Charles Taylor on Self-Interpretation:
Understanding the Interpreter and the Interpreted

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Abstract:
A philosophical anthropology includes ontological categories that are generally applicable to humanity. It provides answers to questions concerning the nature of human beings. Central to Charles Taylor's philosophical anthropology is the idea that the human person is always open to questions that can only be answered by referring to a moral identity. This claim is rooted on the idea that the human person is "not just a [purely] contingent fact." Rather, it is "a being for whom certain questions of categorical value have arisen" and on which he has "received at least partial answers." Things matter for the human person. This distinguishes human identity from the rest of creation. While the identity of other creatures lies solely on their physical properties, the identity of the human person necessarily takes into account interpretations of what matters to the human person. Human identity is dependent on self-interpretation. Self-interpretation, however, is never qualitatively neutral. Things matter to the human person and this matter-ing is only meaningful within a background of qualitative discrimination. Thus, the identity of the human person is intelligible only in his capacity to make these qualitative distinctions. This relationship between selfhood and the good claims a non-contingent relationship between self-interpretation and the good. The non-contingent relationship of the self with a background framework does not contradict the contingency of how a person is oriented. Self-interpretation demands a strongly evaluable life in relation to authentic existence, family life, nationalism, and social justice as contingent facts defined by a historically specific inescapable cultural horizon: "Horizons are given."

Keywords:
Taylor, self-interpretation, philosophical anthropology, moral identity, human person

"I believe that what we are as human agents is profoundly interpretation-dependent, that human beings in different cultures can be radically diverse, in keeping with their fundamentally different self-understandings. But I think that a constant is to be found in the shape of the questions that all cultures must address."

– Charles Taylor, "The Moral Topography of the Self," 299.

"Human beings are self-interpreting animals."[1] This concept about the human person must be explained clearly as it goes against the leading ideas of modern thought and culture. "It violates the seventeenth-century naturalistic paradigm of clarity and objectivity."[2] Clarity and objectivity requires that the human person be seen "as an object among other objects."[3] This rejects attributing subjective properties to objects of human experience. The human person must be seen as a specimen, an object amidst other objects. The example Taylor uses is the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Secondary qualities cannot be included in the science of nature because they are subjective: they are properties of the objects in the sense of the human person's experience of them. Although secondary qualities are also objected to on the grounds of variability and insusceptibility to inter-subjective validation, it must be noted that the ultimate ground of objection is their subjective nature. Secondary properties are essentially sense-dependent. Following this line of thought, color, sweetness, heat, *et cetera* are not ontological properties of things but are sense-dependent, or grounded in the person's experience of things.[4]

It is behaviourism that has, in recent times, manifested this basic objectivist orientation. It "expresses itself in the perspective of a reductive explanation of human action and experience in physiological and ultimately in physical and chemical terms."[5] This conception allows the treatment of the human person as an object among other objects, a specimen, characterizing him purely in terms of properties independent of his self-experience. Behaviourism articulates "the standard of clarity and objectivity, that is, of a clear account

[1] Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45. Three of Charles Taylor's major works namely, *Human Agency and Language, Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, and *Philosophical Arguments* are collections of essays previously published elsewhere. For the convenience of the readers, whenever essays from these collections are cited, the reference is to the essays in their collected form, rather than to the originals.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 46.

[4] Ibid., 46-47.

[5] Ibid., 47.

of what things objectively are."[6] It proposes the reduction of experience to a merely subjective view of reality, to the level of *epiphenomena*, or to a muddled description. Charles Taylor claims otherwise. He contends that the human person's interpretation of himself and his experience is constitutive of what he is, "and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality, nor as an *epiphenomenon*, which can be by-passed in [the human person's] understanding of reality."[7]

Subject-referring Imports

In defending his contention that the human person is a self-interpreting animal, Charles Taylor begins by claiming that the human person experiences emotions, which arise as a reaction to certain objects. To put it shortly, "emotions are essentially related to certain objects."[8] To experience pain is to experience some object as painful; to experience joy is to experience some object or situation as joyful, and so on. In this sense, experiencing a given emotion involves experiencing a situation as having a certain property. However, "this property cannot be neutral, cannot be something to which [the human person is] indifferent, or else [the human person] would not be moved."[9] "Experiencing an emotion is to be aware of [the human] situation as humiliating, or shameful, or outrageous, or dismaying, or exhilarating, or wonderful, and so on."[10]

