity on the dark sides of humanity, as well as in denouncing the feet of clay upon which Modernity is built. Along with Nietzsche, Taylor advocates the realization of freedom and the affirmation of life. He also sees how modern society imposes on the individual a "crisis of affirmation" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 448), which attacks his freedom as a fulfilled possibility (cf. Taylor, 1988d; see also Knapp, 2010, pp. 292–295). Indeed, he finds Nietzsche to be a brother who basically seeks the same goal: "The profoundly Christian resonance which remains paradoxically in Nietzsche in spite of his virulent opposition to Christianity lies in his aspiration to affirm the whole of reality, to see it as good, to say 'yes' to it all" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 452). They even share to a large extent the use of the genealogy to show the weaknesses of its modern moral order. The big difference, however, lies in Taylor's doctrine of strong evaluation, with which he tries to overcome Nietzsche's critique (cf. Meijer, 2017b, p. 381).

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In that sense, Taylor agrees with Nietzsche that there are higher forms of life, but unlike him, Taylor is open to these forms being based on something beyond life and the subject. In that sense, he also accuses Nietzsche and immanent counter-enlightenment of being closed to transcendence and causing mutilation, as he does with immanent humanism (see also Taylor, 2018a). On the one hand, Nietzsche sees renunciation for the sake of the greater good as incompatible with the nature of free and non-slave human beings.[229] He discovered how beneath reason and consciousness circulates the unstoppable current of Life, which he summarizes in essence as *Wille zur Macht* (Nietzsche, 1988a, III). From there, the whole human world must be rooted. Hence his use of genealogy, which attempts to dig beneath the visible to find the hidden roots from which all our acts spring, whether they promote and stimulate Life, or hinder and obstruct it (cf. Pintor Ramos, 2002, pp. 126–127). One can understand in this way Nietzsche's fierce criticism of historical Christianity and the morality of slaves that originates from this perspective of debunking everything contrary to Life. This is how he formulates it in *Der Antichrist*:

> "The Christian concept of a god—the god as the patron of the sick, the god as a spinner of cobwebs, the god as a spirit—is one of the most corrupt concepts that has ever been set up in the world: it probably touches low-water mark in the ebbing evolution of the god-type. God degenerated into the *contradiction of life*. Instead of being its transfiguration and eternal Yea! In him war is declared on life, on nature, on the will to live!" (Nietzsche, 1940, §18).[230]

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229 In another place, Taylor refers in this way to Nietzsche's attitude against goods beyond life: "Nietzsche, of course, rebelled against the idea that our highest goal is to preserve and increase life, to prevent suffering. He rejects this both metaphysically and practically. He rejects the egalitarianism underlying this whole affirmation of ordinary life. But his rebellion is in a sense also internal. Life itself can push to cruelty, to domination, to exclusion, and indeed does so in its moments of most exuberant affirmation" (Taylor, 1999b, p. 27, 2011b, p. 21). On Nietzsche's challenge to Freedom according to humanism, see (Heit, 2017).

230 ["Der christliche Gottesbegriff—Gott als Krankengott, Gott als Spinne, Gott als Geist—ist einer der corruptesten Gottesbegriffe, die auf Erden erreicht worden sind; er stellt vielleicht selbst den Pegel des Tiefstands in der absteigenden Entwicklung des Götter-Typus dar. Gott zum Widerspruch des Lebens abgeartet, statt dessen Verklärung und ewiges Ja zu sein. In Gott dem Leben, der

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The above fragment's aggressive tone against the Christian faith can be found in many other passages. In fact, right at the end of Der Antichrist, we find a text that actually rejects the humanitarianism linked to Christian morality and spirituality:

> "Let any one dare to speak to me of its "humanitarian" blessings! Its deepest necessities range it against any effort to abolish distress; it lives by distress; it *creates* distress to make *itself* immortal... [...] The "equality of souls before God"—this fraud, this *pretext* for the *rancunes* of all the base-minded—this explosive concept, ending in revolution, the modern idea, and the notion of overthrowing the whole social order —this is *Christian* dynamite.... The "humanitarian" blessings of Christianity forsooth! To breed out of *humanitas* a self-contradiction, an art of self-pollution, a will to lie at any price, an aversion and contempt for all good and honest instincts! All this, to me, is the "humanitarianism" of Christianity!" (Nietzsche, 1940, §62).[231]

As the last two quotations show, humanitarianism and altruism are, in Nietzsche's vision, two consequences of the corruption of humanity that came through Christianity. As Taylor describes, Nietzsche understands this fact as a "hyper-sensitivity to suffering, a weakness" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 575, n.2). Modernity and its imperative to avoid suffering would not be for Nietzsche but "one all in the cry and impatience of pity, in the mortal hatred of suffering at all, in the almost feminine inability to keep spectators watching, to make them suffer" (Nietzsche, 1988b, p. §202).

The transformation that auspices *agape* and the love of neighbor born of it create an illusion, would oppose the Will to Power, and

Natur, dem Willen zum Leben die Feindschaft angesagt"] (translation copied from Nietzsche, 1918, p. 67).

231 ["Man wage es noch, mir von ihren "humanitären" Segnungen zu reden! Irgend einen Nothstand abschaffen gierig wider ihre tiefste Nützlichkeit,—sie lebte von Nothständen, sie schuf Nothstände, um sich zu verewigen ... [...] Die "Gleichheit der Seelen vor Gott", diese Falschheit, dieser Vorwand für die rancunes aller Niedriggesinnten, dieser Sprengstoff von Begriff, der endlich Revolution, moderne Idee und Niedergangs-Princip der ganzen Gesellschafts-Ordnung geworden ist—ist christlicher Dynamit... "Humanitäre" Segnungen des Christenthums! Aus der humanitas einen Selbst-Widerspruch, eine Kunst der Selbstschändung, einen Willen zur Lüge um jeden Preis, einen Widerwillen, eine Verachtung aller guten und rechtschaffnen Instinkte herauszuzüchten!—Das wären mir Segnungen des Christenthums!"] (translation copied from Nietzsche, 1918, pp. 180–181).

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would ultimately engender resentment. Again in Taylor's words, Nietzsche "would see *agape* as a cover for a twisted will to power, motivated ultimately by hatred and revenge" (Taylor, 2016, p. 207; see also 215).[232] Although Nietzsche acknowledges that altruism is a potent moral force operative throughout history, he denies its real plausibility in its pure state. Thus one can read in his critique of Schoppenhauer's thesis that selfless action is "impossible but real" ("unmöglich und doch wirklich") and that its origin is indeed compassion, even *agape*.[233] Nietzsche argues that all human actions, even the most selfless, can only be psychologically motivated by the agent's self-interest. There will always be some inclination because of a desire, an impulse, or a longing ("Die Neigung zu Etwas (Wunsch, Trieb, Verlangen) ist [...] vorhanden" (Nietzsche, 1988c, §57; cf. Schopenhauer, 2007; see also Elgat, 2015). We will always find personal pain or desire in the interest for compassionate action (cf. Nietzsche, 1988c, §104, §133, see also 1887, 1988d).

Taylor, however, does not see that Nietzsche's critique of Christian agency advances his main thesis of closed-mindedness to transcendence. Per se, the fact that aggression is, for Nietzsche, something ineradicable from human nature and something to be celebrated makes him incompatible with the transformation proposed by *agape* and the Christian conception of eschatological hope (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 635). Taylor's response is to recall the essential

232 In another place, he says ironically that "nothing gave Nietzsche greater satisfaction than showing how morality or spirituality is really powered by its direct opposite, e.g., that the Christian aspiration to love is really hatred of the weak for the strong" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 698–699).

233 Schopenhauer specifically refers to *agape* in the following paragraph excerpted from *Parerga und Paralipomena*, in which he contrasts compassion with the Kantian notion of dignity: "for every human being with whom one comes into contact, do not undertake an objective evaluation of him according to value and dignity, hence do not take into consideration the baseness of his will, nor the limitation of his understanding and the wrongness of his notions, because the former could easily arouse hatred, the latter contempt for him. Instead, focus alone on his suffering, his distress, his fear, his pain—then you will always feel kinship with him, sympathize with him and instead of hatred or contempt sense that compassion for him which alone is *agape*, and to which we are exhorted by the gospels. In order to prevent hatred and contempt from rising up against him, truly it is not the seeking of man's 'dignity' but, quite to the contrary, only compassion that is the suitable position".

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elements of his defense of strong evaluations as the basis of our morality (cf. Taylor, 1989a, pp. 70–75). In short, Nietzsche would also make strong evaluations, although the moral source is not *agape* or any of the others that Taylor explores, but ressentiment: "it is only an additional ironic twist in Nietzsche's argument when he shows that 'love' here is controlled by its opposite: by ressentiment and hatred(Taylor, 2011i, p. 837, cf. 2011c, p. 298).[234] And in addition, Nietzsche would add further reasoning as an adverse reaction to altruistic moral behavior. Thus, for Nietzsche, "the reduction of suffering is not a good idea, because this would (...) block the way to Übermensch" (Taylor, 2011i, p. 833, cf. 2011c, p. 298).

