

## 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 deontology 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

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

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.<sup>22</sup> 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).<sup>23</sup>

Against this backdrop, Taylor defends a form of moral realism that stands between *strong realism* and *weak realism*.<sup>24</sup> 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-

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.<sup>25</sup>

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).<sup>26</sup>

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.

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*."

## 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*.<sup>27</sup>

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

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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. William 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.<sup>28</sup> 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).<sup>29</sup> 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.

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*.<sup>30</sup> *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.<sup>31</sup> 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).<sup>32</sup> 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).<sup>33</sup>

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.<sup>34</sup> 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).

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.<sup>35</sup>

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 classifiable 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).<sup>36</sup> Taylor considers that the fact that many ethical theories (such

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).<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup> 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

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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).

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.<sup>39</sup> *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

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

*strong*.<sup>40</sup> *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

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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).<sup>41</sup>

### 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.<sup>42</sup> 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 for 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).

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).<sup>43</sup>

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:

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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 unarbitrarily 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.<sup>44</sup> *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:

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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)

### 2.3. Is the articulation of agape qualitatively distinctive?

“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

imply, and is often communicated to us by exemplary persons of action in reality or in fiction” (Taylor, 1990a, p. 74).<sup>45</sup>

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

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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 obliges, 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.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> 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

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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.

*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).<sup>48</sup> 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,

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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.

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}.<sup>49</sup>

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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.<sup>50</sup> 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}.

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*.

## 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

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.<sup>51</sup>

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"

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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)<sup>52</sup>—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.”<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup>

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 (Isaías 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.).]

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.<sup>55</sup>

In fact, he understands Taylor's critique of Habermas practical philosophy as a new version of Hegel's critique on Kant's moral world.<sup>56</sup> 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,<sup>57</sup> 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).<sup>58</sup>

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

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

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.

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).<sup>59</sup> 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

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.).<sup>60</sup> 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

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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.)].

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.<sup>61</sup> 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

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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*.

from the peripheries (Dussel, 2007, pp. 186–226).<sup>62</sup> 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).<sup>63</sup>

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

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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 theoretically—, 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.

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-

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

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