Taylor labels these properties "imports," by referring to the aforementioned adjectives. By "imports," he means "a way in which something can be relevant or of importance to the desires or purposes or aspirations or feelings of a subject; or otherwise put, a property of something whereby it is a matter of non-indifference to a subject."[11] In short, an import is the property of a situation or an object that can neither be neutral nor indifferent to the human person. In identifying the import of a certain situation, the human person evaluates that which gives the basis for the feeling. It is not sufficient, however, to assign an import to a given feeling or situation. It is not "just stating in other terms" what the human person feels in a certain situation, nor is it a simple equivalence, where feeling the emotion is tantamount to ascribing the import. "The import gives the ground or basis for the feeling."[12] And that is why describing an emotion involves making explicit the situation it incorporates. Emotions are initiated by the imports they relate to: "fear is the

[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 48.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 49.

affective response to the menacing, anger to the provoking, indignation to the flagrantly wrongful, and so on."[13] Experiencing an emotion, then, Charles Taylor writes:

"[I]nvolves making explicit the import-ascription, a judgement which is not thereby affirmed, it is true, but experienced as holding the sense of the situation which it incorporates."[14]

Imports are experience-dependent properties. "They characterize things in their relevance to [human] desires and purposes, or in their role in [the human person's] emotional life."[15] Imports have sense only in a world where there are beings, which are taken to have purposes. This is a constitutive factor of selfhood: human persons are beings with purposes that have significance for them, and have an important role in their identity.

A purpose is closely related to goals in the sense that to have a purpose includes fulfilling a particular outcome and striving to achieve it. The presence of purpose, which directs and shapes action, creates a gap between humans or animals, and the rest of nature or inanimate objects. This is why human agency is always linked to responsibility. Patterns of behaviour cannot just be summed up in terms of external forces or impersonal laws. This position is prevalent in Taylor's first book, *The Explanation of Behaviour*, and suggests an understanding of human behaviour in terms of its teleological explanation.[16] He means that a human person must always make a reference to "the result for the sake of which events concerned occur."[17] This introduces considerations that are non-empirical and even metaphysical in nature. These purposes direct and structure the human person's self-interpretation. Because of this, only the human subject can have a grasp of his own self and identity and mold himself into a better person.

A human person is a subject with an aspiration to be. "[A] subject with this kind of aspiration must be a subject of awareness, of experience."[18] "The point is... that a subject with this kind of aspiration must be capable of experiencing the whole range of imports connected with shame, dignity, respect, however insensitive he may be in certain

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 50.

[15] Ibid., 51.

[16] "Teleological explanations are only applicable to human persons because if animals do have a language, it remains inaccessible." Charles Taylor, *The Explanation of Behaviour* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 26-27. However, from the reductionist's standpoint, the teleological approach is unscientific. "Teleological explanations of the natural world, which posited final causes in nature and saw the cosmos as a meaningful, ordered whole, were criticized during the seventeenth century scientific revolution. Since then, they were labelled as un-scientific." Charles Taylor, Hegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4.

[17] Taylor, *The Explanation of Behaviour*, 9.

[18] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 53.

cases."[19] Thus, an import "can be explicated only by reference to a subject who experiences his world in a certain way."[20] An import is meaningful only in a world where there are subjects for whom things have certain emotional meanings. "This involves reference to things--like a sense of dignity and of worth--which are essentially bound up with the life of a subject of experience."[21] Taylor calls these imports as "subject-referring" properties.

Subject-referring properties "can only exist in a world in which there are subjects of experience, because they concern in some way the life of the subject *qua* subject."[22] They are experience-dependent because they are understood only in relation to the experience of subjects. The relation may not be a simple one, because "[i]t may be something that is presupposed by this experience, or gives it its shape, like an aspiration to dignity or, even less immediately, one to integrity, or wholeness, or fulfillment, about which [the human person] can only speculate or offer controvertible interpretations."[23] "That is why... an explication cannot be found which does not invoke other meanings for the subject."[24]

Subject-referring imports are neither limited nor necessarily self-referring imports. "[S]ubject-referring imports only arise in connection with emotions that are self-concerned,"[25] but not self-absorbed. It is not narcissistic because not all feelings are only "self-referring." Some feelings are not "self-referring" because an emotion arises as a response to the way a person understands his self and aspires to appear in public space. "It is subject-referring, because the full recognition of this import involves reference to a subject," which is not necessarily the self, but fellow creatures.[26] Taylor explains this further by referring to obligation in reference to a fellow human person that is in need. In this case, the import concerns the needs of another person and not one's self. It is subject-referring, although not self-regarding, "because the full recognition of this import involves [a crucial] reference to a subject."[27]