Hence, Taylor's response to Nietzsche is to bring his critique of transcendence and humanitarianism to the coordinates of his moral realism. In the case of Nietzsche, what changes with respect to the position of *agapeic transcendence* is the ground understanding. The moral reactions of rejection and repugnance to neighborly love are a strong mode of evaluation that also entails a particular conception of the world. Therefore, Nietzsche also makes his own evaluation, but he would not recognize the same reality behind what Taylor sees. Thus, the difference between Taylor and Nietzsche is not one of class or degree but of the reality they see behind the moral reactions and the articulation that follows them. Ultimately, however, ressentiment excludes *agape* by definition. As Taylor himself says, "the account of what truly inspires wonder will distinguish theists and atheists, and will connect with different things for each" (Taylor, 2011i, p. 836).[235]

In short, Taylor sees Nietzsche's challenge as going to the heart of moral motivation toward benevolence and altruism (cf. Redhead, 2001, p. 83). Moreover, he goes so far as to say that "Only if there is such a thing as *agape*, or one of the secular claimants to its succession, is Nietzsche wrong" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 515). However, it is clear that Taylor thinks that Nietzsche, on this point, is wrong.

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234 ["So ist es nur eine zusätzliche ironische Wendung in Nietzsches Argumentation, wenn er zeigt, dass »Liebe« hier von ihrem Gegenteil gesteuert wird: von Ressentiment und Hass" (translated by S.G.)].

235 ["Allerdings wird die Darstellung dessen, was das Wunder wirklich inspiriert, Theisten und Atheisten unterscheiden und sich für beide mit jeweils verschiedenen Dingen verbinden" (translated by S.G.)].

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As he already said in *Sources of the Self*, also referring to exclusive humanist positions, "They make once again what I believe is the cardinal mistake of believing that a good must be invalid if it leads to suffering or destruction" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 519). That is to say, by eliminating transcendence from the equation, they incur an unjustifiable mutilation since the truth is that even without the help of transcendence, evil continues to run wild. For Taylor, Nietzsche would not articulate reality correctly and observes it mutilated and distanced from the sources that can give it more meaning. His virulent opposition to Christianity and ontology behind is what makes him not offer a better and richer proposal to cope with the pain of the stranger and the demands of motivation to help him.[236]

8.2.3. Agape as a fuller account

Against Nussbaum's and Nietzsche's rival accounts, Taylor argues that openness to agapeic transcendence yields a fuller explanation of neighbourly love and moral motivation. As he puts it, "invoking the vertical dimension brings us in another way back to the missing perspective in modern moral philosophy, that of moral motivation" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 707). However, his strategy is often indirect: rather than offering a deductive proof, he tests rival frameworks by exposing what they leave unexplained, under-describe, or tacitly presuppose.

Taylor is aware that a faith-based stance such as his needs to present itself today as plausible, showing how it "can make more sense of the life all of us are living" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 638). Any such option must account for evil, violence, exploitation, domination, and the many forms of human self-destruction and indignity—no less than non-believing options do. It must also explain our impulse to help the stranger while sustaining moral motivation in the face of discouragement, powerlessness, and injustice. In essence, a belief-option has to render an account of these realities just like any other non-believing option. Any option must explain why we want to help

236 More on the antagonism of Nietzsche and Taylor on this matter in (Connolly, 2010, 2011). Besides, Meijer (2017b), Redhead (2001), Shapiro (1986), and Shearn (2016) also read the debate between Nietzsche and Taylor from the Best Account argument, as we do here.

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the stranger (the kind of explanations that clarify our moral predicament) and, at the same time, provide us with a source of moral motivation that does not faint in the face of the powerlessness, discouragement, and injustice that is perceived, endured, or consented to in doing good.

Taylor gathers these requirements under the name of *maximal moral demand.* That is, in terms of the dilemma posed by the question of "how to define our highest spiritual or moral aspirations for human beings, while showing a path to the transformation involved which doesn't crush, mutilate or deny what is essential to our humanity?" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 639–640). The tension is such that, according to Taylor, "we either have to scale down our moral aspirations in order to allow our ordinary human life to flourish; or we have to agree to sacrifice some of this ordinary flourishing to secure our higher goals" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 640). Moreover, in light of his dialogue with Nussbaum and Nietzsche, *agapeic transcendence* must contend with the charge of "mutilation" from exclusive humanism and immanent counter-enlightenment. All in all, this is the same dilemma with which *Sources of the Self* ends: "The dilemma of mutilation is in a sense our greatest spiritual challenge, not an iron fate" (Taylor, 1989a, p. 521).

We are thus, to a large extent, facing the union of the main storyline of Taylor's two great works, just as we saw when we referred to the argument of the *Best Account*. Taylor summarizes the challenge as:

> "finding the moral sources which can enable us to live up to our very strong universal commitments to human rights and well-being; and finding how to avoid the turn to violence which returns uncannily and often unnoticed in the "higher" forms of life which have supposedly set it aside definitively" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 726).

Focusing on the Christian option and whether it is better equipped to meet these higher forms, Taylor speaks at various points of overcoming tensions, avoiding mutilation, or transforming the human condition by the irruption of *agape*. Taylor speaks first of recovering the centrality of the body and ordinary life for a religion based on the Incarnation in a context, the modern one, affected by excarnation. Taylor explains that to do this properly, we need to avoid misunderstanding Christianity, particularly the kind of exaggerated "hyper-Augustinian" view that treats body and soul as completely

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opposed or separate. This must be replaced by *agape*, "which will ultimately sideline and make irrelevant the satisfactions of ego-boosting [and] is itself bound up with a compassion which is itself incarnate as bodily desire" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 644). The irruption of *agape* and compassion would overcome the mutilating dichotomies of the relationship between body and soul.

Taylor again uses the same schema to treat *agape* in relation to evil and suffering and to the "spiritual hunger" that arises from the question of "how we live with it" (Taylor, 2007a, p. 681). He surveys a range of responses—revived sacrificial mechanisms (propitiation, scapegoating), Stoic disengagement, and modern inward sources such as disciplined reason or sympathy—yet finds that these options either blunt the demand of solidarity or struggle to sustain concern beyond the immediate circle, especially when confronted with the distant stranger. Taylor also notes harder-edged responses: Nietzschean suspicion toward benevolence and equality, as well as secularized "victim" postures that claim innocence by projecting evil entirely onto others—forms that can slide into cruelty or indifference (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 683–684). Across these outlooks, believers and non-believers alike remain tempted "to neglect the failures, the blackguards, the useless, the dying... in brief, those who deny the promise" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 684).

Christianity is not exempt from this danger. But what does Christianity add, distinctively, or contribute to, according to Taylor? On the one hand, he speaks of a purified Christianity, based on *agape*, "where one could aim to dwell in the suffering and evil without recoil, sure of the power of God to transform it" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 685). On the other hand, this confidence in the transformation of the world is fueled by spirituality: "One is part of the solution by being there and praying, being there and affirming the good which is never absent. You see the good through the eyes of God" (ibid.). In part, such spirituality is about opening one's eyes to the evil in the world, including the evil present in oneself, which Christianity knows as *sin*.[237] Taylor speaks of recognizing a "pedagogy of God" in the transformation of humanity in explaining the historical presence

237 It would seem that a purified Christianity would have to get rid of terms such as sin. Undoubtedly, it may be a theological category that would hide an anthropological vision that denies human flourishing and introduces distrust of human nature. However, a good Christian theology will always see the

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of evil. A transformation that "is not just a matter of plasticity" but "is much more mysterious, and involves offering another spiritual direction" in collaboration "with God's pedagogy." The difference between the transformative vision with that of the humanists and the Nitzcheans is that the irresolvable tension of human dilemmas is lived before the force of a different pole that leads to a resolution *beyond life* and not before the "demands of the immediate agenda" (Taylor, 2007b, pp. 672–674).

8.3. Agapeic transcendence in the later work of Charles Taylor

Further arguments and counterarguments could be advanced, but the preceding discussion already allows us to draw some conclusions to help us better understand Taylor. On the one hand, it seems that Taylor allies himself with Nietzsche —at times also with Foucault— to criticize secular humanism as an inconsistent attempt to retain the force of *agape* without the believing and transcendence-open grounding that strengthens it. However, the danger with this line of argument is that Nietzsche's use of genealogy as a critique leads us to the deconstruction of compassion based on faith in God. On the other hand, Taylor allies himself with Nussbaum's humanism in his restitution of the importance of compassion as a crucial value for human flourishing. He also joins secular humanism against Nietzsche in drawing a line under genealogical deconstruction, for Taylor finds some comfort in the Enlightenment (cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 637). Nevertheless, both rival positions ultimately challenge *agapeic transcendence* by rejecting the idea that authentic compassion could

possibility of sin and the existence of evil counterbalanced by the abundance of grace and the certainty of salvation in Christ. Properly understood sin allows us to grasp the reality of evil committed or suffered and human beings' difficulties in achieving existential freedom (cf. Rahner, 2013, pp. 101–104). Moreover, it allows us to understand how human beings do not pay attention to the call of the other. Sin, according to the Catholic Church, "is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity" (CCC, §1849). A proposal of Christian spirituality based on opening the eyes to the evil of the world can be found in Johan Baptist Metz (2017b) or the spirituality of liberation (for example, Casaldáliga & Vigil, 1992).