This kind of import calls someone to act "in virtue of being a certain kind of creature."[28] It calls someone, not as a human subject, but as a living being, a human person. This explains the notion of obligation; "and this involves a reference to the subject as

[19] Ibid
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 54.
[23] Ibid., 55.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 57.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 58.

proper addressee."[29] Charles Taylor summarizes:

"Hence the class of subject-referring imports is much wider than that of self-referring or self-regarding imports. To speak of subject-referring imports is not to see all motivation as narcissistic. On the contrary, these imports can have a very different structure, very different foci of attribution, as it were."[30]

Subject-referring imports, then, "incorporate a sense of what is important to [human persons] qua subjects, or to put it slightly differently, of what [they] value, or what matters to [them], in the life of the subject."[31] This is the basis of understanding what it is to be human and this involves interpreting some feelings as offering insight into what matters and what does not.

Frameworks of Strong Evaluation

In line with these, subject-referring imports incorporate a crucial set of qualitative distinctions, of what is important for the human person. By "qualitative distinctions," Taylor is referring to ends that are desirable in a way that cannot be measured on the same scale as ordinary ends. "These ends or goods stand independent of [the person's] desires, inclinations or choices, and they represent standards by which these desires and choices are judged."[32] Somehow, these qualitative distinctions are woven in different ways in one's life. This allows the human person to "evaluate," "that is, consider good or bad, desirable or despicable,"[33] these human desires. In this sense, they are not just more desirable, but their special status simply commands the human person's awe, respect, or admiration.

Strong evaluation captures the idea that the human person ranks certain qualitative distinctions as higher than others. It refers to distinctions of worth that the human person makes regarding his desires where some are recognized as more worthy, more meaningful, and more valuable than others. Strong evaluation, therefore, is a "qualitative distinction

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid. Emphasis added.

[31] Ibid., 60.

[32] Although Charles Taylor uses the terms "moral frameworks" and "strong evaluation" synonymously [Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 26], it makes more sense to think of moral frameworks as consisting of strong evaluation. As he writes of "having an identity which is defined in terms of certain essential evaluations which provide the horizon or foundation for the other evaluations one makes." Idem, *Human Agency and Language*, 20.

[33] Ibid., 26.

made between different actions, or feelings, or modes of life, as being in some way morally higher or lower, noble or base, admirable or contemptible... that are central to moral thinking and are ineradicable from it."[34] It is both hierarchical and contrastive, and is ōntological to the human person, who is the strong evaluator.

Charles Taylor develops his idea of strong evaluation from Harry Frankfurt's discussion of "second-order desires." These are desires the human person feel vis-a-vis his own desires. Although the human person experiences a range of desires, he evaluates some as more admirable than others. Taylor contends that this ability to value desires differently contributes to the distinction between human beings and the rest of creation. The human person is a creature with multiple desires that he can rank as qualitatively higher or more worthy compared to each other. This hierarchical judgement in strong evaluation is made evident by Taylor's statement: "A good test for whether evaluation is 'strong' in my sense is whether it can be the basis for attitudes of admiration and contempt."[35]

Charles Taylor explains strong evaluation clearly in four ways. First, not all choices made involve strong evaluation. Some choices do not invoke any sense of higher or lower value. Neither does all decision making involve strong evaluation, nor does Taylor preclude other things as involving qualitative distinctions for others. Some human persons regard something as higher and lower, or noble and base depending on the person's context. This "judgement involves ranking goods, hence ranking motivations."[36] The ranking of motivations makes it a "strong evaluation." The human person does not just evaluate objects in reference to desires, but evaluates the desires themselves. This is why strong evaluation is also called "second order" evaluation.

Second, though the term "evaluation" is used and any strong evaluation demands the ordering of goods, it is not always the fact that the human person is aware that he is ordering and evaluating his desires in a hierarchical way. "Not always" because there are instances when the strong evaluator is aware of the hierarchical ordering of goods, and when he is not. Strong evaluation consists not only of explicit answers to the question "What do I value?" but also of implicit orientations in life. There are two levels of strong evaluations, the implicit level of reactions, motivations, and actions and the explicit level of linguistic articulations. Even before one answers the question of value, he is already living one answer or another. Taylor explains this further:

"Our attempts to formulate what we hold important must, like descriptions, strive to be faithful to something. But, what they strive to be faithful to is not an independent object.... But rather a largely inarticulate sense of what is of decisive importance. An ar-

[34] Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 234.

[35] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 523, n.2.

[36] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 66.

ticulation of this "object" tends to make it something different from what it was before."[37]

On one hand, if the strong evaluator is aware of these distinctions, then strong evaluation may be called "contrast articulation," which refers to the attempts "to formulate what is initially inchoate, or confused, or badly formulated."[38] For Taylor then:

"The strong evaluator can articulate superiority just because he has a language of contrastive characterization. So within an experience of reflective choice between incommensurables, strong evaluation is a condition of articulacy, and to acquire a strongly evaluative language is to become articulate about one's preferences."[39]

Taylor argues that strong evaluation is the object of articulacy, and articulacy not the object of strong evaluation. This stand creates a difference between strong evaluation per se and the language of strong evaluation. The term "evaluation" is closer to an intuitive judgement than to the outcome of a reasoned reflective process.

On the other hand, if the strong evaluator is not aware of qualitative distinctions, it remains a strong evaluation. As Taylor writes, "It is this level of inarticulacy, at which we often function, that I try to describe when I speak of the 'sense' of qualitative distinction."[40] Explaining this further in another work, he writes:

"I don't consider it a condition of acting out of a strong evaluation that one has articulated and critically reflected on one's framework... I mean simply that one is operating with a sense that some desires, goals, aspirations are qualitatively higher than others."[41]

It is a misconception, therefore, to limit strong evaluation with articulation of one's qualitative distinctions alone. This is in as much as inarticulacy is also very much part of Taylor's conception of strong evaluation.

Third, though the term "strong" is used to refer to these evaluations, strong evaluation must not be understood as referring to mere force or power relations. Rather, strong evaluations are assessments anchored in feelings, emotions, and aspirations. These involve subject-referring imports because they involve discriminating motivations as higher or lower, or intrinsically good or bad. "It involves, one might say, attributing to different

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[38] Charles Taylor, "Responsibility for Self," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 295.

[39] Ibid., 288.

[40] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 21.

[41] Charles Taylor, "Reply and Rearticulation," in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: Charles Taylor in Question*, ed. by James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 249.

motivations their place in the life of the subject."[42] Taylor explains this further:

"Implicit in this strong evaluation is thus a placing of our different motivations relative to each other, the drawing, as it were, of a moral map of ourselves; we contrast a higher, more clairvoyant, more serene motivation, with a baser, more self-enclosed and troubled one, which we can see ourselves as potentially growing beyond, if and when we can come to experience things from the higher standpoint. The drawing of a moral map puts us squarely in the domain of the subject-referring, since this touches quintessentially on the life of the subject qua subject. It is in fact an attempt to give shape to our experience."[43]

And fourth, though all individuals are strong evaluators, not all human persons value the same things strongly. Although strong evaluation is ontologically human, the things people value vary across persons and cultures. Despite the sensitivity towards the diversity of moral values, Taylor maintains that there are some goods that are present in all moral codes and strongly valued by all cultures, namely the dignity of the human person and the value of human life. As he writes:

"Every moral system has a conception of what we might call human dignity, ... of quality, which, in man, compels us to treat him with respect, or... a conception, which defines what it is to have respect for human beings."[44]

It involves discerning the good or higher life. It involves defining what the human person is really about, what is really important to him; it involves entering the question of identity.

Taylor emphasizes the specific role of a moral orientation in his analysis of identity. He writes:

"To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary."[45]

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[42] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 67.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, 232.

[45] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 28. Charles Taylor calls this moral orientation a framework. A framework provides the background, explicit or implicit, for human judgments, intuitions, or reactions in distinguishing what is important or valuable in the lives of subjects (Ibid., 26), or what Taylor identifies, in his reading of Heidegger, as "the background," in which the human person reflects on and evaluates his life and the world in which he lives. See Charles Taylor, "Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. by Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 325.