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be oriented by a good perceived as coming from beyond ordinary human life.

In any case, Taylor's response may seem insufficient to overcome the sense of lack of persuasiveness of an argument that ultimately relies heavily on belief. When it comes to defining what is the specific contribution of *agapeic transcendence* in the face of the dilemmas imposed by the integration of human life or the violence that allows us to overcome the mutilations into which other positions would fall, Taylor points, once again, more to a *hunch* than to a reasoned position. Rosa's harsh criticism goes in this direction. He expected the book as an elaboration of the "hunch" with which *Sources of the Self* closed, and yet what he encountered he summarized as unsatisfactory, as an "almost theological" analysis of an apologetic defense that falls far short of expectations in that particular matter (cf. Rosa & Kern, 2012, pp. 5–7; a similar argument in Roothaan, 2017, pp. 19–22).

However, Taylor's later work offers resources that allow for a more constructive reconstruction of the theistic moral map and of the phenomenology of *agapeic transcendence* itself. In particular, three elements deserve attention: the indirect mode of hermeneutic argumentation, the role of moral exemplars and admiration, and the significance of what Taylor calls "subtler languages." As this study has suggested, these features—together with others explored throughout the book—can be understood as central expressions of Taylor's *catholic attitude* toward transcendence and moral life.

8.3.1. On the significance of hermeneutic interpretations

Taylor attempts to restate the theistic moral map in *The Language Animal* (2016, pp. 177–263), approaching openness to transcendence from the active and expressive self-interpretations of human beings. That is, from the relationship between the moral articulation of strong evaluations and language, with the addition of the horizon of transformation invoked by *agape*. As we saw in Chapter 2, Taylor is interested in language dimensions open to *metabiological meanings*. He anchors in them the motivations toward something higher, and, as evidence thereof, he speaks of the inspiration and admiration that *agape* can provoke as a moral source.

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Taylor brings this line of argument to a close by contrasting the possibilities opened by *agapeic transcendence* with those offered by immanent alternatives. His commitment to openness to transcendence remains grounded in the *Best Account* argument, but the novelty here lies in how this argument is deployed. Rather than merely counting the blind spots of rival theories, Taylor shows how openness to transcendence makes better sense of agents' self-interpretations. Thus, he starts with the following question that introduces a *hermeneutic Best Account*: "can the sense we can make of things be challenged by a rival hermeneutic which can account for these matters, for instance varieties of action and feeling, and distinctions between them, that we cannot?" (Taylor, 2016, p. 216). Here, Taylor emphasizes that a hermeneutic approach to moral sources does not aim to establish causal relations between sources and actions, but rather to render actions and responses intelligible within the narratives through which agents make sense of their lives. Making sense means rendering moral actions comprehensible, albeit within the particular narrativity with which people's lives unfold and with which individuals give meaning to their actions and their moral choices.[238]

For Taylor, the question calls for a positive answer, since explaining moral motivation requires widening the interpretive horizon within which actions are understood. But the point is that he argues for the need to widen the interpretation of the meanings of actions, enriching the understanding and "the landscapes of meaning that these agents act within" (Taylor, 2016, p. 217). Thus, this widening would test the different ethical outlooks "by testing the motivational constellations that each presupposes" (Taylor, 2016, pp. 220–221). By "motivational constellations," Taylor refers not to isolated moral reactions, but to the broader configuration of meanings, experiences, motivations, impediments, and self-understandings that shape an agent's life. This is what Taylor calls an "indirect" way of arguing,[239]

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238 Taylor refers here to Dilthey's "empathic understanding" (1981; Harrington, 2001; see also S. Gallagher, 2019) and Max Weber's "verstehen" (1988, 2013; see also Herva, 1988; Balog, 2008). That is, he focuses the hermeneutic analysis from the point of view of the meaning that the agent himself gives to his action (cf. M. Martin, 2018; Raza, 2022).

239 To show what this "indirect" way of arguing consists of, he relies on the notion of a "hermeneutical circle." He draws on Heidegger (1927; see also

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which would be proper to the hermeneutics he proposes since it involves opening the focus of the "direct" way, which only focuses on the moral reaction or on the right or wrong action (see also Taylor, 2012b).[240]

In this sense, the interpretations of the altruistic act, in their different versions—also Nussbaum's or Nietzsche's —, must be understood as parts of a whole. An individual decision must be understood in view of the whole of a life. Or an emotional response must be understood with the whole pattern of feelings that are part of a person's character. Moreover, meaning also requires making sense of the moral sources from which it draws. In the same way, solidarity with the distant, both the concrete reaction to the need and its role in a person's life decisions, must be understood from the set of meanings that are part of a person's life. So too from his openness to transcendence, or his lack of it, from how he articulates goods, whether conscious or not. The indirect hermeneutic argument allows us to access the whole from this small part. In this sense, looking at the Good Samaritan, we must go beyond the concrete action of helping the neighbor and interpret it from the whole of the Samaritan's life. If we do so, we will understand that *agape* love, with its openness to transcendence, is indeed relevant and is not just one more option for the good Samaritan.[241]

Taylor, 1995j, 2006), Gadamer (1975), and Ricoeur (2007), contextualizing such a conception from the interpretation of texts to the "human meanings" of action: I believe that the notion of a hermeneutical circle can be generalized to understand how we operate with the skeins of interdependent meanings which are central to our human self-understanding" (Taylor, 2016, pp. 218–219).

240 As he says elsewhere, distinguishing himself from overly narrow conceptions of reason such as that of Rawls, Korgaard, or Habermas, what he seeks with hermeneutic reason "is not to avoid contradiction, but to offer the best and most comprehensive interpretation of very deep human intuitions" (Taylor, 2021b, p. 504).

241 Moreover, this way of arguing entails responding to the usual *overlapping consensus* surrounding altruistic actions, in which attention is focused on the act itself and not the motivations that support it. Such overlapping consensus is well reflected in Amartya Sen's idea of "neighborhood" when he comments on the passage of the Good Samaritan: "It does not matter whether the Samaritan was moved by charity, or by a 'sense of justice,' or by some deeper 'sense of fairness in treating others as equals.' Once he finds himself in this situation, he is in a new 'neighborhood'" (Drèze & Sen, 1989, p. 172). Taylor would answer that, precisely, what moves the Samaritan is of supreme importance for

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Now if we go back to the previous hermeneutic triangle, philosophers like Nietzsche would deny this hermeneutic argument. From the part (the mere possibility of altruistic action), they would deny the whole (motivation from a source such as *agape*). Specifically, "Nietzsche is too firmly convinced that the appeal for mercy cannot but emanate from the slave's will to power for him to accept its face validity" (Taylor, 2016, p. 219). Moreover, when Nietzsche grounds *agape* in ressentiment, he also breaks with any possibility of a hermeneutic explanation. Thus, the explanation of *agapeic transcendence* better explains the whole moral experience.[242] The same argument can be made for Nussbaum's case, *mutatis mutandis*: on a first, direct level, she gets the origin of our moral intuitions right; on a second level, however, she mutilates the prospect of a broader interpretation that captures the true meaning of altruism for many people by closing herself off to transcendence. Thus, Taylor maintains that *agapeic transcendence* offers a more comprehensive hermeneutic account of the moral whole than either Nietzsche's or Nussbaum's immanent frameworks.

In any case, as we indicated in chapter 2 when evaluating Taylor's interpretative frameworks, we also miss here a greater attention to the phenomenology of moral action, that is, to the causal relationship between the articulation of moral source and concrete action. Perhaps this phenomenology would not help much in the trialogue with Nussbaum and Nietzsche, since the debate revolves around the frameworks of understanding from which to comprehend the

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the reasons we are explaining. In any case, we should remember that Taylor accepts the pluralism of moral sources as something proper to the modern moral order and that he welcomes the ecumenism that occurs de facto in non-profit organizations dedicated to helping others.

242 Taylor also cites in this context Ayn Rand as a follower of Nietzsche. She stated in an interview in 1964: "My views on charity are very simple. I do not consider it a major virtue and, above all, I do not consider it a moral duty. [...] I regard charity as a marginal issue. What I am fighting is the idea that charity is a moral duty and a primary virtue" (Rand, 1964). Its main problem is how much aiding the stranger involves violating one's self-interest. A supererogatory act without benefit to the agent becomes indefensible to her: "The proper method of judging when or whether one should help another person is by reference to one's own rational self-interest and one's own hierarchy of values: the time, money or effort one gives or the risk one takes should be proportionate to the value of the person in relation to one's own happiness" (Rand, 2005, p. 45).