The question "who am I?" is the question of identity. Taylor thinks that giving a name or enumerating a genealogy does not sufficiently answer this question. A specific name or genealogy is not enough to define one's identity. Although the human person is framed by his universally valid commitments like being a Moslem or a rebel, and by his particular identifications like being a Filipino or Chinese, such is not enough to define one's identity. To answer this question is to understand what is of crucial importance to a human person. But, what is of crucial importance to a human person? Taylor answers this question clearly:

"To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand."[46]

A framework of strong evaluation defines one's identity as it determines what is of qualitative importance to the individual. According to Taylor, a person's identity is "partly defined by some moral or spiritual commitment" or partly defined "by the nation or tradition they belong to." These backgrounds "provide the frame within which they can determine where they stand on questions of what is good, or worthwhile, or admirable, or of value."[47]

Identity plays the role of orienting the human person, "of providing the frame within which things have meaning..., by virtue of the qualitative distinctions it incorporates."[48] Taylor explains further:

"Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us, and what is not. It is what makes possible these discriminations, including those which turn on strong evaluations. It hence couldn't be entirely without such evaluations. The notion of an identity defined by some mere de facto, not strongly valued preference is incoherent."[49]

Taylor continues to attack the behaviourist notion that one can live without a framework and insists that a framework of strong evaluation is absolutely necessary for human life. He contends:

"I want to defend the strong thesis that doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and which make

[46] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 27.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 30.
[49] Ibid.

sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations. ... [T]he claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood."[50]

According to him, frameworks are products of human invention, "not answers to questions, which inescapably pre-exist." [51] It is not an answer to a factitious, indispensable issue. Charles Taylor insists that his discussion of identity "indicates that it belongs to the class of the inescapable, that is, that it belongs to human agency to exist in a space of questions about strongly valued goods, prior to all choice or adventitious cultural change."[52]

Further, he adds that the naturalist stand of an agent able to live without a framework points to a person in the grip of an appalling identity crisis. He writes, "Such person would not know where he stood on issues of fundamental importance, would have no orientation in these issues whatever, would not be able to answer for himself on them."[53] And, if this person, without a framework, is outside the space of interlocution, then this person would not have a stand in the space where the rest of humanity is. Taylor claims that this situation is pathological. Thus, a human person can truly reject a particular framework, but in doing so adopts another framework. The concept of identity is predicated upon certain strong evaluations that are fundamental because they form the framework. Without certain strong evaluations, the self would cease to be himself. Taylor explains:

"By which we do not mean trivially that we would be different in the sense of having some properties other than those we now have... but that shorn of these we would lose the very possibility o being an agent who evaluates; that our existence as persons, and hence our ability to adhere as persons to certain evaluations would be impossible outside the horizon of these essential evaluations, that we would break down as persons, be incapable of being persons in the full sense."[54]

In this perspective, an "identity crisis" arises when a person loses a framework, a specific commitment or identification, leading him not to know the significance of things for him. An identity crisis is "an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand."[55] Those in identity crisis clearly "lack a frame or horizon within which things can take on a stable significance, within which some life possibilities can be seen as good or meaningful, others as bad or trivial."[56] The meaning of all these life

[50] Ibid., 27.
[51] Ibid., 30.
[52] Ibid., 31.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 35.
[55] Ibid., 32.
[56] Ibid., 27-28.

possibilities is unfixed, labile, or undetermined. It is a painful and frightening experience.

These strong evaluations, then, involve subject-referring imports, and reciprocally these subject-referring feelings involve strong evaluations. This is the reason why these evaluations refer to the central issues of the human person's life as a subject. As discussed earlier, the dialectic of the implicit and the explicit brings to fore the question of the role of language in shaping, forming, formulat)ng, conceptualizing, organizing, expressing the human person's subject-referring emotions and strong evaluations. As Charles Taylor writes:

"We are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me. ... [T]hese things have significance for me, and the issue of my identity is worked out, only through a language of interpretation which I have come to accept as a valid articulation."[57]

What, then, is the relationship between the implicit, the articulated, and the re-appropriated in one's moral orientation?

The Implicit, the Articulated, the Re-appropriated [58]

Subject-referring feelings open the human person to strong evaluations, which functions in the alignment of feelings. Identity is constructed through these implicit orientations, which may remain implicit or may demand articulation. A functioning identity can, to a large degree, remain implicit. Thus, the first level of the threefold dialectic can be referred to as the level of implicit functioning.

Secondly, the human person can explicate his implicit sense of identity, or what is important. This is the process of articulation, the process of making explicit what is implicit. "Articulations are like interpretations in that they are attempts to make clearer

[57] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 34.