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motivation towards love of neighbor. But it would help in the context of debates with utilitarianism and Kantian formalism, as it does in *Sources of the Self*, in the same terms as they do, that is, around the criteria of judgment towards right action. However, as we shall see in the conclusion, this may not be possible given the different departing positions and interests of their theories.

8.3.2. On the admiration towards moral exemplars

A second element that helps to reconstruct the moral map is admiration for morally exemplary individuals. Taylor admits that an appeal to faith alone cannot demonstrate the greater hermeneutic adequacy of a transcendence-open option; rather, one can "only point to the exemplary lives of certain trail-blazing people and communities" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 643). For Taylor,

> "strength and dedication can also be mediated to us by exceptionally good and/or right-acting people: some saint, or hero, or exceptional political leader (e.g., Nelson Mandela), who has risen above the temptation of personal ambition, or resentment, or desire for revenge, who is, on the contrary, really moved by the common good" (Taylor, 2016, p. 213).

Admiration for exemplary personalities is framed within the question of moral sources as well as the query about how they can bring us closer to the Good and strengthen our commitment. Moral admiration, like nature or art, leads a subject to wonder about the force behind and how it is communicated. Above all, the perception of that force can give the subject a better understanding of the meanings of his or her own life. In a way, if the source that motivates the person one admires comes from transcendence, we will also be coming into contact with it indirectly.

It must be assumed that the topic of admiration shown for morally exemplary persons is a recurrent subsidiary motif in Taylor's realist moral theory. We have reviewed Laitinen's critique of realist moral motivation theory with moral sources and alluded to the need to revisit the transcendence-open nature of *agape*. With moral admiration towards virtue—in particular, we mentioned Mother Teresa of Calcutta—we have established the qualitative difference of *agape* with respect to other sources or constitutive goods. This difference

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was based on the peculiarity of their articulation and because sometimes they require the renunciation of other goods also appreciated by the subject for their realization. In this chapter, we have seen how Taylor defends its renunciation as a consequence of allowing the "transformation" that openness to transcendence entails. The denial of renunciation would be really a mutilation.

On the other hand, Taylor mentions Mandela, Tutu, Michnik, MLK, or the Dalai Lama as paradigmatic social and political figures who were able to envision new ways to overcome violence and inequality by opening up to the vertical dimension and making transparent the normativity of *agape*. We referred to how the admiration for these characters in positions of authority and leadership gave new horizons to the dialectic between justice and good, making entire peoples glimpse paths of peace, reconciliation, and recognition. We define *agape* in politics of recognition as "generous detachment" because it represents an abandonment of positions and ways of seeing, even of the legitimate coercive force of code enforcement, to achieve a new horizontality that is more just for all. In this sense, we speak of their *quasi-sacramental* position and of motivational power of the language of religious content in the public space for political transformation used, for example, by MLK, who used "metabilogical meanings" that everyone understood.[243] Their leadership opened new horizons of peace, reconciliation, and recognition, revealing the normative force of *agape* in the public sphere.

These personalities can be added to the references to others "who broke out of the immanent frame" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 728) examined by Taylor in the final chapter of *A Secular Age*. These individuals glimpse the transcendent strength of *agape*. They can transit in the

243 Bernard V. Brady refers to MLK as a "Love Activist" inspired by Christian love. One of the defining characteristics of the Christian love manifested in MLK is the proper articulation of coping with the negative consequences of altruistic motivation itself. In his view, MLK "holds that before one can be involved in direct action, that is to say, before one can appropriately face the consequences of direct action, that is, brutality, insults, and violence from angry racist mobs, one must be solidly grounded with a sense of purpose" (Brady, 2003, p. 211) Furthermore, for MLK, love transforms enemies into friends with redemptive power. The ultimate causation of that transformation is *agape*: "When Jesus bids us to love our enemies, he is speaking neither of eros nor philia, he is speaking of *agape*, understanding and creative, redemptive goodwill for all men" (King, 1981, p. 50).

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cross-pressures of the secular age even while seeing the flaws of present moral self-understanding. They would trace the paths that traverse "this gap and tension between the demands of Christian faith and the norms of Civilization" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 745) in their meaning-seeking life itineraries and their use of "subtler languages" (see also Coyle, 2016; cf. Taylor, 2007b, p. 353; B. K. Ward, 2014). Taylor cites Ivan Illich, Jaques Maritain, Charles Péguy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, or Vaclav Havel, who was "stuck by love" in his conversion (Taylor, 2007b, p. 729; cf. M. P. Gallagher, 2013; Sciglitano, 2019a). They all "enlarge our palette of such points of contact with fullness" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 729). These characters, this "constellation of Taylor's saints" (J. K. A. Smith, 2014, p. 133), appeal to a sense toward the meaning of things.

In any case, the examples that Taylor calls to mind are not intended to serve primarily as apologetics for religion and transcendence (cf. Jager, 2010). Instead, a crucial question may be to know in what way or in what form the inspiration of *agape* is through these individuals. We can ask ourselves, for example, if there is some kind of caution not to place admiration on a character whose ideas or practices are entirely controversial or abominable.[244]

We can attempt to answer these questions by turning again to the history of ethical growth and the idea of angles of transcendence that Taylor takes from David Martin (Taylor, 2024, p. 559, 2021b). Drawing on Taylor's account of ethical growth, admiration for exemplars can be understood through different "angles of transcendence". Ethical growth operates with two dynamics in close relation to transcendence; on the one hand, dynamics of opening up the degree of transcendence increase the ethical demand and raise the standards to almost supererogatory levels, as in the example of the Good Samaritan or with the figures of many saints; on the other hand, some movements seek to close the degree of transcendence, in which, without lowering the degree of demand, the repertoire of possible actions that allow the whole of society to be raised towards a different moral horizon is broadened, such as the truth and reconciliation commissions in South Africa, the movements for the abolition of slavery or civil rights.

244 These questions and others are what exemplarist moral theories attempt to answer, most notably in the debates surrounding Linda Zagzebski's recent proposal (cf. Zagzebski, 2017; see also Szutta, 2019).

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In any event, underlying these two modes of opening up the degree of transcendence is a twofold way of understanding transcendence: on the one hand, as a going beyond life and the cosmos, with an accent on the abandonment of the world, so to speak; and, on the other hand, transcendence as "the discovery or invention of a new standpoint from which the existing order of cosmos or society can be criticized or denounced" (Taylor, 2021b, p. 498). Of course, the two may be related. We can emphasize from the second definition, however, the creation of these new anchor points from transcendence that had not been imagined before and that, he adds, serve to criticize and transform the moral order of each historical moment.

In any case, we are inclined to think that Taylor trusts more and prefers to be inspired by charismatic individuals who close the angle of transcendence, that is, individuals who transform the world and do not simply abandon it. Or to put it in another way, individuals who somehow are able to represent the *catholic attitude* that unites openness to *agape* with effective action.[245] He prefers to be inspired by individuals such as those we have mentioned: Mandela, Tutu, Gandhi, Dalai Lama, and most recently, Pope Francis (cf. Taylor, 2020b, 2021a, pp. 10–11). Conversely, a certain mistrust of very open degrees of transcendence manifests itself in a bias against the "transformation" that radical openness to transcendence or "hyper-agustinism" can have, especially in its necessity for the renunciation of many human goods for the sake of a greater love of God.

We speak of a certain distrust; we can even speak of ambivalence. On the one hand, we have spoken of the qualitative distinctions between life goods and constitutive goods and the incommensurability of these, which often go hand in hand with renunciation. Moreover, in this chapter, we have seen Taylor defend openness to transcendence from the accusation of mutilation made by Nussbaum. But he does manifest a particular fear of transformation in some places, as when he speaks of how the axial revolution de facto ended social equality or of how spiritual elites were created that moved away from

245 In another context, speaking of the meaning of the sacred after the disenchantment of the world, he states similarly: "The upshot of these reflections is that a strong, anchored-in-reality-beyond- us sacred can be denied, while another, arising in the interface, can be affirmed" (Taylor, 2011a, p. 118).

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the affirmation of ordinary life or the drive to reform, which strove to raise the degree of evangelical demand of all society.

More clearly, we can see the distrust towards more open degrees of angles of transcendence in an older text published in a Jesuit journal of spirituality. Taylor tries to understand the current spiritual emphasis on the enhancement of life and ordinary existence, but he also tries to reconcile this with the demands of the older spirituality and the demands of something beyond life (Taylor, 1996b; see also Taylor & Costa, 2021, pp. 132–136). In the text, he even presents graphically his representation of some of the current forms of spirituality, which he classifies according to two dimensions. In the horizontal dimension, he moves from Christian to pagan sources. Meanwhile, he moves on the vertical axis between transcendence and what he calls life-centered spirituality.