[58] Compare this idea with Paul Ricoeur's threefold mimesis. Ricoeur notes that there are three levels in the imitation of action, *mimesis 1*, *mimesis 2*, and *mimesis 3*. *Mimesis 1* is the reference to the actual world of action, to the imitated events that the story is about. This world of action in itself does not contain beginnings and endings in the strong sense that narratives create beginnings and ends, but it is already prenarratively organized structurally, symbolically, and temporally. *Mimesis 2* is the level of emplotment, of configuring the events into a story. The phase of *mimesis 3* "marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader." Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative III* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 71.

the import things have for [the human person]."[59] "This kind of interpretation is not an optional extra, but is an essential part of [human] existence."[60] It is speaking or talking about what is morally moving, what makes them cleave into it, and what goods they are moved by in the process. However, there can be rival explications and rival answers to the question of identity.

One criterion of an answer is how true these explications are in relation to the human person's implicit orientations, or how well he avoids distorted pictures of himself. This means that the human person's "subject-referring feelings have to incorporate a certain degree of articulation in order to open [the human person] to the imports involved."[61] However, the fact that these feelings are articulated "opens the question whether this characterization is adequate, whether it is not incomplete or distortive."[62] But, even the best explications can be further weighed and re-evaluated from the viewpoint of moral ideals and imaginative identifications: perhaps the conception that the human person had finally identified with is not the one, which is truest to who he has been so far. This leads articulation to seek further articulation and "elaboration of finer terms permitting more penetrating characterization."[63] Taylor claims that a human person's feelings are bound up with the process of articulation. This is because feelings always incorporate certain articulations, and these articulations seek further articulation. Thus, making the attempt to articulate a feeling is a life-time process.

At this explicit level of articulation, there is a plurality of media expressions in which the implicit sense of self can be expressed: not only in spoken language, but also through different arts or even body language. Narrative emplotment is one important form of articulation, but there is also descriptive characterization, such as the statement "I am a Filipino," or prescriptive speech acts like "I ought to stop drinking," that can express one's sense of self. These need not be interpretations of one's life in its entirety but, rather, of one's ethical ideas, roles, practices, group-memberships, et cetera. The crucial factor is that the "inner" sense of self or of good is expressed in one way or another. Once it has been articulated, one can see the externalized expression as one's own, one can identify with it. But this articulation, surely, requires language.

As linguistic animals, human persons use the human language which is constitutive of emotions, not just because the human person has *de facto* articulated some of them, but also *de jure* as the medium in which all human emotions, both articulate and inarticulate, are experienced. Only linguistic animals have emotions involving strong evaluations.

[59] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 65.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 64.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

"Language is essential here because it articulates insight, or it makes insight possible."[64] Language is, then, constitutive of the human person's subject-referring emotions. In this case, "[t]o say that language is constitutive of emotion is to say that experiencing an emotion essentially involves seeing that certain descriptions apply; or a given emotion involves some (degree of) insight."[65] This brings about a certain transvaluation.

The third phase of the threefold dialectic is the appropriation of the explications, or the internalization of the expressions. As Taylor points out, there is always an element of creativity in the linguistic articulation, and the appropriated articulation is not necessarily the same as the implicit sense that the process began with. Sometimes, the self-definitions the human person adopts are self-consciously reformative, as time goes by, these once innovative self-definitions turn into routines and habits, they become re-sedimented and metamorphose into elements of the implicit background horizon of orientation. Developing Herder's thought, Taylor calls this "expressivism." He writes:

"[T]he revolutionary idea of expressivism was that the development of new modes of expression enables us to have new feelings, more powerful or more refined, and certainly more self-aware. In being able to express our feelings, we give them a reflective dimension which transforms them."[66]

In Taylor's insights expressivism is not just applied to language but also to the self. He explains, "Language articulates our feelings, makes them clearer and more defined; and in this way transforms our sense of the imports involved; and hence transforms the feeling."[67] The human person's subject-referring import-attributing emotions are shaped by the way he sees the imports, and the language he deploys shapes the way he sees the import. Language shapes these emotions.

Taylor explains that a self exists only within a particular "web of interlocution:"

"My discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. ... My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others."[68]

The dialogical nature of the self is embedded in his linguistic background. This notion of a dialogical self comes from the work of the twentieth century Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Taylor uses this idea to express his own thought that the human person's identity is shaped by a continuous conversation. "This is the sense in which one

[64] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 71.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 233.
[67] Ibid., 71.
[68] Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, 231.

cannot be a self on one's own."[69] The self is only a self in relation to certain interlocutors: "in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding--and, of course, these classes may overlap."[70] Dialogue does not take place only within those of the same culture. It may also take place with those of other cultures in the condition that there is a "fusion of horizons," to borrow Hans-Georg Gadamer's words. This is necessary for both human persons to understand each other. The dialogical self must be understood as an imagery rather than taken literally. Dialogue encompasses a broad range of human encounters or interactions. Dialogue includes a psychological blurring of boundaries between the self and the other. The human person's inner life is a polyphony of conversations with other people or beings. These conversations help constitute one's identity.

This gives sense to Taylor's concept of identity, which has to do with "offering an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of where I am speaking from and to whom."[71] He believes that the human person is continually formed through conversation. It is not enough to identify particular stands on moral or spiritual orientations to determine one's identity. A full definition of one's identity includes a reference to a particular defining community. This conversation with others is an inescapable ontological feature of the self. As Taylor puts it, "we are aware of the world through a 'we' before we are [aware of it] through an 'I.'"[72]

So far, everything that has been written points to the theme that the human person is a self-interpreting animal. To explain clearly this point, Charles Taylor uses the sentence: "*Verstehen* is a *Seinsmodus*."[73] This claim is grounded in the basic thesis that the human person is a linguistic animal and is struck with language. Through this language, the human person becomes aware of a certain conception of imports that impinge on humanity. This conception helps constitute the human experience and plays an essential role in making the human person into the one that is. As Taylor explains, "To say that [the human person] is a self-interpreting animal is not just to say that he has some compulsive tendency to form reflexive views of himself, but rather that as he is, he is always partly constituted by self-interpretation, that is, by his understanding of imports which impinge on him."[74]

What is a self-interpreting animal? Charles Taylor explains:

"This is an animal whose emotional life incorporates a sense of what is really important

[69] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 36.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, 40.

[73] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 72.

[74] Ibid.

to him, of the shape of his aspirations, which asks to be understood, and which is never adequately understood. His understanding is explicated at any time in the language he uses to speak about himself, his goals, what he feels, and so on; and in shaping his sense of what is important it also shapes what he feels."[75]

A series of caveats is necessary to explain what Charles Taylor calls self-interpretation. First, self-interpretation is not an individual enterprise. It is only forged in relation to a particular linguistic commtnity. It is not solipsistic. One cannot be a self on one's own. Second, self-interpretation is not mere imagination. Imagination is not enough to make the human person into who he is. Although self-interpretation is still crucial for one's identity, validity is not the sole criterion for significance. It might be invalid, but it can be significant. Significance is also a norm for self-interpretation, when the criteria of validity and truth do not seem applicable. Third, a human person can have conflicting ways of self-interpretation; it is not a unitary process; it is changing. It includes a variety of views depending on the human situation. And fourth, a change in self-interpretation necessarily means a change in the self that is both interpreter and interpreted. This means that any change within one's conception of himself is a significant change which enables one to change not only himself, but the way he looks at that self or himself.

Summary

To sum up, Charles Taylor's self-interpretation can be understood as a reaction against naturalism. In relation to this, this paper attempts to utilize the four basic mechanisms of the seventeenth-century revolution in scientific thought as a framework to summarize the ideas expressed in this paper.[76]

Charles Taylor enumerates these scientific conceptual principles as such:

(1) The object of study is to be taken absolutely, that is, not in its meaning for us or any other subject, but as it is on its own ("objectively").

(2) The object is what it is independent of any descriptions or interpretations offered to it by any subjects.

(3) The object can in principle be captured in explicit description.

(4) The object can in principle be described without reference to its surroundings.[77]

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., 51.

[77] Ibid., 33-34.

The first two features forbid explaining the world in subjective, anthropocentric properties. But neither of these two features holds for Taylor's analysis of self-interpretation. "Human beings are self-interpreting subjects."[78] Empirical information about his race, class, occupation, age, background is not enough to understand a human person. "To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there could not in principle be an answer."[79] The human person is not to be understood as an object in the usually understood sense. He is not a specimen. The human person is not a self in the sense that he is an organism; his self-interpretation is quite independent from his nature as an organism. The human person is partly constituted by his self-interpretation and his movement in a certain space of questions. Because human persons are beings with language, they naturally interpret themselves.