The latter polarity is crucial. Taylor represents a difference between the "purity stance," closer to the upper vertical pole of transcendence, and the "*agape/karuna* stance," down nearer to the centrality of life, yet still on the axis of transcendence. In Taylor's view, the *purity stance* insists on the return of religion to its purity, elevating the renunciatory ends by proposing them as goals for all, detached from the pursuit of prosperity. In contrast, in the *agape* stance, neither renunciation for the sake of the greater good nor human flourishing is rejected. However, it is assumed that the divine will desires, at least in part, precisely human flourishing (cf. Taylor, 1999a, p. 20, 2007a, pp. 17, 500, 2011e). For Taylor, the concern of spiritual persons should not be elevation as a departure of the world or the restoration of past times animated by nostalgia, but rather "our major concern must be our dealings with others, in justice and benevolence and on a level of equality: to increase life, relieve suffering and foster prosperity. To lead one's ordinary life rightly in this way is open to everyone" (Taylor, 1996b, p. 12).

Such a practical-focused *agape*, or *agape* with a closed angle of transcendence, is concerned with healing the world's injustices and with fulfilling the sensing subject's expectations of meaning. We can find this *agape* in the charismatic characters that close the angle of transcendence. Thus, we can characterize these characters as individuals who transit the angles of transcendence, having one foot in the immanent moral order they live in and another foot in the broader horizons, beyond life, that the inspiration by *agape* opens

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for them. The articulation of *agape* allows them not only to have a quasi-utopian vision of how interpersonal and societal relationships should aspire to be but also provides them with a reliable commitment immune to any unexpected negative consequence, such as moral superiority, misanthropy, ethnocentrism, discouragement in the face of an unresponsive reality or the use of any violence and imposition as a means to an end (cf. Taylor, 1999b).

Furthermore, not only do these individuals see the possibility of breaking through the ceiling of the immanence of the current moral framework, but they not only see the possibility of achieving fulfillment in their lives. In addition, *agape* allows them to dream of more just and equitable worlds in the social and political realm and gives them the moral motivation to put them into practice. They form the "loyal opposition" of Modernity (Taylor, 2007b, p. 745), in the midst of it as "mustard seed,“ as "grain in the world" (see Taylor, 2018b):

> "The mustard seeds are the points at which acts happen which break the ordinary course of things and show the love of God, like the conversion of St Francis, or the work of Jean Vanier, or the courage of non-violent resistance which brings not just liberation but peace with the former oppressors" (Taylor, 2021b, p. 493).

Therefore, charismatic figures are the privileged agents of an articulated altruistic behavior that allows History to advance, leading the way to universalism. With one foot in life and the other *beyond life*, forming an angle between the love received and the love that seeks to give itself to those who need it most, they are Taylor's examples of what we have called *agapeic transcendence*. In essence, they provide the model of altruism and love of neighbor that we can suggest through Taylor's thought: of deep inspiration from an external source, so that not only the motivation towards concrete action is given, but a deep identification of the individual with that constitutive good takes place, which is the basis of the choices he makes, both in leading his life and in his social and political involvement.

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These *agapeic leaders*[246] are a "fuller expression of the demands of the Gospel," extending beyond the integral following of Christ's actions in the New Testament to realize them more fully in new contexts, such as our post-Christian one (Taylor, 2021b, p. 502). By being inside the world, they can discern those situations in which to move forward and meet those demands more fully. As he himself remarks:

> "So the Christian supports and tries to live some version of the Enlightenment ethic, but in the different register of *kenotic* compassion. And this leads to important differences, both in assent and dissent. And these differences may just plant the mustard seeds whose growth may transform the world for the better, more than the best ethic of rules could ever do. This I take to be a tenet of Christian faith, not an apodictic certainty" (Taylor, 2021b, p. 505).[247]

Referring to these *agapeic leaders*, the quote is meant to emphasize that they can live the call to universality present in an *agape*-based ethic, ensuring that they do not fall into the codification and normativization of apodictic certainty. Again, certainty is needed, and truth is to be sought. However, compassion serves as a counterbalance to identifying the core of religion with a particular set of truths or an established code. *Agape*, as the source of the moral articulation of the Christian religion, allows for avoiding any claim to truth or normativization that, by any extension, involves failing to love the neighbor or generating unbridgeable distinctions between individuals or communities. *Agapeic leaders* can also project such articulation on history and society, generating new horizons previously unimagined or unattainable without generosity, forgiveness, and the original interest for the neighbor.

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246 Carvalho and Mulla (2021, 2023) have recently sought to provide a model of leadership based on *agape*. However, their research applies only to management and the business world, with little attention to the influence of *agape* on social and political leadership.

247 The allusion to kenotic compassion is undoubtedly an invitation that *agape*-love is best realized when it involves radical self-dispossession. Besides, behind this kenotic compassion, a nod to a particular theology invites us to see the descending love of the trinity as a movement of suffering, compassionate and sacrificial love that invites us to do the same in response (cf. Balthasar, 1990). Also, together with the renunciation of apodictic certainties, certain proximity to the kenotic ontology of authors such as Derrida or Levinas can be noted (cf. Balthasar, 1990; Davies, 2003).

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In any case, we should be cautious with admiration for charismatic characters. First of all, because of the ambivalences we have already noted. Secondly, it would be necessary to consider all the factors that can help to understand the success or failure of their inspiration. In fact, some characters Taylor refers to are not exemplary in all aspects of their lives. Others, such as Mother Teresa or Gandhi, do not arouse global agreement on the exemplarity of their political or charitable action. Furthermore, Jean Vanier's work has definitely been called into question after the investigations into cases of sexual abuse.[248] As the New Testament itself says at the end of the first letter of St. John, shortly after speaking of the commandment of love: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

Habermas himself, in a dialogue with Taylor, already spoke of the danger of certain political theologies that center on the charisma of leadership, such as Carl Schmitt, who, in his revolt against the dissolution of the metaphysical truth of liberalism, ends up proposing an identitarian conception of a mass democracy led by a Führer. He adds, "Of course, Carl Schmitt's clericofascist conception of 'the political' is a matter of the past, but it must serve as a warning to all those who want to revive political theology" (Habermas, 2011, p. 23; see also Schmitt, 2015). It would be inelegant for that to be a warning to Taylor, however much he also appeals to the recovery of a certain ontological notion of the good and flirts with the charism of certain leaders. The discussion, of course, did not go down those paths but was coming to the use of religious language in the public sphere (cf. Taylor & Habermas, 2011). This brings us to the next point to test the viability of the moral map of *agapeic transcendence*: the *subtler languages*.

8.3.3. On the use of subtler languages

One of the distinctive qualities peculiar to these characters that we can trace in Taylor, albeit briefly, is their ability to articulate their

248 The study on abuses in *L'Arche*, the community founded by Jean Vanier, warns that "the institutionalization of charismatic authority (...) could constitute a breeding ground favorable to the development of configurations of control and the perpetration of abuse" (Higgins, 2023; see also Mertes, 2023).

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experience of love in languages that are understandable to many other people.[249] His moral exemplarity is often accompanied by a use of language that opens horizons of understanding of reality that facilitate ethical and moral progress.

It seems that the capacity to mobilize through presence, example, and words of the personalities alluded to by Taylor refers to the concept of *subtler language*. With the notion of "subtler language," borrowed from Earl Wasserman (1979), Taylor describes forms of expression that can open cracks in the immanent frame and gesture toward transcendence without fixing it conceptually (Taylor, 2024, pp. 31–36, see also 1989a, p. 393ff, 2007b, pp. 353–361, 718–720, 755–761). Since the post-Romantic period, Taylor has been attentive to any attempts to abandon the limits of the "languages of objective reference" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 357), especially from literature, poetry, and music (cf. Taylor & Costa, 2021).

In that sense, Taylor is somewhat interested in how language is interwoven in life, shaping human experience, creating new meanings, and being an integral part of the construction of the individual self and the community. From the symbolic, what *subtler languages* allow is both to embody the constitutive and existential meanings internal to the human being as well as the realities external to them with which they resonate, including also the constitutive goods of moral and spiritual experience: "Symbols can help bring to bear what I called in another work' moral sources" (Taylor, 2016, p.

249 Referring to Martin Luther King and Lincoln, Timothy P. Jackson said that they were "individuals capable of cross-fertilizing the languages of biblical religion and liberal politics," which helped them "to check the pretensions of both democracy and philosophy" (Jackson, 1993, pp. 71–72). Of course, this ability has to go hand in hand with the skill to recognize those voices and separate them from those with twisted purposes. In that sense, Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly speak of the current need to develop what they qualified as metapoeitic ability: "Living well in our secular, nihilistic age [...] requires the higher-order skill of recognizing when to rise up as one with the ecstatic crowd and when to turn heel and walk rapidly away". As an example, they explain that "the person who has acquired this skill knows that it's not always appropriate to walk away from the crowd—getting caught up in the mood of "I have a dream," and rising with 200,000 people to cheer Dr. King, is not an event one should be proud to have walked away from" (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, pp. 211–212).

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168).[250] In any case, as we saw in comparing Ricoeur's and Taylor's view of *agape*, in Taylor's case, symbols are reinforced by the view of the constitutive good behind them, giving them greater normative value, circumventing the coercive weakness and interpretive relativism of symbols. Taylor also suggests that contemporary religious expression increasingly unfolds through *subtler languages* that allow experiences of transcendence to be shared while leaving ontological commitments open. *Subtler languages* "allows us to manifest an order in things while leaving our ontological commitments relatively indeterminate" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 607). In this way, *subtler languages* allow us to share the experience of openness to transcendence, especially in times of mutual fragilization of any moral and spiritual perspective and search for authenticity.