The third feature of the classical object of study leads to another failure that is already implied in the failure of the second feature. But the self's articulation can never be fully explicit. Language articulates the self's issues in relation to the good. However, full articulation is an impossibility. The human person only counts in using this language. As Taylor says, "[w]e clarify one language with another, which in turn can be further unpacked, and so on."[80] Language does play a constitutive role in relation to the self. "To study persons is to study beings who only exist in, or are partly constituted by, a certain language."[81] This means that a change in vocabulary, in words and ways of interpreting one's self, also means a change in one's self. The human person "is a self-defining animal. With changes in his self-definition go changes in what [the human person] is, such that he has to be understood in different terms."[82] Taylor sees the self in the same way as the hermeneutical tradition concerns itself with the meaning and interpretation of texts. A self is like a text, which has meaning and whose meaning admits more than one expression. In this case, the self is both the interpreter and the interpreted, as well as the recipient of the interpretations. Feminism, for example, provides a change in self-interpretation that leads to a change of the self by giving many women a new vocabulary for interpreting their experiences and emotions. Along with feminism, Marxism, queer theory, and psychoanalysis to name a few prominent examples, add new vocabularies that lead to a better understanding of one's self. Changes in self-interpretation are a process of progress. Adopting a new self-interpretation means changing an old, obsolete, and inaccurate self-interpretation. Although changes and alterations are constant in self-interpretation, they are not uncertain or careless. Self-interpretation always makes references to its purpose; the self always has a purpose. Purposes are closely related to goals: to have a purpose means that

[78] Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 44.

[79] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 34.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 34-35.

[82] Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, 55.

one desires a particular outcome and strives to achieve it. He owns these purposes; they are not imposed by society; these purposes direct his actions. Thus, having a purpose is an ontological feature of the self.

The fourth feature fails in relation to the third feature. "A language only exists and is maintained within a language community."[83] Language presupposes the dialogical nature of a human person. A language exists only within a language community. In other words, "[o]ne is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it."[84] Self-interpretation varies across cultures and historical situations.

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83. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 35.

84. Ibid. Ricoeur looks at his discussion on narrative identity as mediating between two extremes: harmony and dissonance, lived and told, "what is" and "what ought to be," innovation and sedimentation, voluntary and involuntary, fact and fiction, author and reader, and exalted cogito and "shattered *cogito*." Taylor also avoids extremes, and his position on narrative identity seems to be in substantial agreement with Paul Ricoeur on many points. Nevertheless, Charles Taylor does not necessarily agree with all the points mentioned. The central difference between Ricoeur and Taylor is that Ricoeur favors indirect hermeneutics, whereas Taylor seems to opt for direct hermeneutics. See Paul Ricoeur, "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology," in The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics, ed. Don Hilde (Evaston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 3-24. In connection to narrative identity, this means that Ricoeur's analysis contains a detour through a structural analysis of narration as emplotment. Taylor also locates narratives directly on the ethical level, whereas Ricoeur says that narratives mediate between the ethical and descriptive perspectives. Idem, Oneself as Another, 1-25, 114-15, and 152-68.
Further, Taylor does not draw a distinction between the two poles of self-identity, but instead tends to focus on the side of what Ricoeur calls "character." Paul Ricoeur analyzes narrative identity from the viewpoint of his general analysis of narrativity as an emplotment and imitation of action. The analysis applies both to historical and fictive narratives. Taylor does not pay attention to narrativity in the technical sense. Nevertheless, one can say that from the Aristotelian element of tragic poetry, Ricoeur stresses the notion of plot, whereas the center of Taylor's analysis is the theme of the narrative. Taylor is interested in the "thematic unity of life," which according to him is defined by one's ethical commitments. Taylor, Sources of the Self, 25-52.

Charles Taylor connects narratives to his idea of strong evaluations. This is the topic of his narratives. According to Ricoeur, narratives are a central form of self-interpretation, whereas for Taylor the notion of strong evaluation is the focal point. Taylor thinks there is a variety of forms in which strong evaluations can be expressed, but nevertheless contends that among them, narrativity is an inescapable form of self-interpretation. Ibid., 25-52 Ricoeur says that whereas narratives stir the imagination, taking an ethical stand and committing oneself are the final steps in self determination. Thus, the position of this paper is that both Ricoeur and Taylor think that both ethical and narrative aspects are necessary in the process of creating and sustaining one's identity. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative III*, 249.

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