The characteristic of these languages is also the ontological indeterminacy, again distinctive of Taylor's moral realism. As with the reconversions he presents at the end of *A Secular Age*, these languages allow us to express what Taylor sees as the future of the religious predicament in the West: "one feels oneself to be breaking out of a narrower frame into a broader field, which makes sense of things in a different way" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 768).

What he says about poetry and other arts serves Taylor to suggest that religious expression today must be explored through *subtler languages* (cf. Taylor, 2007b, pp. 486, 489). Taylor mentions numerous authors throughout his work as true admirers of literature and poetry. In any case, to illustrate the itinerary of these languages—as a bridge between life and what goes beyond it, as a pore that cracks the *buffered* identity of modernity, as an angle open to transcendence—we can use Paul Celan's image of the "meridian" that he rescues:

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250 Taylor is especially sensitive to how this openness occurs in the language of poetry: "The extensions of language that one needs to be fully aware of this, to be fully nourished, are poetic. So "poetically man dwells" [dichterisch wohnet der Mensch]" (Taylor, 2016, p. 97; cf. Heidegger, 2009, 2:25–26). Taylor is heavily influenced by August Wilhelm Schlegel on this point: "Poetry... is nothing other than a perpetual symbolizing: either we seek an outer shell for something spiritual, or else we relate something external to an invisible inner reality" (Schlegel, 1963, pp. 80–81; quoted in Taylor, 2016, p. 168). [Dichten ...ist nichts anderes als ein ewig Symbolisieren; wir suchen entweder für etwas Geistiges eine äussere Hülle oder wir beziehen ein Äusseres auf ein unsichtbares Inneres (translated by Ch.T)].

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> "I find something that binds and leads to encounter, like a poem. I find something—like language—immaterial yet earthly, terrestrial, something circular, returning upon itself by way of both poles and thereby— happily—even crossing the tropics (and tropes): I find... a *meridian*" (Celan, 2001, p. 413; quoted in Taylor, 2011g, p. 65).[251]

Meridian provides a metaphor to describe the connectivity that leads to encounters, "a moving place which reconnects" (Taylor, 2011f, p. 65). Celan refers to the places of his origins, the places of his childhood. Yet the metaphor goes still further if we read Taylor's interpretation. Although it appeals to a special image of a place, it actually invokes a non-place, a utopia. It refers to a horizon that gathers the different horizons through the performative power of language and "its ability to restore the contact across the lines of fracture, and thus reconstitute the underlying integrity" (Taylor, 2011f, p. 65).

The language of *meridians*, then, allows the gathering of spaces and times through imagination and inspiration beyond all pressures. And it also allows "the reconnection of persons, the restoration of a lost, or never possessed, mutual presence" (Taylor, 2011f, p. 67). It allows the eruption of the Other within a context of signification that rescues the universal union of all human beings. Moreover, beyond that, the reconnection of all human beings with the sacred that lies behind the intuition of *agapeic transcendence*—the wonder of nature, the love to which we open ourselves, the solidarity lived and felt, even beyond the boundaries of the self and what is familiar to open ourselves to the stranger. *Subtler* or *meridian* languages would ignite an instinct that accompanies us even before the Axial Age but is present in the *agape* force. The opening to the *agapeic transcendence* would connect us through these languages with this instinct to ethical transformation:

> "To carry through integrally on this ethic would involve a transformation, a kind of transcendence in relation to the instincts which the first humans inherited from their evolutionary ancestors. It would require an instinct of belonging, of solidarity, without the obligatory contrast case of the other, the outsider. A transformation of belonging and friendship,

251 [Ich finde das Verbindende und wie das Gedicht zur Begegnung Führende. Ich finde etwas—wie die Sprache—Immaterielles, aber Irdisches, Terrestrisches, etwas Kreisförmiges, über die beiden Pole in sich selbst Zurückkehrendes und dabei—heitererweise—sogar die Tropen Durchkreuzendes—: ich finde... einen Meridian (translated by John Felstiner)].

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> therefore, which transcends the need for the enemy" (Taylor, 2016, p. 340).

Language thus can change our goals, broaden our life horizons, aspirations, and even the way we understand the world. "It is this kind of articulacy, which changes its object-which is in other words, constitutive" (2016, p. 191). Thus, when we formulate *agape* and its content and open ourselves to its articulation—or stand before someone who embodies it and admires us —"we grasp a new vocabulary (...) and hence alter the shape of the issues we recognize, we become capable of explorations we couldn't make before" (Taylor, 2016, p. 193). Such a reliance by Taylor on constitutive languages is based on his conviction that the power of semantics also lies in its possibility to generate new articulations of our motivations: "articulated meanings may draw us more powerfully," and "they may also repel us more decisively" (2016, p. 189).

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9. Conclusions

The previous chapter focusing on *agapeic transcendence* was the completion of the journey we started with Taylor's moral realism to study his approach to the motivation towards *agape*-based neighbor-love. In the last pages, we aim to gather the main answers to the questions with which we started this research. In this sense, we positively value Taylor's recovery of *agape* as a way of articulating moral motivation towards altruism, despite the lack of a systematic phenomenology of selfless action motivated by the vision of the other. On the other hand, we will synthesize the insights about Taylor's approach to *agape* throughout our research to show that he provides answers to the dilemmas and criteria we established in the introduction for evaluating an ethic built from Christian love. As we will see, Taylor offers a consistent vision of *agape*. However, with a series of ambivalences and lack of clarity in some points, he resolves with what we have called a *catholic attitude*. Finally, we will address three areas in which *agape* can play a role: the motivation of third-sector workers and volunteers, the profiling of Christian faith-based organizations committed to humanitarianism, and the resolution of conflicts in the political sphere.

9.1. Agape as a motivational source for loving the neighbor: Strengths and weaknesses

Since the beginning of our research, we have observed that *agape's* distinctive characteristic as a moral source is openness to transcendence. In Chapter 2, we already found some elements that made us distinguish *agape* from the rest of the constitutive goods. Among these elements that marked a distinctive characteristic of the articulation of *agape* were the responsibility and concern towards the other that went as far as the capacity to renounce life goods for their own sake and not for ours; the appearance of charismatic characters

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who are motivated by *agape*, capable of eliciting admiration and political transformations; and, finally, the distinctive way of motivating *agape* as a moral source, for, as we have best expressed when referring to the Good Samaritan, "it is both path and destination" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 604), making it challenging to separate the source of motivation from the very act of expressing love towards one's neighbor.

As we saw in Chapter 2, Taylor criticizes the excessive focus on right action and obligation in current moral theory and the neglect of the moral sources that can motivate action for justice or benevolence. Moreover, the effects of such interest and neglect are seen in the dilemma of modernity that appears in history in the form of moral exceptionalism and higher moral demands for solidarity and, at the same time, the lack of sufficient strength to achieve the commitments to which our ideals or *hypergoods*, in Taylor's terms, commit us. In Chapter 4, we visited the Best Account argument to justify his moral realism as a better description of moral life and human agency and his variant of *agape* theism as a better way of resolving the above tension.

In that sense, we have missed a systematic proposal of the phenomenology of motivation from *agape,* in the sense that he does not offer a prescriptive model of the action that follows the motivation of *agape*. We tried to solve this lack by turning to the reconstruction of the parable of the Good Samaritan in the same chapter. However, we did so in Taylor's terms, that is, around the frameworks of understanding that allow us to explain the moral predicament within the space where we ask ourselves about what is good, right, and what is really worth doing. We believe that such a description reinforces Taylor's *Best Account* argument.

Although Taylor aims to surface the ontology behind our moral commitments to solidarity, which is a determinant for motivation, we have missed a clarification of whether *agape* as a moral source leads to a distinctive type of action, a way of helping one's neighbor that engages more or less than selfless solidarity actions stemming from other types of moral sources. Taylor only focuses on the robustness of the motivation support of *agape* for our moral commitments, focusing in a hermeneutic-interpretative level of human agency. In short, we miss a greater interest in the etiology of *agape* toward charitable action. Such interest would place the debate in

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the same terrain in which some of the authors we have mentioned throughout this work move: the theoretical explanation to be able to base our charitable action on some normative aspect but with interest in knowing what kind of action is justified and demandable.

But in this debate, the genuine contribution of Taylor's theory of motivation is to recover the ontology behind our moral commitments and the motivational power of *agape* as an aid for us to satisfy such demands. Of course, such an enterprise, which places the good as an ontological category at the center of practical philosophy, leads him to posit a moral theory from anthropological and epistemological foundations differing from many of those we allude to in this research, including utilitarianism, Kantian formalism, Dussel's liberation philosophy, Rosa's resonance, and even, as discussed in chapter 8, Nussbaum's exclusive humanism or Nietzsche's anti-humanism. Taylor's common interest in the discussions with all of them is to warn of the consequences of the mutilation of an integral vision of human agency, forgetting the ontology behind the question of the good life and transcendence.

In a way, the lack of attention to the phenomenology of moral action shows us that Taylor does not resolve the inner tension of practical philosophy, especially accentuated in modernity, between the seeking of the normative criterion of moral obligation and the interest in the good life, focusing on the former. Nevertheless, this fact does not encourage us to discard his model of articulation of constitutive goods and *agape* in particular for the motivation towards love of neighbor. We believe that his recovery of ontology with the range of arguments he offers is plausible. Moreover, his influence is apparent in new models for normatively assessing the social consequences of the dynamics of modernity from the concern for the good life, as we have seen with Hartmut Rosa. Although we believe that his moral realism does not commit itself to a concrete vision of the good and remains at the level of the construction of human meanings, we believe that his recovery of ontology is a line of thought to follow due to its potential to unite the interest in the good life with the social transformation from an integral vision of the human being.

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9.2. Evaluating the presence of agape in Taylor's philosophy: Consistencies and ambivalences

With Taylor's assessment of the motivation for altruism based on *agape*, we do not exhaust our interest in his approach to this moral source. As we saw in the introduction, *agape* is the focus of attention in debates about the meaning of neighbor love from a Christian perspective. As we already advanced, Taylor does not present a systematic thought on *agape*, albeit it plays a distinctive role in several places in his thought. Specifically, we already argued that *agape* functions as a distinctive motivation towards the neighbor—above all, at the level of the moral background—and in the construction of a more just society. For this reason, we established a series of criteria to evaluate his conception of *agape* in light of the tensions around its definition.

The first tension concerns the dynamism of grace and the relationship between the supernatural love of God and the use of human freedom in moral discernment. Specifically, we refer to the tension between emphasizing *agape* as external ecstatic love in a dialectical relationship with the nature of human love or as an incarnate love that already dwells in human interiority. Thus, we have elements in Taylor's thought that underline both sides of the dilemma. On the one hand, in *Sources of the Self*, we saw that *agape* was clearly defined as grace (cf. Taylor, 1989a, p. 410) so that we could reconstruct a first narrative of its secularization from the *slippages* that would lead to the occlusion of the supernatural in our current times. Such stress on grace could have led us to think of *agape* from a strong variant of its ontology as an exception to its peculiar form of moral realism. However, on the other hand, we find a multiplicity of accounts of *agape* insisting on an incarnational accent starting from the conference *A Catholic Modernity?* in 1996, which marks the beginning of his increased attention to the phenomenon of secularization and the conditions of belief.

Since then, Taylor has presented in various works the peculiarity of *agape* as a source of motivation that functions simultaneously as a constitutive good with origin in transcendence and a phenomenology of motivation based on the bodily movement of *splangnizesthai*, the call to transformation and relationality, finding in the other the very image of God. Thus, relationality and transformation are

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united, especially in Taylor. Moreover, relationality is the basis of *agape networks*, pre-legal tacit bonds of direct relationships and gift exchange not based on categorical grouping but as "a skein of relations which link particular, unique, enfleshed people to each other" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 739).

The second tension refers to the relationship between responsibility towards distant strangers and care for those who are closer. In other words, the tension between the universality of love, that is, its non-limitation, and the need arising from human nature to be specific or ordered in the scope and obligation of neighborly love. In Taylor's case, although he pays attention to civic, social, or political solidarity, he always tends to stress the universality as a non-limitation of the scope of *agape*. (cf. Taylor, 1994c, 1999f, 2010a; see also Browne & Lynch, 2018; Taylor, 1995e). Within this universality, Taylor tends to every human being in need, always from the spontaneity, gratuitousness, and proximity that characterizes *agape*, as we saw in the example of the Good Samaritan. We could even claim that, from the perspective of *agape* in Taylor, global solidarity is the origin of any human solidarity, including civic or social solidarity (contra Scholz, 2012, p. 232ff). On the other hand, the universality of love, as moral universalism or *agapeic space*, is the origin and culmination of the history of ethical growth, which begins in the axial age and culminates again in *agape* as a result of the slow growth of ethical vision and repertoires of effective historical action that raises ethical standards (cf. Taylor, 2021a).

However, this approach's weakness lies in explaining the link between the universal scope of *agape* and the narrower space of relationality in Taylor. Taylor hints by referring to *agape networks* and the new relationality that arises from the encounter between the Good Samaritan and the wounded. He also mentions the elevation to new horizontal orders of understanding by the vertical elevation and motivational conversion of the whole society through reconciliation and forgiveness, mediated by charismatic characters, such as Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, or MLK. But, ultimately, the only resource for seeing the union of universality and particularity and the foundation of all solidarity in *agape* is faith, albeit quasi-sacramentally present in these figures and in the eschatological confidence that God drives history into a more *agapeic* humanity.

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Nevertheless, such ultimate dependence on faith, although it is its *proprium*, comprises part of the fragility of *agape*, for in the last instance, as grace, it is uncontrollable (*unverfügbar*), in Rosa's terms (cf. Taylor, 2007, p. 703). God's love, even theoretically speaking, undoubtedly represents the best moral source for Taylor, but at first glance, it is not available to everyone. Despite the motivational power of *agape*, it is restricted to those who already move within the moral map oriented towards divine love. Even though a non-believer may be convinced that *agape* is the *Best Account* for sustaining a robust commitment to the good of the other, one cannot force him or her to embrace it; one can only suggest it through dialogue and encounter. Of course, Taylor's conviction is that there is a common level of understanding, a universal anthropological trait, that of the search for fullness, which eventually allows him to find a ground of understanding with no believers.

However, even if a Christian sees in other subjects with different moral frameworks the imprint of *agape* sustaining their human nature, it is easy to understand that a non-believer cannot see it.[252] A non-believer may applaud the behavior of the Good Samaritan and even want to imitate him or may be inspired by and support the leadership of the charismatic characters we have pointed out. However, it is easy to imagine that she or he will fail to be motivated by a moral source that is beyond her or his reach, at least at this moment. Taylor strives to give rational credibility to religious discourse in ethics and public dialogue (cf. Taylor, 2011l, p. 323ff; Taylor & Habermas, 2011), but without faith, it is difficult for a non-believer to take advantage of religious motivational power personally.

In any case, regarding the criteria of the discussion on *agape* that we established in the introduction, all of them have been mentioned during this research. However, we have pointed out in some chapters Taylor's ambivalence regarding the renunciation involved in the transformation of *agape*. In that sense, the renunciation of life goods by virtue of a *hypergood* or in the horizon of a constitutive good is part of the usual moral discernment of the human being, and it seems to be praised by Taylor when it is a matter of renouncing a life-good for the sake of someone else. However, when we come to religiously based motivation, Taylor shows a shifting position. Thus,

252 A similar argument can be found in (Gaita, 2000; Crittenden, 2021, p. 195).

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in contrast to Nussbaum and Nietzsche, he defends heroism or the renunciation of one's interests in order to achieve something higher and more worthy of admiration. The admiration for people committed to hopeless situations bringing help, and a vision of how to overcome circumstances puts us in front of figures who have renounced many goods related to human flourishing. However, we have read Taylor as critical of the excesses of renouncing vocations, something we also saw when we placed *agape* on the axis of the ordained closer to equilibrium than maximum openness to transcendence and what he called *purity stance*. This is one of the reasons some find a lack of clear commitment either on the side of transcendence or on the side of immanence in his position (cf. Gregory & Hunt-Hendrix, 2014, p. 237).

9.3. Taylor and the catholic attitude: an integral and undamaged account of humanity

In the introduction, we alluded to the *catholic attitude* as a perspective from which to understand the tensions inherent in the concept of *agape* and, in particular, to understand Charles Taylor's sometimes ambivalent position. Although Taylor's work is eminently philosophical, Taylor's approach to *agape* shows a fragile and paradoxical balance that is understandable from the *catholic attitude* that we describe from the 'both/and' principle and a deep concern for unity. Such attitude explains both the lack of a synthetic vision of *agape* from the incarnational-dialectical tension and the ambivalence regarding self-renunciation.

Indeed, the almost antinomic and contradictory tension between grace as radical openness to transcendence and its dialectical pair of Nature already full of sacred meanings to the very "dogmatic paradox" (Lubac, 1988, p. 328) present in theological thought. It is precisely in these tensions that this paradoxical character manifests itself. Hence, for instance, if, on the one hand, it is difficult to understand *agape* as a distinct moral source if grace is removed from it—either manifested in an experience of God's free gift or as an illumination of natural reason—unless we wish only to give an external description of it, it is also true that the unity of grace and

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human freedom in its quality as a moral source is unintelligible from the point of view of reason.

Taylor resolves the tension by alluding to faith, as we have said, yet also by linking the transcendent element to the human quest for the moral good and thus finding common ground from which to dialogue with the dominantly secular culture. In a certain sense, this is nothing less than a return to the roots of the critical discourse that gave rise to both theological reflection and moral philosophy, the beginning of which we can trace in the well-known dialogue between Adeimantus and Socrates in Book II of *The Republic*: "well, isn't god in fact good? Shouldn't be represented as such?" (Plato, 2000, 379a). To talk about God and his role in morality, Taylor chooses the path of ontology anthropologically based on the search for goodness and fullness through the meaning of our actions, through the use of backgrounds and indirect hermeneutics. Thus, the end of this tension is embraced from the background of *agape*, which is anthropologically grounded. From this realistic perspective, there is the immediacy of God's grace and openness to the other out of love freely received and given.

We can find the same horizon of understanding when it comes to resolving the ambivalence and lack of coherence that we find in the role of self-renunciation. Ultimately, without closing himself to a healthy mysticism, Taylor has the proper *catholic attitude* of not wanting to allow excessive mystical rapture, moralistic zeal, atomistic individualism, or an emphasis on identity that separates the soul from the body, the world, or society, because such prospects compromise his integral understanding of the human condition. At the same time, he recognizes that charity, without renunciation, has nothing to give. For Taylor, the balance of gratuitous giving is linked to relationality and transformation. This is seen as a positive possibility in the Good Samaritan and also in reconciliation processes developed by Truth Commissions. In these examples, we see how the articulation of *agape* has one foot in transcendence and another foot in the creation of new networks of communion. And at the same time, *agape* manifests itself without separation: just as *agape* cannot be understood without grace, neither can it be understood without the mediation of others, given the social nature of the human person and the unity between grace and nature as expressed in moral discernment and action of moral exemplars.

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On the other hand, we have been mentioning those places where positive determinations of the *catholic attitude* appear throughout the research. We speak specifically of the Christian dialectic in Taylor's historical reconstruction and its use as an argument, its eschatological accent, the quasi-sacramental role of some historical personages who raise the ethical level and instill hope in broad strata of the population, and the equilibrium between the transcendent and the immanent in the *agapeic transcendence*. In a way, these places respond to the Catholic theological and philosophical accents we pointed out at the beginning: sacramentality, mediation, communion, the sense of history, and Christian realism. This interpretation, which, as we have argued, seems to us more adequate than other influences that can be found in his philosophy—especially since we have made references to Hegelian philosophy at various points -is explained not so much by advocating a "clear line of demarcation (...) of Catholic identity" (Taylor, 2020a, p. 91), but by giving a complete sense of human agency within a framework in which all aspects of what it means to be human fit. It is from this "integral, that is, undamaged" (cf. Taylor, 1989a, p. 27) perspective of Self-identity that we understand Taylor's understanding of the "both/and" of the Catholic attitude.

9.4. Taylor's contribution to the debate on the motivation towards altruism and the reinforcement of the call to love one's neighbor

To conclude, we would like to offer a few contributions of Taylor's vision of *agape* both to the debate on the justification of the ethics of altruism from a vision open to transcendence and to gather some places where we consider that the presence of *agape* can help the commitment to dignity and justice.

Firstly, Taylor responds to one of the questions of most significant concern in current practical philosophy—the need to give solid substantive foundations to the commitment to justice and dignity—by reactivating the ontological bases of moral motivation by focusing on human moral and spiritual experience. In a way, Taylor's question is to return to the issue of *why to be moral* (cf. Taylor, 1991, pp. 30–31), and all his work involves rethinking the forms

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and categories that have marked moral reflection since modernity, rescuing the questions that have been sidelined. He answers that any ethical justification, including that of altruism if it aspires to be a universal principle, must be something with which people really identify (cf. Taylor, 2007, p. 692).

Secondly, understanding *agape* from Taylor's moral realism as possible outcome updates and qualifies the virtue of Christian love as a moral motivator towards altruism within the conditions of a pluralistic society and in dialogue with modern and postmodern outlooks. One of the virtues of Taylor's moral philosophy is that it attempts to give "orientation in contingency" at a time of "contingency of orientations" (cf. Höhn, 2006, p. 135). Moreover, he does so while respecting pluralism as a premise of his whole philosophy. His perspective on personal ethical growth needs the contrast with the plurality of goods in order to challenge one's own moral topography and arrive at another vision of the good. In the same way, the search for the moral source that best responds to the challenge of providing motivational support to the high demands of solidarity makes him advance *agape* in conditions that facilitate dialogue with other moral perspectives.

Thus, thirdly, we hold that, put into practice, Taylor's moral realism can help all those actively engaged in charitable and humanitarian engagement. In a way, Taylor asks the person who allows himself to be affected by the pain of the other what lies behind his indignation, his compassion, his critical thinking in the face of reality, his notion of justice, whatever goal he recognizes as worthy of achievement in his life, thus challenging one's sense of who he or she is and what he or she is doing for the sake of the neighbor. Thus, the question of the vision of the good behind our moral commitments accompanies the question of the correct or most effective action to alleviate the pain of the other—although Taylor does not give us many answers to the latter -reinforcing the motivational basis of action and of the vocation to lead one's own life. But the question of the vision of the good in Taylor's version also includes the possibility of proposing *agape*, as an option open to transcendence, as a way of supporting good intentions, especially in the face of the ambivalence of the world, the reality of violence, the poverty of many institutional responses or the agent's own weakness.

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Fourth, a further area in which the insights of this research can help is reinforcing the identity profile of faith-based organizations engaged in social action in an age when secularization manifests itself as rationalization and excarnation, as we have described. Although we have refused to identify these organizations as *agape networks* in Taylor's terms because of their eschatological terms, these organizations are indeed called to show the distinctiveness of their action flowing from the fountain of *agape*. The model of such activity should be that of the Good Samaritan: undoubtedly, the response to an immediate need in certain situations, frequently faced by chance, but from a cordial attention, coming from the heart and from the bowels of compassion, as a call that engages the whole person in fostering the Other (Benedict XVI, 2006, §31, see also §15 and §25; Francis, 2020, §56-§86). In addition to technical and professional competence, programming and foresight, and strategic advocacy, an *agape*-based organization needs not to forget that it remains a "part of God's response to the skewed serve the robbers have lobbed into history" (Taylor, 2007b, p. 277). Like the Good Samaritan, a willing heart to relieve suffering with comfort goes far beyond protocols and codes to embrace the promised space of relationality. Like the Good Samaritan, the action of these organizations should show the genuine *catholic attitude*, understood this time as universality, as God's love that wants to reach out to all in their real need, without distinction of race, gender, age, nationality, religion or ideology, to rebuild "a skein of human relations animated by *agape*" (ibid.). Even if an effective action for the neighbor is unthinkable today outside the institutional organization, the relationality of *agape* and its discovery of God in the face of the other is the true transforming force of the action of these organizations.

Fifth, our research also focuses on *agape's* role in achieving reconciliation and recognition after periods of conflict, structural injustice, and social violence. In the face of dynamics that focus on the defense of one's own personal or family interests, discourses that emphasize a depersonalized and exclusionary collectivity or dynamics of forgetting or historical revenge, *agape* recovers the other and the perspective of the Thou (cf. Zoll, 2023, pp. 329–330). The motivational foundations of the leaders studied by Taylor show such perspective in listening to the normative points that are not theirs and in the search for collective goods to protect or to achieve.

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They show the presence of *agape* in recognizing the other and the welcoming of pain in their zeal to feel the world, to discern injustices and structures that deserve to be transformed. They show that love united with justice is the only combination capable of elevating a conflict to reach forgiveness and reconciliation. Thus, we believe that this space of transcendence opened in politics provides the basis for understanding the work for truth and reconciliation that has been done in other places, such as Chile (*Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura*, 2005) or Colombia (*Hay futuro si hay verdad*, 2022), and shows a path of commitment to justice in which a Christian perspective has much to contribute.

Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, Taylor offers an answer to Habermas' concern with which we began this research, about the need for a strong foundation of solidarity with those who suffer: the "awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven" (Habermas, 2008a, pp. 30–31). For Taylor, what we are missing, in short, is to ask ourselves about what unites us with the human being who suffers, in short, about our true human integral beingness. In a time that tends to overlook substantive backgrounds, what we lack to sustain altruism, in short, is to ask ourselves about the vision of the good that sustains our ethical commitments and even to allow ourselves to be surprised by love.

The love we have discussed at length with Taylor, with its strengths and weaknesses, its consistencies and ambivalences, is nothing less than a believer's response to the question of our responsibility for the pain suffered by others and to the need felt by many people of goodwill, to respond to injustice in the world. If Taylor is correct, there is nothing so strong as *agape* for accepting human beings in their vulnerability and working strenuously for the transformation of the conditions under which human beings suffer today, despite the advances of modernity. This love involves the love with which God loves the world and which Jesus embodied and continues to be present even in a secular time of eclipsed presence of the divinity through many witnesses who continue to extend that love to the world. Taylor looks to the present and the future but is fearless in going back to the past to remind modernity that its original impulse was to foster human flourishing and reduce human suffering. But he goes further back in history and deeper within ourselves to remind

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us that the original impulse that unites us, even with those who weep and struggle today, is an urge to love.

A.M.D.G.

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